

FACILITATION SCENARIO

Instructions: Read the following scenario. At certain points you will be asked to identify what you would say and/or do in the situation described.

The exercises are intended to provide contexts for practising facilitation decisions and/or QRF skills.

For guidance, you are advised to refer to the sections on Facilitator Roles & Behaviours; Questioning, Responding, & Fielding Skills; and Leading Discussions.

An answer key is presented at the end of this reading.

Background: It is late in the morning on the final day of a workshop on conflict resolution that you are facilitating. You thought things were going well, but now you're no longer certain.

“Could you repeat what you've said about conflict resolution?”, asks Tim.

Since only the last afternoon of the workshop remains, you nervously ask Tim, “Which part would you like me to repeat?”

“Well, most of what you've said since break. This isn't making sense to me any more. I thought I had it. What do I really need to know about conflict resolution?”

1. *What would you say to Tim in this situation? State the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

One of the other learners, Jeanne, who seems to think she should be leading your session, wanders into the discussion at this point and offers Tim her theory of conflict resolution.

Jeanne says, “Conflict occurs when our basic needs are not being met. Therefore, we have to learn to view every outrageous act as a signal that people are in deep emotional turmoil. No matter how difficult, unreasonable, demanding, unreliable, or torturous they are we have to learn to love them as they ... ”

Sensing that Jeanne is launching into a full-roar speech, you know that you have to limit its scope and duration.

You’re also faced with the added dilemma that what Jeanne has said is incorrect. The workshop is designed to help people provide effective feedback and what she is saying is contrary to that.

You can just hear it now: “Well, we learned in the workshop that we’re supposed to accept people for themselves. People perform poorly at work because their needs aren’t being met, so instead of punishing them we should try to make them happy.”

If the learners adopt such a viewpoint, then that could be the end of your reputation as a SME in conflict resolution!

While you’re having this internal conversation, you hear Jeanne’s monologue continue. Now Jeanne is recalling a passage from something called Embracing Conflict.

You think to yourself, there has to be an easier way to make a living. You decide that you must intervene now.

2. *What would you do in this situation? Identify and explain the facilitation decision that you would use to bring the discussion back on track:*

The workshop now seems like it’s unravelling.

Jeanne is looking none too pleased about her shortened speech, and there are several in the group who appear to be supporting her.

Tim is picking lint off his sweater, making it very obvious that he is not prepared to listen to anything at this point in time.

You turn to your neat and colourful flipcharts and feel a sense of comfort – you like your flipcharts, you do well with flipcharts, they are your friends.

You continue: “We have just finished our session on identifying the root cause of conflict. Now we are going to analyze our conflict resolution practices to determine what we need to modify.”

To your dismay, you see Tim raise his hand. Maybe he’s just stretching? No such luck.

Tim asserts, “I don’t see how I can analyze my own performance until I understand what we did this morning. How can we start to work on something that we don’t know enough about?”

Your temples start to throb. It’s just caffeine, you remind yourself. It can’t be stress. It’s only your first training session after your holiday.

Several other learners now are nodding their heads in agreement with Tim. What’s really frustrating you is that you’re still not sure what is puzzling them. You thought it was so clear. What can you do at this point?

3. *What would you do in this instance? What would you say? Identify and explain your facilitation decision, and state the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

Tim remains fixed on his need for clarification: “I don’t understand how the conflict resolution model helps *me* deal with conflict. I guess I don’t see why all five steps have to be followed.”

No wonder, you think. He wasn’t even in the classroom when you were discussing that aspect. In response to his question, you ...

4. *What would you say? State the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

As you had hoped, numerous learners are willing to describe the individual and collective values of the steps in the conflict resolution model. A nice summary, you think. And Tim seems satisfied to have heard the answer from someone other than you.

Another learner, Sheila, asks, “What would you do if your totally unreasonable boss was always on your case about being negative. I can’t stand that! What would you do with someone so bossy and mean-spirited?”

Your antennae start to tingle (warning, warning), you ...

