FACILITATORS AND THE PROCESSES THAT THEY USE TO SUPPORT
PROBLEM-SOLVING IN TEAMS: DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH
MODEL

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ABSTRACT
Among the many strategies used to improve team performance is facilitation. Facilitators are employed to ensure that the correct techniques are applied to the problem-solving process. To date there has been no definitive study which investigates the processes which facilitators use to support problem solving in teams, and the literature that is available is disparate and spread throughout a number of different disciplines. The majority of empirical studies involving facilitators have concentrated on team responses or perceptions to facilitator interventions during the workshop stage, rather than examining the management of team processes from the perspective of the facilitator. Consequently, this paper sets out to address a recognised gap in the literature by consolidating these processes into a single framework.

KEYWORDS: Facilitation, Process Facilitators, Content Facilitators, Specialist Facilitators, Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST).
**Introduction**

As the global economic environment becomes increasingly more competitive, businesses have begun to explore alternative ways to both manage and improve team-based problem solving and decision-making (Niederman et al., 2006; Holweg & Pil, 2008). One of the most commonly used methods is to employ a facilitator. However, the processes which facilitators use to support problem solving teams have not been well defined nor understood, and the literature, as well as theory which is available is disparate and spread throughout a number of different disciplines; management information systems (Khalifa & Liu, 2008), psychology (Cosmides & Tooby, 2004), strategy (Long, 1992), management communication (Fayard & DeSanctis, 2005), quality management (Farrell & Weaver, 1998), change (Hamilton, 1988), organisational culture (Murphy, 1995), training (Pierce et al., 2000), planning (Broome, 1995), teams (Kinlaw, 1993), creativity (Kramer et al., 2001) and problem solving (Mittleman et al., 2000).

More importantly, within each discipline few studies make the facilitator the central focus of their research, preferring instead to investigate team dynamics and performance. Evidence suggests however, that the role that the facilitator fulfils in managing these processes is critical to the success of the team (Khalifa & Liu, 2008). Of more concern is that, of those authors, which have studied the facilitator, few have attempted to empirically validate their research (O’Loughlin, 2003). This is both a reflection of the how the models and frameworks have been developed, as well as the way in which the role that the facilitator fulfils has evolved over time (Peters, 2005; Boyd, 2007). As a consequence, many models are either overly parsimonious, whereby they provide little guidance for the facilitator, team or organisation (O’Loughlin, 2003), or they remain exclusively as conceptual frameworks lacking any empirical base (DeDreu & Weingart 2003). Given the above, the gap that this paper seeks to address is the development of a model, which both encapsulates the processes that facilitators use during problem solving within teams, that can also be empirically tested.

This paper is the first of a two-part research project, which was conducted in 2007-2008 focusing on investigating facilitators and the processes that they use to support problem solving in teams. The purpose of this paper is to construct a research model identifying the processes that facilitators use to support problem solving in teams, and develop specific research questions. The paper begins by defining the facilitation, of which there are essentially three types; process facilitation, content facilitation and a mixture of both content and process facilitation. The paper then goes on to distinguish the role of the facilitator from other organisational functions. The following section proposes the use of Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) to explain the dynamics underpinning the research model and the
development of the research questions. The paper concludes with a brief summary of the key issues.

Defining Facilitation
The origin of teams as problem solving agencies is as old as human behaviour. The Greeks developed teams as tools in learning and religion, and the renaissance brought about a greater use of teams within economic and work communities (Broome & Keever, 1989). However, the conditions for making teams efficient and effective did not start to materialise until the second quarter of the twentieth century (Lewin, 1947; Bradford et al, 1964; Coch & French, 1948; Rogers, 1951; Gordon, 1987; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Keltner (1989, p.9) notes:

*We have, in the past century, begun to see a special form of group helping emerge. A special role, with roots in teaching, counseling, training and therapy, has developed in the person of the group process facilitator.*

Although the widespread use of problem solving groups and teams in organisations has stimulated considerable and sustained interest in the study of team dynamics and processes within organisations and how best to manage them, a review of the literature reveals a paucity of enquiry by scholars of all disciplines, concerning ways in which performance can be enhanced through the facilitation of team interaction processes (Hirokawa & Gouran, 1989; Beranek et al, 1993; Berry, 1993; Nagasundaram & Dennis, 1993; Frey, 1995; Ackermann & Eden, 1998; Kacen & Rozovski, 1998; Beise et al 1999; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 2000; Petersen & Behfar, 2003; DeChurch et al., 2007). It is therefore, paradoxical that while many organisations continue to rely extensively on teams to solve problems and make important decisions, organisational scholars are limited in their ability to offer theoretically sound and empirically valid prescriptions for facilitating team performance (Chilberg, 1995; Clawson & Bostrom, 1996; Clawson et al, 1996; Farrell & Weaver, 1998; Choi et al., 2003, Klein et al., 2006; Ayoko et al., 2008).

