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GETTING A G-R-I-P ON YOUR SESSION

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Abstract

This session focuses on the areas of best practices, design and preparation. Facilitators are constantly faced with the challenge of trying to corral busy group leaders to get basic information on the sessions they are tasked to facilitate. Corporate teaming, expanded offices, and video teleconferencing constantly exacerbate this problem. Facilitators, who are taught to seek consensus, often agree to go into sessions with incomplete information. The results can be disastrous for new facilitators. Even experienced facilitators are plagued by slow starts, frustrated groups, and decreased productivity. This session offers facilitators some techniques to alleviate this information exchange problem. Facilitators will learn to use the



G-R-I-P (Goals, Resources, Issues, Procedures) planning process to develop Outcomes, Agendas, Roles and Rules, that will jump start them on the path to success. The planning processes covered in this session are applicable to both basic and experienced facilitators. Basic facilitators will learn how to meet with the group leader and quickly garner valuable information that will help them prepare for the session. Experienced facilitators will learn new techniques to organize the information into a mental checklist that helps them prepare for short notice facilitations.

Getting a G-R-I-P

The facilitator role is a challenging one. I always smile when someone tells me "you are a natural at this" or "you make this look so easy." Group leaders and group members have no idea how much time, planning, and rehearsal went into making the facilitation role seem so casual and unrehearsed. Guiding task accomplishment, monitoring group development and performance and maintaining relationships while balancing different expectations is no easy feat. While this is a formidable challenge, proper training and preparation will help the skilled facilitator overcome these barriers.

Prior planning helps a facilitator be effective. One trap that many new facilitators are caught in is relying too much on their natural talents. A good facilitator must be flexible enough to adapt to the group's desires. This flexibility is gained by prior planning. A good plan allows you to reduce the amount of unknown factors that can derail your facilitation. It also allows you to mentally wargame options and variations to your plan. Consequently, when the group changes direction, you are ready to take advantage of the change or execute some course correcting techniques if necessary.

Goals.

The first step in the GRIP is to determine what are the Group Leader's goals. It is important to know how group leader defines success for the event being facilitated. Some questions to be asked include:

- What are the outcomes needed at the end of the session (Examples are products such as minutes, attendance rosters, key agreements, or information briefings)
- What is the group charter?
- Who is the sponsor or the group leader's boss?
- How does the sponsor define success?
- How does the Group leader feel the participants will define success?

This information is crucial to your success.

Resources.

The next step in the process is to determine the resources need to support the event and to fix responsibility for gathering those resources. Nothing is more frustrating than to have a good plan and realize that you cannot execute it due to a lack of resources. The term resource includes everything you need to execute your plan. It means people, such as admin support if someone needs extra copies of a briefing as much as it means extra paper and markers. It also means the physical resource such as a room large enough to comfortably seat the people expected at the event.

Key Questions:

How much planning time is available? What room will be used? How will the room be equipped? What are facilitator versus leader responsibilities? What admin support is necessary / available? Is there and Audiovisual or computer support required?



Issues

One of the hardest parts of facilitating is handling conflicts. One way to prefer for conflict management is to simply ask what potential conflicts exist. Often group leader will have an idea of the contentious issues that may surface during the event. Another helpful piece of information is to know if you will encounter disruptive personalities at the event. However, getting at this information requires a certain amount of tact. The best source of information of the personalities may be from other facilitators that have worked with the group. Another non-obtrusive way to obtain this information is to talk casually with others who have attended meeting or facilitated for people who will be attending the event you are facilitating.

Key Questions

What hidden agendas may surface to disrupt the conference? Are there any dominant or disruptive personalities the facilitator may encounter? What is the history of the event?

Procedures

The idea behind discussing procedures is twofold. First, it helps ensure important details have been thought out. Next, it helps determine how the facilitator is expected to interact with the Group Leader and the group members. Although this sounds simple, it can be deceptively complex. In the discussion on the facilitator and leaders can flesh out the small details that will ensure the meeting gets off to a professional start. Details as to start time, agenda and ensuring everyone has been invited are discussed during this portion of the GRIP. This is also the time for the facilitator to ask how he or she is expected to interact. A good example of a key point during this discussion is will the leader introduce the facilitator or does the facilitator want the facilitator to start the meeting.

Key Questions

How will the graphic game plan and/or the electronic tools be used during the session?
 What is the agenda? What roles and rules does the leader anticipate the group will adopt? What techniques will the facilitator use (Wait till after presentations and recap or stand by board during presentations to capture points that surface during briefings?) Who is inviting the attendees?