5. *What would you say in this situation? State the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

People love to solve other people’s problems. You know this to be true because now it seems everyone wants to give Sheila advice.

The problem is that none of the advice takes into account that Sheila may be a co-contributor to this difficult situation.

I am losing it, you scream in silence! We spent all morning saying people should spend time focusing on their own behaviours. Stifling a sigh, you ...

6. *What would you do in this situation? Identify and explain the facilitation decision that you would use:*

Jeanne, the would-be-leader in the group, begins to describe a very difficult person she encountered during a trek through the Andes. This is definitely off-topic, but she seems to be relentless in bringing up Peru.

Not wanting to cut-off what could be an interesting discussion, yet needing to stay on-track with the session's agenda, you ...

7. *What would you say in this situation? State the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

So there you are looking at them. And there they are looking at you. A lot has happened in the last 45 minutes. You sense that the mood has improved. Tim, in particular, is acting more like a productive learner. You perceive the need to acknowledge what has occurred.

It would be strange simply to move on. So, you ...

8. *What would you say at this moment? State the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

No one says anything, they don't even nod. You ...

9. *What would you say? State the exact words that you would use (and identify the QRF skill or skills):*

Suggested Solutions

1. *The facilitator could:*

Tim has asked you to review information that has already been dealt with, and he is asking for a rather significant review. You could use this situation as an opportunity for the group to review. To accomplish this, relay Tim's question to the large group and let them respond to his concerns: "Everyone! Tim is suggesting a synopsis of conflict resolution. What have we learned about conflict resolution to this point, in the session?" (relay-to-large group)

2. *The facilitator could:*

This is an opportunity to exercise your role as process observer. You could offer your feedback to the group about what you see happening; and then either ask the learners to identify how they want to proceed, or be more directive by suggesting a return to the agenda.

3. *The facilitator could:*

You could direct a question to subgroups and ask each subgroup to discuss what's clear about the model and what's still unclear: "What do we know and don't know about the conflict resolution model? – compile responses in your table groups." You also could request learners in subgroups to advise each other about things that may have been missed. You could then offer to take-up remaining issues in a large group discussion, if needed. Here is an example of a facilitator being a leader in using a direct-to-subgroup question.

4. *The facilitator could:*

You could choose to relay the question to another learner: "Benicio, in your opinion, why is it necessary that we follow the five steps in the conflict resolution model?" (relay-to-individual)

5. *The facilitator could:*

Reflect the question back to the asker: "Sheila, before I respond, what are you doing now in this situation – and is what you're doing working or it is not working?" This choice is the safest route, since you can foresee Sheila going back to work, telling her boss "what for and how come", and then blaming you for the repercussions.

6. *The facilitator could:*

You could ask members to turn to page “x” in their workbooks, which outlines the conflict resolution tool you want them to practise as soon as this Q&A period ends. You could ask them to use Sheila’s problem as an opportunity to apply this tool in a real-world conflict resolution situation. This intervention is an example of the facilitator performing the roles of process commentator and problem solver (see p. 6).

7. *The facilitator could:*

Offer to record this discussion topic in the parking lot: “Jeanne, I’m a Peru fan myself, but we’re a little off the beaten path with this topic. Let’s put it in the parking lot and return to it later if we can.” Or you could suggest that learners who are interested in continuing this conversation do so during lunch: “Interesting anecdote, Jeanne, but somewhat unrelated to our present theme. Who’d like to get together at lunch with Jeanne and continue with her story?” These measures should appease all sides. These options illustrate the parking lot response (two varieties).

8. *The facilitator could:*

Ask an overhead question that asks learners if they are prepared to move on: “We need group guidance at this juncture; are we ready to move on to new material?” (overhead question)

9. *The facilitator could:*

Tim’s concern was the factor that prompted the discussion. Allow him to bring the discussion to closure: “Tim, has our look back at conflict resolution been helpful? Should we add to the review or move on?” (direct-to-individual)

Source: A. McEachern. Adapted by StFX.