Process Facilitation
According to Miranda and Bostrom (1997) there are essentially two types of facilitation, which may be classified accordingly:

1. **Content facilitators**: these are experts in a particular task or subject area, which “involves interventions that relate directly to the problem being discussed, for example, supplying interpretations, information, criteria or alternatives” (Miranda & Bostrom, 1997, p.126).
2. **Process facilitators**: are generally experts in the management of meeting processes and do not contribute to the content of the meeting. They also provide “…procedural structure and general support to groups through meeting process, for example, assisting in agenda development and prompting groups to follow the agenda” (Miranda & Bostrom, 1997, p.126).

Miranda and Bostrom’s (1997) definition of a content facilitator is very specific and focuses on the facilitator as content expert, intervener or participant. Eden (1986 and 1990) argues that the facilitator has a role to play in terms of content, and characterises the facilitator as a manager of content and process, but not as a subject expert. Eden further suggests that the management of content and process are interrelated and form what effectively constitutes a bidirectional system. He further contends that depending on the problem, the majority of facilitators will generally move between the management of content and process (Eden, 1986). Eden (1986 and 1990) further asserts that the facilitator’s management of either the process, or content aspects of any team –based workshop will almost certainly have a reciprocal effect on the other.

An alternative perspective is presented by Huxham and Cropper (1994, p. 5) who have attempted to extend Eden’s (1986) model by adding the ‘injection of substantive expertise’ which is defined as “…expertise, knowledge or even lay-comment and opinion into the decision making.” The principle criticism of Huxham and Cropper’s (1994, p. 8) definition is that they envisage the facilitator as fulfilling the role of a consultant and making “…substantive contributions to a consultancy process…” This type of facilitation fits in much more with Miranda and Bostrom’s (1997) content facilitator/expert, and moves away from Eden’s (1986) facilitator as manager of content and process.

**Distinguishing the Role of the Facilitator from Other Organisational Functions**

Within organisations the source of facilitative influence is believed to exist at three levels of interaction. The first is from within the team itself, the second is the leader or manager as a facilitator, and the third is the facilitator specialist (Heron, 1993; Keltner, 1994 and 1995; Schwarz, 1994; Felkins, 1995; Hunter et al, 1996 and 1999b; Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999; Kirkman & Shapiro, 2000; Pescosolido, 2001; O’Loughin, 2003; Khalifa & Liu, 2008).

**Participants as Facilitators**

Within teams participants who are particularly sensitive towards and aware of team processes, are often employed to intervene in content discussions and comment on process issues (Weaver & Farrell, 1997). This can be a very effective method of managing a team, but there
are a number of problems concerning their involvement with content aspects, which can potentially bias any outcome (Chilberg, 1995; Miranda & Bostrom, 1997; Porter et al., 2003; Klein et al., 2006). There is also the associated difficulty of managing peer groups. This problem may be overcome if the team is also sensitive to team processes (Greer et al., 2008). Finally, using a participant as facilitator can in small teams significantly reduce the capacity of the team to work on a problem, by forcing the participant to manage the process rather than contribute towards a solution of the task (Olekalns & Smith, 2003a and 2003b; Schei, 2004; Ten Velden et al., 2007).

**Leaders and/or Managers as Facilitators**

In other aspects of the literature it is assumed that the leader or manager is held to be responsible for managing a team’s interactions and processes (Casey et al., 1992; Schwarz, 1994; Weaver & Farrell, 1997; Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999; Oertig & Buergi, 2006). Evidence shows that during workshops a variety of leadership roles exist, which have a tendency to rotate around the team (Belbin, 1986, 1993a and 1993b; Belbin et al., 1996; Harvey, et al., 2003; Howell & Shamir, 2005, Pastor et al., 2007). For example, there are formal and informal process leaders, specialist leaders and content leaders. While their authority tends to be transient they fulfil an important role within teams, and formal recognition of these nominal leaders is extremely important if the team is to achieve its objectives (Foels et al., 2000; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Sy et al., 2005).

Research shows that, leaders and managers usually acquire their status because of their content, rather than process knowledge (Hersey & Chevalier, 2000; Pescosolido, 2002; Oertig & Buergi, 2006).

