

Heron Facilitation Model

BACKGROUND: John Heron is the well known author of *The Facilitator's Handbook* (1989) and *Group Facilitation* (1993) and the *Complete Facilitator* (1999) that describes the Heron Facilitation Model. The model helps facilitators to understand and develop a personal style to their work offering strong theoretical content on the fundamental thinking underlying facilitation but combines this with a wide repertoire for practical action designed to enable facilitators to build up their skills effectively. The model's distinctive merit is its capacity for adapting a facilitator's natural style to meet nearly any situation faced.

Heron's model has two parts. The first part comprises the Six Dimensions of Facilitation. The second part is the three Power Modes. The six dimensions interweave and overlap, being mutually supportive of each other. They need to be distinguished from each other in thought and action to achieve effective facilitation.

Six Dimensions of Facilitation

Planning Dimension: This is the goal-oriented (ends and means) aspect of facilitation. It has to do with the aims of the group, and what it should undertake to fulfill them. The facilitative question here is: how shall the group acquire its objectives and its program?

Meaning Dimension: This is the cognitive aspect of facilitation. It has to do with participants' understanding of what is going on, with their making sense of experience, and with their reason for doing things and reacting to things. The facilitative question is: how shall meaning be given to and

HERON FACILITATION MODEL				
Dimensions of Facilitation	Autonomy	Co-Operative	Hierarchical	Power Modes
Planning				
Meaning				
Confronting				
Feeling				
Structuring				
Valuing				

found in the experiences and actions of group members?

Confronting Dimension: This is the challenge aspect of facilitation. It has to do with raising consciousness about the group's resistance to, and avoidance of, things it needs to face and deal with. The facilitative question is: how shall the group's consciousness be raised about these matters?

Feeling Dimension: This is the sensitive aspect of facilitation. It has to do with the management of feeling and emotion within the group. The facilitative question is: how shall the feelings and emotions within the group be handled?

Structuring Dimension: This is the formal aspect of facilitation. It has to do with methods to be used, with what sort of form is given to work within the group, with how is it to be shaped. The facilitative question is: how can the group's work be structured?

Valuing Dimension. This is the integrity aspect of facilitation. It has to do with creating a supportive climate which honors

Please note: The Heron's Facilitation Model was written with a focus on instruction-based facilitation not group facilitation. We have adapted some parts of this model to speak specifically to facilitation of groups in a business setting,, not the classroom.

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and celebrates the individuality of group members; a climate in which they can be genuine, empowered, disclosing their reality as it is, keeping in touch with their true needs and interests. The facilitative question is: how can such a climate of personal value, integrity and respect be created?

Power Modes

Hierarchical: The facilitator works with the manager to share absolute control of the group and its work. The facilitator controls the process while the manager makes group decisions. Hierarchically managed teams have a clear [explicit], or unstated [implicit] command and control system; there is commonly one right way of doing things, usually the manager's.

Co-operative: the facilitator and participants work together to achieve the aims of the group. In co-operative mode the manager is part of the team and they make decisions together. Essentially they meet to make decisions as peers, everyone has an equal say, and responsibility is shared and owned by all team members.

The first two power modes correspond to Kurt Lewin's leadership styles i.e. autocratic and democratic (1951). The third is substantially different from Lewin's concept of "laissez-faire" leadership which means "do what you like".

Autonomy: The facilitator delegates authority and responsibility (but, does not abdicate responsibility and accountability) to the team to make decisions, and agrees to abide by the decisions the team makes. This mode makes full use of the expertise contained within the team, implies a high level of trust, and demands maturity and responsibility from manager and team.

By openly ensuring that participants know how power is being used, Heron was

encouraging all facilitators to make open, ethical political statements to groups in how power could/would be used in the room.

According to the model, the six Dimensions of Facilitation and the three Power Modes combine to create eighteen possible combinations of facilitation styles. Changing styles can be confusing to both the facilitator and the participants. Yet at times a facilitator needs to adapt their approach to meet the needs of the group or the groups situation.

APPLICATION

The greatest value any facilitator can bring to the group is the capacity to adapt to meet their needs with alternative styles and approaches. When understood and properly applied Heron's model will give the facilitator the knowledge to do that.

RESOURCES



The Complete Facilitator's Handbook; John Heron, March 1999 Kogan Page Publisher ISBN: 074942798 \$63.00 (£31.00)

Group Facilitation: Theories and Models for Practice; John Heron, April 1993, Kogan Page Publisher, ISBN: 0749409703 \$45.00

Teaching and Learning Forum 98 article by Christine Hogan:

<http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf1998/hogan-ch.html>

The Art of Facilitation by Pat Young:

<http://www.lpiper.demon.co.uk/hpvoices/artofaci.htm>

Helping Whole People Learn:

<http://www.human-inquiry.com/WholPeop.htm>