



## How to choose and use a facilitator for your programme workshops

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Last month, we went through the root causes of unproductive programme meetings. This month, we look at how managers can use facilitators to ensure that their programme workshops work.

Why might we use another person to be a facilitator in our own workshop? Well, we looked at the complexity of programmes last time, including:

- High levels of uncertainty
- A wide variety of stakeholders
- The possibility of conflicting views erupting
- Organisational politics
- The sheer complexity of interdependencies that are inherent to any programme
- The likelihood of cross cultural or even global working

Programme management methodologies recommend the use of facilitators for key workshops. This allows the programme manager to get involved with the content, safe in the knowledge that the outcomes will be reached. You can expect the facilitator to get the best out of everyone in the least possible time. Can you really? The answer depends so much on the individual facilitator.

We'll look at three ways of getting really good facilitators and what to be aware of in each case:

### **1. Create an internal pool of programme management facilitators**

Wouldn't it be great to have facilitators who understood the internal politics and the ways of working of your organisation, as well as how programmes work? One way to do this is to train up programme managers as facilitators and then to provide a pool within the organisation that others can call from. I did this in a multinational company, and it worked very well. There's one big drawback nowadays though – when did you hear of a programme manager who had enough spare time to undergo training in facilitation, let alone spending days per month serving their colleagues? I found that what happened was that the best programme managers were in huge demand as facilitators and they ended up with far too much work on top of their programmes!

### **2. Use facilitators from your internal Programme Management Office**

Perhaps we could set up a group of facilitators within the Programme Management Office? They would understand the internal politics and ways of working of the organisation. This way, they could be 'on tap' to facilitate workshops without impacting individual programmes. Great! First of all, you need to have the right calibre of people in your programme office. Do they really understand how programmes work? Do they have facilitation skills of a high standard? Are they suited to the work? Some programme office roles involve analysing detail, and probably wouldn't fit. Is there training in place to make sure that people can develop general facilitation skills as well as those needed to run typical programme workshops? These include setting visions and process change, dealing with risk, realizing benefits and learning reviews. I was once in a global programme management office with high calibre people, where this worked well, except we often had to turn down requests for help as we just were not staffed to a high enough level. Success bred demand for us. Organisations nowadays are cut to the bone, and maybe it's no longer practical.

### **3. Use an external facilitator with programme management experience**

An alternative to building skills (and headcount!) internally, you may want to look for people outside your organisation who can help you out from time to time. You'll want a mixture of good facilitation skills and a good, practical understanding of change and programme management. This is a rare combination.



For good facilitation skills, you can look for certified professional facilitators (CPF). These have been tested for their ability to get groups to work productively. You can search for a list of those near you at [www.iaf-world.org](http://www.iaf-world.org) under 'Find a Facilitator'. This might be all you need for simple reviews, but for programme workshops in areas such as benefits realization or risk you will need more. Look for a facilitator who also has the experience of running a programme and facilitating programme workshops like yours. They are few and far between!

Once you've found the right person, brief them on what you would like to achieve and answer all their questions about your organisation and your programme. Expect them to want to talk with several of your stakeholders and to ask you about the what, why, when, where and how of your workshop. They are likely to spend even more time on preparation than on the meeting itself. During the meeting, you will be able to get involved with the content and free yourself from worrying about getting the most out of everyone else. Enjoy!

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For a free report with more practical solutions for programme managers: **'12 ½ ways to make your meetings work for you'**, sign up at our website [www.makingprojectswork.co.uk](http://www.makingprojectswork.co.uk) for our hints and tips.