**The Specialist Facilitator**

The focus of this research centres on the third, and as Keltner (1989, p.22) states “...least understood facilitative role is that of the facilitator specialist.” Specialist facilitators do not deal with team content, they are not members of the team and do not participate as such (Frey, 1995; Murphy, 1995; Poole et al., 1995; Justice & Jamieson, 1999; Pierce et al., 2000; O’Loughlin, 2003). They function as non-members within a highly specialised, yet restricted role (Romano et al., 1999; Macneil, 2001; Hulett, 2007; Cherubini et al., 2007; Wasielewski & Hayibor, 2007).

Benne et al. (1975) provides one possible explanation as to why the specialist facilitator’s role is often difficult to comprehend. They suggest that the facilitator’s role cannot be reduced to, equated with or combined with the normal leader-follower, manager-subordinate, colleague-
to-colleague, or friend-to-friend relationships (Benne et al, 1975). In essence, they argue that the facilitator-team relationship is completely unique, and is not found in any other form within organisations (Benne et al, 1975).

The following section seeks to address a theoretical weakness in the facilitation literature by examining process facilitation in the context of AST. AST has been widely used in group support systems research, to explain the relationship between technologically mediated problem solving processes, facilitated structures and team participation (O’Loughlin, 2003).

**Adaptive Structuration Theory and Process Facilitation**

Poole and DeSanctis (1990) have been credited as being the principal designers of the theory of adaptive structuration, which has been used to study variations in organisational change that occur due to the utilisation of advanced technology (Holweg & Pitt, 2008; Niederman et al., 2006; Allport & Kerler, 2003). They suggest that, “Advanced information technologies bring social structures which enable and constrain interaction to the workplace” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, p. 125). In other words, technologies such as group support systems (GSS) can develop structures, which will influence the way in which participants interact with one another. Anson et al., (1995, p. 8) have defined these structures as “…formal and informal procedures, techniques, skill sets, as well as tools or rules that organise and direct group behaviour processes.”

AST is based upon three functional elements: structuration, appropriation and adoption. Structuration is defined as “…the process by which social structures are produced and reproduced in social settings” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, p. 128). Structuration occurs, for example, when a facilitator introduces a particular technique to a team in order to maximise its process efficiencies. Over time the continual use of particular structures may eventually lead to them becoming embedded within the organisation’s own structure (Poole & DeSanctis, 1990; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Anson et al, 1995; McFadzean 1999; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 2000; O’Loughlin, 2003; O’Leary & Cummings, 2007).

In explaining the justification for using AST, and although it already has an established research history, this is the first time that it has been applied to directly explain facilitator practice. All of the previous studies have focused on technologically induced structures, through, for example, the use of a GSS (Beranek et al, 1993; Anson et al, 1995; Fuller & Trower, 1995; Wheeler & Valacich, 1996; Niederman & Volkema, 1999; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 2000; O’Loughlin, 2003, Niederman et al., 2006; Rains, 2007). The argument supporting the use of AST, to explain the dynamics of the research model, is based upon the
fact that facilitators behave in a similar manner to the technology, by creating, managing and removing various structures during team problem solving (Whetten, 1989; Daft & Lewin, 1993; Sutton & Staw, 1995; O’Loughlin, 2003; Allport & Kerler, 2003).

AST uses structuration, appropriation and adoption to explain the impact of process structures on team performance (Anson et al, 1995; Poole & DeSanctis 1992; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Poole et al, 1996; McFadzean, 1999; Rains, 2007; Holweg & Pil, 2008;). Structuration, appropriation and adoption provide a useful, as well as convenient framework for understanding the way in which the facilitator intervenes and manages the processes that are used to support problem solving in teams.

By using AST to explain the research model’s dynamics, it is possible to develop a framework which allows other facilitators, participants and clients/managers, to both engage with, and understand how, various structures and processes should be applied, and most importantly how the framework might be operationalised (McFadzean, 1999; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 2000; O’Loughlin, 2003; Torraco, 2005; Niederman et al., 2006).

The following section examines a number of influential models that have been developed to explain the role of the facilitator.

**Models of Facilitation**

During the 1990s, and to a lesser extent from 2000 onwards, there has been a resurgence of interest in the research and development of models which identify those processes which the facilitator uses to support teams during problem-solving workshops (Beranek et al, 1993; Anson et al, 1995; Antonioni, 1996; Cusimano, 1997; Ackermann, 1996; McFadzean & Nelson, 1998; McFadzean & O’Loughlin, 2000; O’Loughlin, 2003). However, in spite of an apparent increase in the number of published articles the discipline has made little progress towards the development of a model which fully integrates empirical observations with theoretical assumptions, and which may subsequently be used by a facilitator to manage workshop processes (Bostrom et al, 1991; Clawson & Bostrom, 1993; Ackermann, 1993 and 1996; Fuller & Trower, 1994; Clawson et al, 1996; Griffith et al, 1998; McFadzean & Nelson, 1998; Niederman & Volkema, 1999; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 2000; Pierce et al, 2000; Kramer et al, 2001; O’Loughlin, 2003).

