



White Paper 2025-09

The benefits of the Expert Facilitator for Large Industrial Projects

Facilitation is a core skill that can be leveraged to efficiently identify valuable solutions, overcome challenges and align on directions in large, complex projects. However, the “facilitation road” to discover and implement these value-adding solutions requires courage, collective hard work and expert guidance, in addition to project knowledge and dedication from the team. An Expert Facilitator - an experienced professional with a profound understanding of e.g. an industry and its specific dynamics - combined with facilitation skills - brings these essential qualities to the table.

In this White Paper we will explore the “features and benefits” of the Expert Facilitation, which is at the core of Project Value Delivery’s activities. We will use the term Expert Facilitator to refer to a facilitator who has deep knowledge of large industrial projects, but who is not a stakeholder to the project or organisation.

Introducing facilitation

The word facilitation stems from the Latin word “facilis” meaning “to make easy” or “to render less difficult”. At its core, facilitation is about creating the structure and environment that makes it easy for discussions to flourish, in a workshop setting. The facilitators’ main role is to guide and catalyse discussions towards a desired outcome, building on the strengths and collective intelligence of all the participants - without influencing the content or taking centre stage. This neutral stance sets them apart from meeting leaders, managers, or experts, whose task is often to steer the content, inform, or provide answers and solutions “from the front”.

Some of the critical skills of a good facilitator are:

- **Create a safe space and efficient structure:** Making it easy and comfortable to share thoughts, explore solutions, and collaborate efficiently.
- **Guide the team towards the goal:** Design the workshop strategically and use active facilitation to keep discussions on track, in terms of content and timing.
- **Ask questions and summarise ideas:** Helping participants clarify and refine their ideas.
- **Balance participation:** Ensuring everyone has a voice in the conversation.
- **Be patient and listen:** Understanding that the best solutions often come from within the team, who will ultimately implement them.

Expert Facilitators know the specific dynamics, discussions, traps or side-tracks often occurring on a specific subject and are prepared to guide the group to reach the desired outcome.

When is facilitation particularly useful?

Facilitation is helpful in any situation where three or more people need to collaborate to develop an outcome. It is particularly useful when the purpose is to:

- Align on shared understanding: e.g. on goals, intentions, culture
- Solve complex problems and agree on actions
- Map past, current, or future scenarios
- Learn collectively or from one another

Facilitators vs Expert Facilitators

As indicated above, Facilitators are fully dedicated to the process - planning for and reaching the objectives. They do not have a “stake in the game”, or responsibility for the content of the result, but full process ownership of reaching the result. Without prior knowledge of the subject at hand, the facilitator can bring “fresh eyes and curiosity” to the table, ask the “stupid questions” for clarity or exploring ideas and introduce new perspectives. This is often an advantage, for example in new-thinking and ideation processes, and straight forward problem solving.

Expert Facilitators have deep knowledge of the subject at hand (such as large industrial projects) and are skilled in designing and conducting tailored workshops on this subject. They also have extensive facilitation experience. They know the specific terminology, dynamics, discussions, traps or side-tracks often occurring on this subject and can guide the group to reach the desired outcome. The Expert Facilitator has a good understanding, based on prior experience, of when to intervene and when to let the discussion flow uninterrupted. Some discussions need to happen for the greater good of the endeavour – it might not have had the forum before.

Expert Facilitators have a particular advantage in large, complex industrial project execution problem solving, complex team constitutions or alliances, issue resolution or startup activities for large, complex projects.

It is essential for a “true” facilitator to stay neutral regarding the specific topic or project, remaining outside the project stakeholder group, to be effective and to refrain from directing the outcome.

Internal vs External Expert Facilitator

Facilitation skills, such as active listening and guiding people in their work without giving direct answers, are important for any leader. Encouraging future leaders and interested individuals to develop these skills and become

internal facilitators benefits most organisations. Internal facilitators know internal culture, processes, rituals and team dynamics. They can be mobilised fast and may reduce the risk of participants feeling “not invented here” regarding the exercises and output.

However, key contributors like project managers, or even internal facilitators that have senior roles or authority, should avoid taking on the facilitator role in more complex workshops. They may stifle participation or, voluntarily or not, drive the outcome in a particular direction without achieving the desired buy-in or quality. They should avoid spending time and effort on workshop logistics, and rather focus on delivering key messages, actively listening, analysing the discussions, and providing answers when needed. External facilitators offer neutrality, encouraging balanced conversations. To maintain effectiveness, internal facilitators must thus not have any specific authority on the project or over any of its participants, and not be involved in the particular project.

