

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FACILITATED MEETING AND A COLLABORATIVE DESIGN SESSION?

DesignShop® facilitation calls for a different type of interaction than what is customarily done by people called "facilitators" or "management consultants." The lead facilitator is a useful lens to use in focusing on just how different collaborative design is from the way things are normally done in a traditional facilitated environment.

### Collaborative From Beginning to End

Traditional facilitators walk in with a preset program which they are going to run participants through. That is not what happens in a DesignShop: the journey changes to accommodate the needs of the participants.

There is no rote formula. A facilitator can't say, "The Wharton DesignShop facilitators used these particular exercises in this specific sequence, so I'll just tweak this a little and use the same for solving our unique challenge." This is a guaranteed waste of time, and possibly even harmful to one's overall intent.

A DesignShop lead facilitator has worked in-depth with the session sponsor to come up with a design which will become the journey for the collaborative design session. Over the weeks prior to the session, the design of this journey has been further discussed, explored, rethought, and reconfigured by the entire facilitation team until it has matured. The entire team has come to have a common vision of the goal of the journey and a sense of the shape that journey will take.

The nature of the design and the vision of the journey rests on several foundations:

- an understanding of the goal the sponsor wants to reach,
- a deep understanding of the sponsor's

organization and their business

- an evaluation of what the participants need to learn in order to be able to reach the goal,
- an understanding of the way people learn and create,
- a large, evolved repertoire of ideas and strategies to give people that learning, and
- a "written in pencil" plan for how to give the participants that learning in this situation.



The DesignShop facilitator is not the star. The ideal facilitator would be invisible to the participants; the environment would be so compelling and the exercises so engaging that the work of the facilitator would never actually be noticed.

### Rules of Engagement

Most traditional rules of facilitation are designed to protect the facilitator. For example, traditional facilitators are not supposed to be engaged, and they aren't supposed to be knowledgeable about content issues. They are just watching the process. This, in effect, is to protect the facilitator from the participants.

In a DesignShop, the facilitator needs to be a model, an exemplar of being cooperative, communicative and creative. Hiding out behind a wall of rules, not engaging in discussion, not contributing ideas, not disclosing feelings and thoughts isn't going to cut it. Rather than being buffered by and sheltered by these facilitation rules, the facilitator is called on to place herself/himself on the line and in the path of direct conflict, if that is what it takes for the objectives to be met, for the company to

succeed.

Traditionally, facilitators learn to split between process and content. They are also taught to believe that they can be "objective"—detached and indifferent to the content, focused purely and cleanly on process. But consciously or subconsciously, any facilitator is going to make process decisions based on content. So unless facilitators understand that they are unavoidably in the content already, they are doing a disservice to the client.

In a design session, everyone is in the game with participants; no one stands on the outside. DesignShop facilitators contribute their own content ideas if they have them, but they don't pretend they are content-neutral.

### **Indivisible Methodology**

People who have done facilitation work before tend to miss the integration of environment, tools, processes and time that make the DesignShop experience work. Sometimes they identify a particular feature, understand its importance, but then assume that this will give them all the magic. They'll say, "Hey, those big work walls are great. I'll get those and then I'll have the whole thing." Although big work walls are a tremendously useful tool, there's a lot more to the DesignShop methodology than just this.

Other observers will notice some aspect of the methodology and think that this is the magic ingredient. "Ah," they'll say, "I'll take my standard exercise and add this detail to it." Or they will think, "Oh, the big deal is that it is interactive, so I'll make my exercise interactive." Or, "Hey, the exercises are written, so I'll make them written." Or, "I get it—stay in Scan a long time." All this is very true, but that's not all.

To a certain extent it is artificial to draw a

distinction between environment and tools or environment and process. Information is embodied in material objects, and that information affects people. It is just a matter of scale. The environment is just the tool that is all around you. The process is the psychological environment. It is seamless, and it changes. But so many of us are bound and determined to try to make the distinction.

DesignShops are complex, creative and collaborative nonlinear encounters designed to produce breakthrough problem-solving for participants on a consistent basis. Trying to tease out a hierarchy of importance between process, tools and environment in a design session is like begging the question, Which would have greater impact on how fast your car moves: the amount of air in your tire, the amount of water in your gas or the amount of pressure on the pedal?

