

# Facilitating Improvement

## THE CHALLENGE

Do you need to:

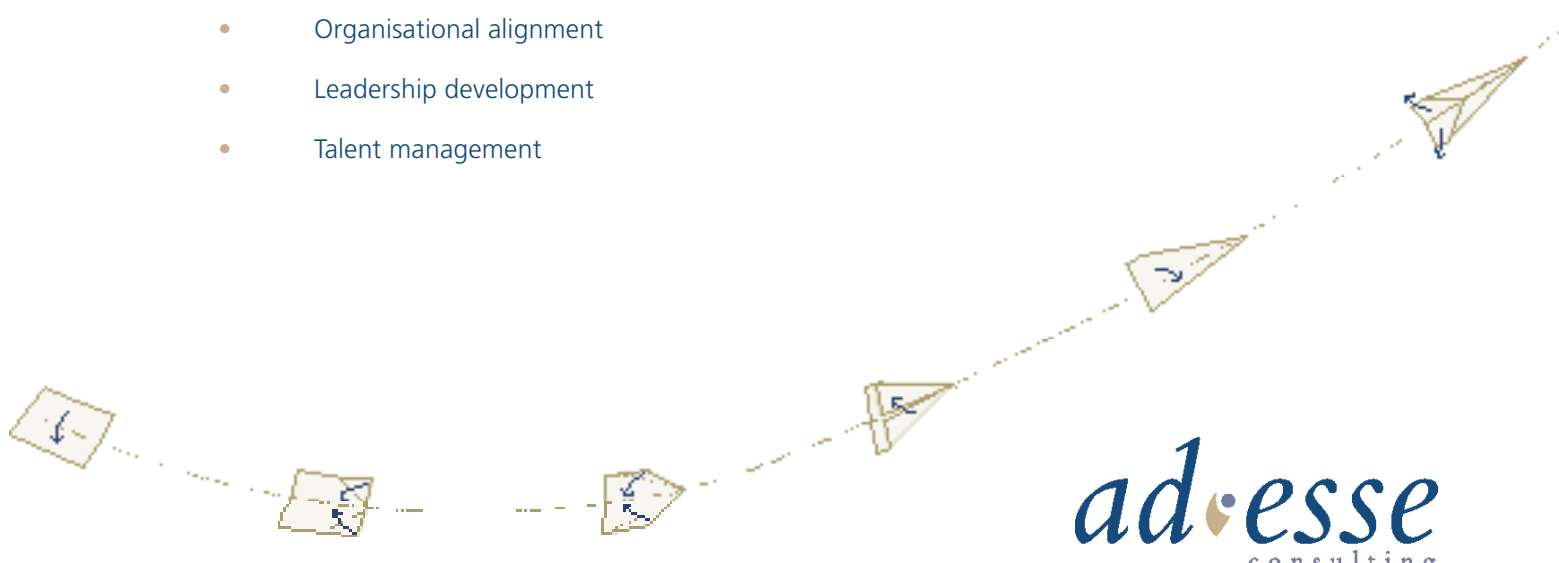
- speed up the rate at which change and improvement can be done in your organisation?
- develop a core set of improvement skills that can be applied consistently?
- develop a critical mass of people who are capable of leading change?
- embed performance improvement skills into daily work?
- be able to respond quickly to local needs for problem solving?

If the answer to any of these is “yes”, then the development of a group of internal Improvement Facilitators could be part of the solution.

## WHY FACILITATION SKILLS?

Sustainable performance improvement is pretty much on every organisation’s agenda and there are a multitude of approaches being used to achieve this, including:

- Six Sigma
- Lean
- Process improvement and re-engineering
- Benchmarking
- Organisational alignment
- Leadership development
- Talent management



A success factor underpinning all the successful examples of improvement processes, is the ability of the organisation to tap into the creativity of its people and fully release their potential to contribute. The use of internal Facilitators is a key enabler of this.

Facilitators may also be known by a variety of titles such as Performance Coaches, Change Champions, Change Agents, or in the case of Six Sigma: Black, Green or Yellow Belts.

Whatever the title, the role is to provide other people in the organisation with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to improve things. Facilitators work alongside individuals and teams, to make change happen.

## WHAT SKILLS ARE NEEDED?

We believe that successful facilitation requires skills in three areas:

### FACILITATOR SKILLS

#### Behavioural & Interpersonal Skills

Behavioural and interpersonal skills are those required to interact successfully with groups and individuals.

Technical knowledge and skills are related to the specific improvement tools and techniques that are available to “do improvement”.

#### Technical Knowledge & Skills

#### Facilitation Process Skills

Facilitation process skills are about having the capability to design and run workshops, events and interventions that can deliver improvement.

All three sets of skills are required. All too often we’ve come across organisations where Facilitators have been trained to run “**Brainstorming**” sessions and that’s the only tool they use. This may be great for stimulating creativity, but unless the ideas generated solve the real problem, or can be prioritised and implemented, they’re not much use. It’s the classic case of “if the only tool you have is a hammer, pretty soon every problem starts to look like a nail”.

- A behaviourally skilled Facilitator, who knows all the tools but can’t design an effective process, will fail to deliver and will apply a scatter-gun approach to improvement.
- A technically skilled Facilitator, who can design effective interventions, but who has poor interpersonal skills, will simply annoy everyone else, by “doing it to them, or for them”.
- Facilitator success is very dependent on being able to apply useful tools and techniques; “theoretical” approaches are usually not helpful. We introduce proven tools and techniques during our programmes and emphasise how these can be adapted to work in a variety of workplace situations.