The motivation for developing conceptual models of facilitation appears to have been driven by the desire to satisfy three particular issues:
a. The need to reconcile inconsistent results across various studies (Grofman et al., 1984; Hamilton, 1988; Martz et al., 1992; Dickson et al., 1993; O’Loughlin, 2003; Limayem et al., 2005).

b. The assumption that by combining theory and practice into a model, or several models that the discipline will in some way be advanced (Ackermann, 1996; McFadzean & Nelson, 1998; Niederman et al., 2006).

c. Reality is far too complex to deal with in its entirety. Models are therefore needed to extract and synthesise the relevant detail from the huge amount of information, which is continually being generated (McLagan & Bedrick, 1993; Pavitt, 1999; Pierce et al., 2000; Allport & Kerler, 2003; Rains, 2007).

Model development has evolved from research into two areas in particular. The first are the practitioner-based models, which have been developed to assist facilitators manage with team behaviour during problem solving (Heron, 1993; Bentley, 1994a and 1994b; Hunter et al., 1996; Weaver & Farrell, 1997; Havergal & Edmonstone, 1999; Justice & Jamieson, 1999; O’Loughlin, 2003; Santenen et al., 2004; Barner & Higgins, 2005; Barner, 2008). The second are the technology-based models involving, for example, group support systems (GSS) which explores how technology can enhance and improve team productivity through electronic facilitation (Beranek et al., 1993; Clawson & Bostrom, 1993, 1995 and 1996; Kelly & Bostrom, 1995 and 1997; Clawson et al., 1996; Licker, 1997; Miranda & Bostrom, 1997; Ackermann & Eden, 1998; Bordia et al., 1999; Khalifa et al., 2002; Limayem et al., 2005; Khalifa & Liu, 2008).

**Ackermann’s Summary of Learning Points**

Ackermann initially explored data, effects, benefits and disadvantages of particular problem solving technologies with the intention of developing learning points to assist facilitators during workshops. As Ackermann (1996, p. 94) explains:

> Although initially the research study had a number of objectives, of which understanding more about facilitation was only one element, the latter emerged as one of the most important elements and therefore one worth focusing on.

**[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]**

Although there were a number of important learning points which emerged from the study, one of the most important was that, workshops should be divided into three stages, pre-meeting, meeting and post-meeting, rather than simply focusing solely on the workshop stage.
itself (Ackermann, 1996). The primary data source was participant’s perceptions of the facilitator’s performance during various meetings (Ackermann, 1996).

Ackermann’s (1996) research focused on the use of a methodology called SODA (Strategic Options Development and Analysis) (Eden & Ackermann, 1989). Underpinning SODA is Personal Construct Theory, which involves people making sense of the world through a process of contrast and comparison thereby allowing them to predict how they may control the world in the future (Argyris, 1960 and 1970; Ackermann, 1996; McKenna, 1996).

A Model for Facilitating a Group Problem-Solving Session

McFadzean and Nelson (1998) have developed a conceptual model for facilitating team problem-solving sessions. The principal difference in this model is that it specifies time frames in terms of when activities might take place, or occur. What is important about McFadzean and Nelson’s model is that it places the process skills of the facilitator into a framework, which highlights when certain activities are likely to come in to play. This clearly extends earlier models, which have concentrated on simply identifying the types of skills that a facilitator requires, and provides greater predictive qualities.

McFadzean and Nelson’s model is underpinned by TEAM (Team Economics of Attention Management) theory, which was developed by Briggs and Nunamaker (1996) specifically for use in electronic environments. TEAM theory is useful because it places a boundary around the problem, and focuses the facilitators’ and participants' attention towards deliberation, communication and information access and away from various other distractions, which can inhibit productivity (Briggs and Nunamaker, 1996). In short, the theory seeks to moderate recurring problems associated with process losses and process gains (O’Loughlin, 2003).