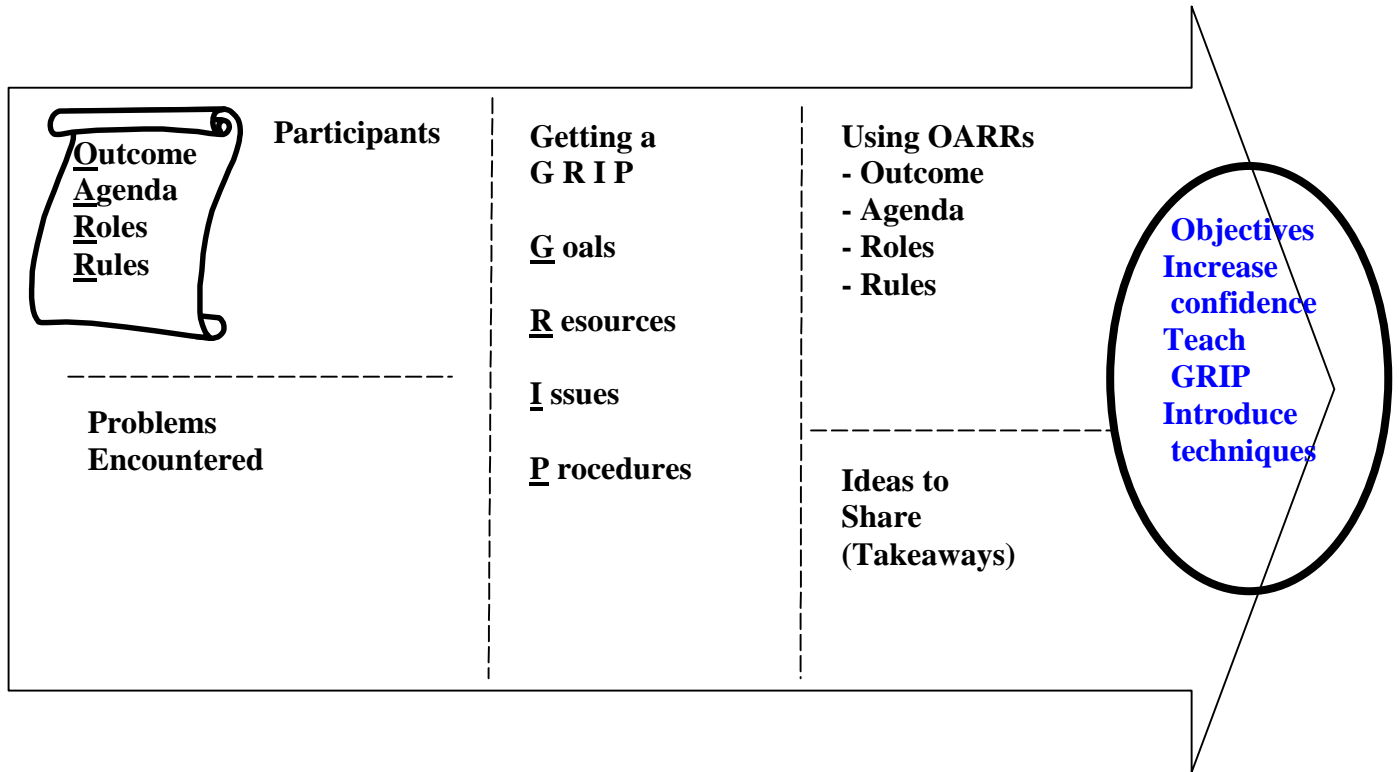


Figure 1. Session Graphic Game Plan

Using OARRs (Outcomes, Agendas, Roles, and Rules).

OARRs allow you to use the information gathered during the GRIP frame the meeting and the facilitation. By explaining and using OARRs, you can jumpstart your meeting by obtaining an early buy-in of the meeting objective and your facilitation methods.

Outcome

Use outcomes to discuss the proposed objectives for the meeting or conference. The objectives can be gleaned from the GRIP and proposed to the audience for their refinement. It is



important to let them modify as necessary to meet group expectations. Giving the group a jumpstart is highly effective when you are on a short timeline. If the time exist, you may want to start with a blank slate and take time more time to develop the objectives

Agenda

This is another item that comes from the GRIP. Make sure you leave room in the Agenda in case the group wants to add items.

Roles

Explain the roles of the Group Leader, Group Members, and members of the facilitation team. People who are not used to facilitated meetings may be confused as to how the process works. Explaining roles will increase participants comfort level.

Rules

Use the portion to establish rules to help manage time and discussion. You can also use the rules to help preserved person relationships. Usually the members will have rules in mind. It is prudent to have some rules in mind so that you can propose them for discussion if the members do not have any n mind.

Seminar Methodology and Process

When the participants enter the room, we have a graphic game plan posted that is used as a tool to teach, guide discussion, and keep us on time. We will use graphic facilitation to present the session. We will develop session outcomes, agenda, roles and rules as an icebreaker for the session. As we settle into the session, we will ask participants to relate problems the encountered or observed during work group sessions. We will record these problems for future reference. Next on the agenda will be our discussion of the acronym G-R-I-P and how it can be used to garner information that avoids the pitfalls discussed earlier. While one seminar leader instructs

and discuss the process, the other will be filling in the graphic game plan with teaching points and discovery learning points brought out by the students. By the end of the session, the students will learn the GRIP process as a method to gather information and be exposed to the use of OARRs as means of jumpstarting the session. By learning to get a GRIP on their OARRs, participants will skillfully be able to guide work groups around maelstroms that may otherwise prevent them from reaching their objectives.

To reinforce their learning seminar participants will be able to pick up a PowerPoint copy of the completed facilitation panel created during their seminar about one hour after completion. The purpose of this copy is twofold. First, it serves as product they can take back and share with their counterparts. Second, it shows a useful way they can capture notes and deliver them as a product to their customers. (Solves the problem of two people delivering different reports of what happened when they attended the same meeting.

Biographies:

Harry Johnson Sr. specializes in Graphic Facilitation, Electronic Facilitation, Decisionmaking, and Large Group facilitations. Harry is head of Training and Services Support for U.S. Joint Forces Command's Joint Warfighting Center Support Team in Suffolk, VA. He manages the training, assignments, and professional development of 42 trained facilitators who support internal and external events. Harry received Basic and Advanced Graphic Facilitation certification at TRW. He received Electronic Facilitation and Decisionmaking processes certification at Ventana's Group Systems University. He is a member of IAF and the Project Management Institute.

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