A Facilitator who can develop a clear improvement process and who is behaviourally skilled, but lacks knowledge of the tools and techniques will not be able to help people solve problems quickly.

## FACILITATOR SELECTION

In most organisations, being a Facilitator will be a part-time role, to be accommodated while continuing to do “the day job”. This has two benefits: Facilitators can apply their learning and skill to their own work and they keep in touch with the day-to-day reality of business needs.

Facilitators should be chosen from your best people; those who have demonstrated they can lead change and who are respected by their peers. Often, they will be people who have been identified as having “potential” and giving them an opportunity to learn facilitation skills is a good way to enable them to turn that potential into reality. Great Facilitators can come from any level in an organisation; they need not be managers.

It is important for senior managers to be supportive of any Facilitator development programme, so that they can provide encouragement and ensure time is freed up, where needed. Involving senior managers in the selection process is a good way to get their buy-in and to ensure they understand the role. It can also help senior managers begin to identify specific opportunities where they would want the Facilitators to provide support. There must be a clear job for Facilitators to do, once they have been trained.

**Typically the role of Facilitators will be to:**

- Work alongside improvement project teams to help them make rapid progress and develop viable solutions to problems
- Coach managers (and others) in specific improvement tools
- Spot local opportunities for improvement and stimulate action to address these through local line management
- Provide a means of communicating improvement priorities and successes, alongside line managers
- Provide a local resource with a higher level of improvement capability (sometimes a “pair of hands” to get things done because of their skills)
- Challenge conventional wisdom and brings a creative perspective on apparently intractable problems

## A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Facilitator development programmes should be designed to address all three areas of skills listed above, and they are designed within an overall approach that typically includes:

- How to identify and select potential Facilitators
- Assessing the skills that will be relevant and that are a priority
- Developing a programme to address the skill gaps
- Briefing the participants and their managers on the role and the development programme
- Delivering the programme
- Supporting and coaching Facilitators as they start to “go solo”
- Reviewing and evaluating performance and achievements

Each organisation’s needs are different and the starting-point skills of their people are different, so an off-the-shelf programme is unlikely to be successful. The best programmes build in relevant exercises, tailored to the role the Facilitators will have to fulfil.

Programme designs should provide a broad mixture of learning styles, with an emphasis on learning by doing. Facilitators not only need to “know their stuff”, they must also be able “to do it”, and they must be confident to review it and learn from their experience.

A typical learning module, for a technique like creative problem solving, would follow this cycle:



Programmes are typically delivered in a series of modules, over a period of perhaps 6-8 weeks. This allows people to practice their new skills, at work, between modules and to feedback on their learning at subsequent modules. Where programmes have to be delivered in a solid block of days, there is often a greater emphasis on pre-work, so that people can come along to the event with something real to work on.

## PROGRAMME CONTENT

We have designed programmes that have varied in length from 2 – 8 days, depending on the client’s needs and the breadth of skills required by their Facilitators. Content in the three areas could include:

Interpersonal Skills	Technical Skills	Process Skills
Effective Presentations Training & Coaching Influence & Persuasion Planning & Running Meetings Giving & Receiving Feedback Intervention Skills Listening Skills Achieving Consensus	Brainstorming Creative Thinking Techniques Cause & Effect Analysis Data Collection Tools Data Handling & Presentation Pareto Analysis Process Mapping Risk Analysis Rating & Selection Tools Force Field Analysis Process Measurement & Analysis Statistical Skills	Problem Solving Process Improvement Benchmarking Decision-Making Team-Building Customer-Supplier Relationships Managing Change Negotiation Designing Workshops & Events

The number of people participating in a programme will be dependent on the range of skills being covered. Where the programme has a higher focus on interpersonal skills, group sizes will usually need to be smaller because of the extra time required for practice and feedback. Group sizes of 6-10 people are typical.

Our experience includes designing and delivering programmes for clients in the public and private sectors, in both manufacturing and service.

An example programme outline for a client whose Facilitators would be supporting their continuous improvement process is shown below:

<p><b>AGENDA - DAY 1</b>                  Introductions                  What is continuous Improvement                  Facilitating change                  Implementing continuous improvement                  Effective presentations                  Giving useful feedback</p>	<p><b>AGENDA – DAY 2</b>                  Presentations – practice (with feedback)                  The role of projects in improvement                  Homework (to be done before Day 3)</p>
<p><b>AGENDA – DAY 3</b>                  Improvement projects – a step-by-step approach                  Tools and techniques for problem solving</p>	<p><b>AGENDA – DAY 4</b>                  Tools and techniques for problem solving (cont.)                  Teamwork and achieving consensus                  Designing training and coaching sessions                  Homework – applying tools in the workplace (to be done before Day 5)</p>
<p><b>AGENDA – DAY 5</b>                  Homework review – learning points                  Process improvement tools and techniques                  Effective meetings                  Training and coaching practice sessions                  Handling people &amp; managing groups</p>	<p><b>AGENDA – DAY 6</b>                  Dealing with difficult situations                  Measurement                  Ensuring sustainable continuous improvement                  Managing change                  Personal action planning</p>

An effective development programme will focus on process, behaviours and tools, and enabling Facilitators to understand how to adopt the right approach for any given situation they are asked to support.

## THE BENEFITS

An effective team of Facilitators gives you:

- a core resource, capable of leading and implementing change and improvement
- an ability to deliver quick wins and solve long-standing problems
- a critical mass of knowledge about how to “do improvement”
- the ability to get people working together successfully, in teams and across departments

*“This was the best personal development programme ever; it has given me practical tools to enable me to help my colleagues, and our organisation, make real improvements happen”.*



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## FURTHER INFORMATION