McFadzean and Nelson’s model raises a number of unanswered questions and issues concerning the facilitation of problem solving workshops. Firstly, do facilitators really envisage their support as a four-stage process? This is important because a number of studies suggest that the facilitators’ workshop framework is much more likely to comprise one, two or three stages (Clawson & Bostrom, 1993 and 1995; Fuller & Trower, 1994; Schwarz, 1994; Beise et al., 1995; Ackermann, 1996; Weaver & Farrell, 1997; Havergal & Edmonstone, 1999; Justice & Jamieson, 1999; Niederman & Volkema, 1999; Kramer et al., 2001; O’Loughlin, 2003). More importantly, McFadzean and Nelson’s model places a very heavy emphasis on processes that occur outside the actual workshop (group session), which raises questions as to
whether the model is truly representative of the problem solving process. Neither is it altogether clear from McFadzean and Nelson’s model how the facilitator might/should move between each stage, and indeed what the explicit links are between stages. Finally, while acknowledging the parsimonious nature of the model itself, the model does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the processes that a facilitator might use to support problem solving in teams.

**Facilitator Competencies**

The model of facilitator competencies has been developed through forums sponsored by the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) U.S.A and The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs. The basic data for the model has been collected from various conferences over a ten-year period beginning in 1990 (Pierce et al., 2000). In 1995, facilitators from both the IAF and ICA began a review of the various conference papers, journals, workshop information and models from other organisational settings in an attempt to identify common themes (Pierce et al, 2000). The result of this review is the facilitator competencies model.

The model represents an interesting compromise by attempting to synthesise a variety of different skills. There are however a number of important weaknesses.

Firstly, it is not clear how the model operates. It is a staged model, but the number of different stages serves to complicate its operation. Are the relationships matrix-based, holistic, vertical, horizontal, or a combination of all three? Is the model interactive? Are the relationships dependent? How does one move between the different stages? The instructions on how to read the model are unclear. Neither is it clear whether the numbering of the various components, specifically, 1, 2 and 3 relates to any specific depth in terms of skill or learning.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

**Developing a Conceptual Model Of Process Facilitation**

A conceptual model of the processes, which the facilitator seeks to manage during problem solving workshops, is developed from the literature and is presented in Figure 5. The section headings have been validated through a blind panel process. The model possesses three distinctive sets of dynamics, which operate in-conjunction with one another (Ackermann, 1996; McFadzean & Nelson, 1998; Nelson & McFadzean, 1998, Pierce et al., 2000, O’Loughlin, 2003). The first are the stages of the workshop, which illustrates when particular processes are likely to occur. The second are the phases, which are located exclusively during
the main workshop, and highlight those processes undertaken at the start of the workshop, during the workshop and towards the end of the workshop. The final dynamic are the sections. This involves focusing down into the stages and phases to identify specific categories of process.

The stages, phases and sections are important because they provide structure for the model, and enable the categorisation of processes, as well as identifying their location within the model’s frame. Without this structure the processes would become simply a mass of data and provide little assistance to the facilitator, client or participants in understanding the links between processes and when they are likely to occur. Furthermore, the notion of divisions is consistent with Ackermann’s (1996), McFadzean and Nelson (1997 and 1998) and Pierce, et al’s (2000) models.

**Summarising the Contribution of the Models to the Research Model**

- The models all divide and specify the processes, which a facilitator uses to support problem solving in teams.
- The models also recognise and distinguish between the facilitator as process manager, and content interventions by a specialist facilitator.
- The models are holistic in its formulation, meaning that it conceives pre-workshop, workshop and post-workshop stages to be interrelated, and at least to some degree dependent on each other.
- Each model has practical value for both the academic and practitioner in terms of application.
- The models are parsimonious, but also well-structured and sufficiently rich in data so as to allow other researchers and practitioners to access it without too much difficulty.
- Each model recognises the facilitator as the creator, developer and manager of various structures. This is consistent with AST.

The following section sets out the research model, and draws together the components from the models discussed above and the literature.

**A Research Model of Facilitation Processes**

Figure 4 is the detailed research model illustrating all of the combined processes from the literature, which the facilitator is likely to manage during problem solving workshops. The processes have been extracted and combined from the models discussed above, as well as
from the literature. It is important to note that the facilitator may not manage all of these processes during every workshop. For example, if the team membership does not alter throughout the workshop(s), it is unlikely that the facilitator will need to complete a background assessment for each workshop. This will only be necessary if new team members are to be included/introduced into the workshop at a later time.

The broken lines between each section are used to denote the permeability of the stages and interrelatedness of the processes. For example, in discussing the agenda this is a process, which clearly informs the whole workshop, and not just Stage 1. The agenda also provides a framework for Stages 2 and 3. This is true of many of the processes, which are included in all three stages.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Research Questions

The following research questions have been developed from the research model. The primary research question is:

‘What processes do facilitators use to support problem-solving in teams within organisations?’