Designing and delivering engaging, effective, and tailored workshops on critical project subjects requires significant experience, regular practice - and time. Expert facilitators bring that experience and are not distracted by operational constraints of everyday project life.

Core skills and benefits of the Expert Facilitators

Building trust and confidence in the process through their deep knowledge of both the subject matter and facilitation. Participants are more likely to engage in discussions when the questions are highly relevant, and the facilitator understands the challenges they face.

Enhancing productivity and efficiency based on their hands-on experience of the topic, they tailor efficient workshops by designing, planning and delivering:

- Activities & questions that efficiently reach objectives
- Specific visualisation tools and methods
- Productive participant groups / tables

Additionally, they can improvise the agenda when the plan changes. Successfully managing such changes require experience, planning and bravery.

Acting as an advisor, when needed and offer guidance or insights based on their industry expertise. However, they must avoid becoming the go-to content expert. This can undermine the facilitation and prevent the team from finding specific solutions fit for their project.

A neutral Expert Facilitator, involved from the start of large, complex industrial projects, can support setting the framework for collaborative client-contractor or alliance dynamics

Expert Facilitator role in Owner - Contractor collaboration and alliances of large, complex industrial projects

As described in the Project Value Delivery White Paper [2023-09]: *The Importance of an Independent Facilitator When Setting up Integrated Extended Enterprise Teams for Complex Infrastructure Projects* a neutral Expert Facilitator, involved from the start of large, complex industrial projects, can support setting the framework for collaborative Owner-Contractor or alliance dynamics and help resolve disputes when they appear. The Expert Facilitator can also provide an impartial management of misalignments, claims and disputes to maintain a collaborative approach.

The courageous act of facilitation

The facilitator, taking on the task of facilitating complex workshops, requires a great deal of bravery. Guiding project team members to openly share their views in complex, honest and sometimes tough and necessary conversations, let them run their cause and reach conclusions, can be a daunting task. If the facilitator has a stake in the discussion, it is often quite

uncomfortable.

The Project management team (PMT) must also demonstrate bravery during facilitated discussions. Instead of stepping in to decide or conclude, they must listen, contribute on equal terms, and trust the collective intelligence of the team. This fosters trust, accountability, motivation, and buy-in from the team, resulting in better project outcomes.

Expert Facilitation - the role of a safety net

One might say that courageous Expert Facilitators act as a safety net for the project management team. They can

- ensure that the PMT is properly aligned and prepared before the actual workshop thereby avoiding destructive live misalignments between PMT members
- facilitate the discussions to lower the risk of them derailing,
- deliver “uncomfortable” truths to the team, and
- lower the pressure on the PMT by carrying the responsibility for reaching the workshop objectives

Facilitation is a joint adventure

The key to great facilitation is collaboration, preparation and creating good group dynamics – it is a joint adventure between the facilitator, the PMT and the workshop participants.

The Expert Facilitator and the PMT together plan and set the workshop scene. Understanding the group and their priorities and concerns is important for the end result.



We Empower Organizations to be Reliably Successful in
Executing Large, Complex projects.

Discover more on
www.ProjectValueDelivery.com

Proper preparation allows for tailored activities and questions.

It also allows the PMT members to prepare joint key messages and answers to deliver during the workshop and by whom. Their full and visible support for the workshop initiative and its result is essential for the success.

As a general rule, the preparation phase is for the leaders to learn, contribute and influence, and the workshop itself is for the team members.

...providing value and energising managers and participants

With proper preparation, the project managers and team members can confidently address difficult questions, celebrate achievements, and actively listen to each other. They come out of the workshop energised and with new insights and actions.

Summary

Expert Facilitators are knowledgeable on both the subject at hand - e.g. large industrial projects - and facilitation. They can provide tailored, efficient, energising and “safe” project workshop development and delivery. They have the experience, tools and methods to be highly efficient and to allow important and fruitful discussions to take place, while reaching the desired workshop goals.

The Expert Facilitator allows all the participants – managers and team members alike - to shine!

Read the Industrial Projects Practical Owner Guide

Available on all e-bookstores such as [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) and on [Kindle](https://www.amazon.com/kindle-dbs)



We Empower Organizations to be Reliably Successful in
Executing Large, Complex projects.

Discover more on
www.ProjectValueDelivery.com