

## Issues that influence co-facilitation & co-facilitation challenges

### Audience

How many participants are there? Is the group so large that participants may feel a responsibility to support the facilitator and consequently fail to challenge if they consider the facilitator is overwhelmed by the size of the group?

Is the group so small that two facilitators could inhibit learners' willingness to take risks? What are the gender, race and status of the facilitator? For example, a single, male facilitator delivering a course on sexual abuse to a predominately female group may result in the participants feeling awkward and embarrassed, which could act as a block to learning.

### Course content

What is it? Does it include a diverse range of knowledge, values and skills that is most likely to be covered by two facilitators with different areas of experience and expertise?

### Delivery methods

Do the facilitation methods require more than one facilitator – for example, modelling and demonstrations of practice?

### Process issues

Is the focus of the facilitation likely to provoke anxiety or intense reactions among participants, or evoke feelings of anger and anxiety towards the organisation, requiring two facilitators to contain the anxiety?

### Facilitator issues

Does the facilitator feel anxious or vulnerable, because of their own past experiences, or because of the facilitation content, and consequently likely to impede/block learning? Does the facilitator feel vulnerable and anxious that they do not have sufficient depth of knowledge and skills to manage the learning group?

### Individual needs of participants

Are participants likely to feel anxious about the learning experience - for example, new social workers who may not have much formal training? Are there individual learners who have specific needs – for example, they have a physical disability or previous traumatic experience, which requires some individual attention from the facilitator?

## Co-facilitation challenges

Tony Morrison encourages facilitators to have a commitment to fully exploring and discussing the benefits, and identifying any pitfalls of co-facilitation and ensuring there are strategies in place for them. He points to four key areas which need to be acknowledged and worked out in detail to avoid major pitfalls – they are:

- 1. Differences in status and power**
- 2. Conflicting approaches to training**
- 3. Different understanding of co-training**
- 4. Dysfunctional facilitator behaviour**

Morrison (1999:224), cautions that participants “take notice of the way in which facilitators work together and will be aware of any lack of trust, openness and support for each other. This can result in the facilitators modelling poor approaches to learning, as they are not demonstrating the trust required for facilitating learning. For example, if one facilitator continually contradicts the other facilitator, and does this using put downs, the message to the learners is that it is not safe to take risks and make mistakes”.

An effective co-facilitation partnership is dependent upon facilitators being prepared to work on the co-facilitation relationship in an honest and open way. In order for the co-facilitation to be effective, there must be clear protocols between workers as to the specific roles each will undertake throughout the delivery of the course, e.g. if one facilitator has the “expert knowledge” then the other facilitator should facilitate the session allowing their colleague to work with the content and not so much the process.

Co-facilitation also refers to both facilitators being engaged and involved together in each of the sessions.

Facilitators need to identify ways in which they can work together, both in the planning and delivery of facilitation to ensure that ‘best practice’ occurs, participants receive facilitation in an optimum environment, and learning outcomes are successfully met.

References:

*Sheal, P.R. (1997) How to Develop and Present Staff Training Courses, 3rd edn, London: Kogan Page.*

*Morrison, T., Horwath J (1999) Effective Staff Training in Social Care, from theory to practice. Routledge: London.*

*Appleton, C. (2001) Learning and Development Facilitation paper presented at L&D Conference, Auckland New Zealand*

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