This question is answered through two sub-questions:

Research Question 1: Which of these process variables do facilitators practice?

Research Question 2: In what ways does AST provide a useful theoretical explanation of the processes that facilitators use to support problem solving in teams?

The objective of the research is therefore to firstly, confirm which process variables the facilitators’ practice and, secondly to investigate the way in which the facilitators have used these processes to support problem solving in teams.

Summary

A considerable amount has been written within the literature on the role of the facilitator and the processes which they manage before, during and after a team problem solving session (Clawson & Bostrom, 1993; Ackermann, 1993 and 1996; Fuller & Trower, 1994; Schwarz, 1994; Anson et al, 1995; Beise et al, 1995; Burns, 1995; Clawson et al, 1996; Weaver & Farrell, 1997; McFadzean & Nelson, 1998; Beise et al, 1999; Haergal & Edmonstone, 1999;
Justice & Jamieson, 1999; Mittleman et al, 2000; O’Loughlin & McFadzean, 2000; Pierce et al, 2000; Kramer et al, 2001; Petersen & Behfar, 2003; Klein et al., 2006; DeChurch et al., 2007; Ayoko et al., 2008). This also includes research into facilitator practices during sessions supported by a group support system (Dickson et al, 1989 & 1993; Clawson, & Bostrom, 1995; Ackermann, 1996; Niederman et al, 1996; Mittleman, et al, 2000; Allport & Kerler, 2003; Limayem et al, 2005; O’Leary & Cummings, 2007). However, few studies have actually investigated the practices undertaken by facilitators in a face-to-face situation, and encompassing the three stages of Pre-Workshop, Workshop and Post-Workshop.

**Implications for the Facilitator, Manager and Team**

There are a number of important issues that managers should be aware of with regard to the development of the research model and AST:

- The research model provides a holistic framework, and covers a number of important processes and practices. Previous models have tended to be overly parsimonious, or lack a clear transformational structure. This is important for practitioners and managers alike, as it clearly indicates that the problem-solving process is more complex than often portrayed.

- Also recognised are the pre and post-problem solving stages, which are extremely important if process consistency is to be maintained and managed effectively. These stages indicate to practitioners and managers that problem solving does not simply begin and end during the workshop stage. There are other transformational processes that need to be recognised outside of the workshop.

- Team efficiencies may be gained through recognising where the various processes occur (Pre-workshop, Workshop and Post-workshop), which is important as it indicates that, regardless of whether the meeting is a one-off, or part of a series there is a need to structure the process so as to achieve greater team coherence, thereby effectively removing some of the administrative issues/burden, and allowing the team to concentrate on the problem/task.

- It is also anticipated that the model will also allow for greater team effectiveness. It illustrates that teams are capable of *managing* and *controlling* the problem solving process through stage identification (Start, Body and End). The author suggests that the stages act as temporal points of reference for the team, and allow, as Gersick (1988 and 1989) contends greater time management and performance through the stages.
• AST helps to provide an explanation as to why problem-solving workshops might function as they do. By this the author means that, it is possible for managers, facilitators and participants to control the development of various structures, and therefore potentially influence the outcome of the problem solving process.

This paper has identified an important gap in the literature on managing teams during problem solving. This involves identifying the role that the specialist facilitator fulfils in managing the processes used to support problem solving in teams. The literature on facilitation has been reviewed, and as part one of this research project a research model and questions have been developed.
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### Ackermann’s Summary of the Learning Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-workshop stage</th>
<th>Workshop stage</th>
<th>Post-workshop stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1: Providing the client with some control over the meeting</td>
<td>2.1: Providing an explanation to the process</td>
<td>3.1: Keeping the energy and enthusiasm alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2: Giving advice to the client concerning the dangers of participative methods</td>
<td>2.2: Providing a clear set of objectives and corresponding agenda</td>
<td>3.2: Stressing to the client the importance of implementing outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3: Providing information on the benefits gained from participative methods</td>
<td>2.3: Creating and displaying an overview of the issue/problem</td>
<td>3.3: Agreeing on ‘quick’ wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4: Ensuring that a match is made between the problem task and the facilitator’s skills</td>
<td>2.4: Managing the group’s direction and progress</td>
<td>3.4: Promulgating actions achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5: Understanding more about the organisation</td>
<td>2.5: Ensuring that participants perceive themselves to be equal for the event</td>
<td>3.5: Managing the process of review and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6: Paying attention to group membership</td>
<td>2.6: Enabling participants to contribute freely</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.7: Discussing the location of the workshop/meeting</td>
<td>2.7: Enabling the group to concentrate on the task being addressed</td>
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<td>2.14: Considering the actions in light of the responsibilities</td>
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Source: Ackermann (1996, p.95)
Figure 2: McFadzean and Nelson’s Conceptual Model for Facilitating a Group Problem-Solving Session

Pre-Planning Session
- Knowledge of problem solving process/techniques
- Communication skills/interaction with clients regarding agenda
- State clear meeting objectives with client
- Structure agenda/look at whole picture
- Focus on initial problem definition
- Knowledge of group dynamics and environments
- Choose group members and discuss political issues
- State session ground rules
- Develop terms of reference
- Understanding of business environment

Group Session
- State and agree agenda, objectives and timetable
- Experience and knowledge of process and techniques
- Introduction/warm-up session - encourages commitment to work with each other
- Guidance and support
- Flexibility
- Neutral intervention
- Encourage participation by all group members
- Feedback on meeting
- Presentation skills
- Knowledge of group dynamics

Post-Session Report
- The post-session report should contain:
  - Output obtained from the session. The results will depend on the meeting objectives stated in the pre-planning session
  - Aims and objectives - the report should state what should be undertaken next e.g. the next meeting, implementation plans, timetable etc.
  - The people involved in the session and any future instructions that may be required of them

Post-Session Review
- The following should be reviewed after each session:
  - The session output
  - The problem solving process
  - The timetable
  - The goals
  - The people involved

Figure 3: Facilitator Competencies Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Engage in Professional Growth</th>
<th>B. Create Collaborative Partnerships</th>
<th>C. Create an Environment of Participation</th>
<th>D. Utilize Multi-Sensory Approaches</th>
<th>E. Orchestrate the Group Journey</th>
<th>F. Commit to a Life of Integrity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maintain a base of knowledge</td>
<td>1. Develop working partnerships with those served.</td>
<td>1. Demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills.</td>
<td>1. Evoke group creativity, blending learning and thinking styles.</td>
<td>1. Guide the group with clear methods and processes.</td>
<td>1. Ask the depth questions of oneself and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledgeable in management, organizational systems and development, group development, psychology and training</td>
<td>• Identify authentic client needs.</td>
<td>• Demonstrate effective verbal communication skills.</td>
<td>• Be aware of individual learning thinking styles.</td>
<td>• Establish clear context.</td>
<td>• Identify authentic client needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand dynamics of change</td>
<td>• Clarify mutual commitment.</td>
<td>• Develop rapport with participants.</td>
<td>• Communicate with all styles.</td>
<td>• Apply a variety of participatory processes.</td>
<td>• Clarify mutual commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand learning theory</td>
<td>• Promote value and use of facilitation.</td>
<td>• Proactive active listening.</td>
<td>• Draw out participants of all styles.</td>
<td>• Manage small and large group process.</td>
<td>• Promote the value and use of facilitation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| • Know a range of processes. | • Design services cooperatively. | • Encourage positive regard for the experience and perception of all participants. | • Assess group sensory needs and abilities | • Keep the group moving. | • Articulate the possibility of transformation in all situations |
| • Distinguish process from task content. | • Demonstrate team values and processes | • Create a climate of safety and trust. | • Select from a wide variety of sensory approaches | • Recognize tangents and redirect to the task. | • Approach situations with self-confidence and an affirmative attitude |
| | • Support co-facilitation during delivery of service | • Bring forth the diversity of the group. | • Use approaches that best fit needs and abilities of the group. | • Listen, question and summarize to elicit the sense of the group. | • Model professional boundaries and ethics, e.g. confidentiality |

| 3. Maintain professional standing. | 1. Co-design and customize applications to meet client needs. | 1. Facilitate group conflict. | 1. Use time and space to support group process. | 1. Guide the group to consensus and desired outcomes. | 1. Trust group’s potential and model neutrality. |
| • Engage in ongoing study. | • Design customized constructs. | • Recognize conflict. | • Arrange space to meet the purpose of the meeting. | • Know a variety of approaches to meeting group objectives. | • Honor the wisdom of the group. |
| • Practice reflection and learning. | • Define a quality product. | • Provide a safe environment for conflict to surface. | • Plan and monitor effective use of time. | • Adapt processes to changing situations. | • Encourage trust in the capacity and experience of others. |
| • Participate in a facilitation network or organization | • Assess/evaluate client satisfaction. | • Manage disruptive group behaviour. | • Know when to move the group and when to stay. | • Assess and communicate group progress. | • Set aside personal opinions. |

| 2. Create and maintain professional, collegial relationships. | 1. Co-design and customize applications to meet client needs. | 1. Facilitate group conflict. | 1. Use time and space to support group process. | 1. Guide the group to consensus and desired outcomes. | 1. Trust group’s potential and model neutrality. |
| • Design services cooperatively. | • Design customized constructs. | • Recognize conflict. | • Arrange space to meet the purpose of the meeting. | • Know a variety of approaches to meeting group objectives. | • Honor the wisdom of the group. |
| • Demonstrate team values and processes | • Define a quality product. | • Provide a safe environment for conflict to surface. | • Plan and monitor effective use of time. | • Adapt processes to changing situations. | • Encourage trust in the capacity and experience of others. |
| • Support co-facilitation during delivery of service | • Assess/evaluate client satisfaction. | • Manage disruptive group behaviour. | • Know when to move the group and when to stay. | • Assess and communicate group progress. | • Set aside personal opinions. |

5.1 Gather all of the information together
5.2 Codify the information - where possible ensure that it retains its original character thereby reducing bias in reporting
5.3 Develop a technique for managing the information
5.4 Promulgating actions achieved - distribute
5.5 Keep the participants advised of what is happening particularly if there are likely to be delays
5.6 Agreeing on ‘quick’ wins
5.7 Keeping the energy and enthusiasm alive
5.8 Manage the ‘bridge’ between current workshop and any continuation workshops
5.9 Stressing to the client the importance of implementing the outcomes
5.10 Make sure that where continuation workshops are concerned that either the client or facilitator ensures that actions are completed on time
5.11 Managing the process of review and control

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### Pre-Workshop

1.1 Providing the client with some control over the workshop
1.2 Agree goals with the client
1.3 Agree the workshop process with the client
1.4 Agree a problem solving technique with the client
1.5 Agree an agenda with the client
1.6 Giving advice to the client concerning the dangers of participative methods
1.7 Providing information on the benefits gained from participative methods
1.8 Ensuring that the topic breadth is not too large, or too small
1.9 Ensuring that a match is made between the problem task and the facilitator’s skills
1.10 Agree the number of facilitators attending the workshop
1.11 Understanding more about the organisation and its requirements
1.12 Paying attention to team membership
1.13 Agree the number of participants attending
1.14 Background assessment of the participants
1.15 Circulate an agenda to the participants prior to the workshop
1.16 Discussing the location of the workshop.
1.17 Agree dates for the workshop(s)
1.18 Agree workshop start and finish times

### Start of Workshop

2.1 Ensuring that the workshop starts on time
2.2 Ensuring that the workshop finishes on time
2.3 Explaining the role of the facilitator(s) to the team
2.4 Providing an explanation to the process
2.5 Explaining the workshop structure to the team
2.6 Explain to the team the type of technique that is going to be used
2.7 Explain the rules of the technique to the team
2.8 Explain to the team the benefits of using this technique
2.9 Ensure team adhere to the technique’s rules
2.10 Creating and displaying an overview of the issue/problem
2.11 Providing a clear set of objectives and corresponding agenda
2.12 Establishing goals with the team
2.13 Explaining the agenda to the team - opening discussion
2.14 Ensuring that all the participants that needed to be at the workshop are in attendance
2.15 Ensuring that participants perceive themselves to be equal for the event

### Workshops

3.1 Enabling participants to contribute freely
3.2 Managing relationships between the participants
3.3 Managing the team’s direction and progress
3.4 Providing ‘support’ to help the team
3.5 Enabling the team to concentrate on the task being addressed
3.6 Ensuring participants have sufficient access to information
3.7 Recognising and managing process problems as they occur
3.8 Help team achieve process congruence
3.9 Moderating own behaviour to ensure team retain control of task
3.10 Asking difficult or sometimes obvious questions
3.11 Exhibiting energy and enthusiasm
3.12 Making regular reviews of the material
3.13 Providing the client with some form of control

4.1 Putting aside time to review the outcomes
4.2 Checking outcomes against workshop agenda, objectives and goals
4.3 Re-examining agreed actions
4.4 Help team to develop a plan for future action
4.5 Considering the actions in light of the responsibilities
4.6 Ensuring that all action points and responsibilities are agreed at the end of the workshop
4.7 Explain to the team what happens next
4.8 Give dates for the transmission of information to the participants
4.9 Explain what the participants need to do when the information arrives
4.10 Agree dates for future workshops

### Post-Workshop

5.1 Gather all of the information together
5.2 Codify the information - where possible ensure that it retains its original character thereby reducing bias in reporting
5.3 Develop a technique for managing the information
5.4 Promulgating actions achieved - distribute
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**Figure 4: The Research Model of Facilitation Processes**