

## **What are the differences and similarities between facilitation and animation or even coaching within the context of the construction industry?**

### **Authors:**

[L'Observatoire québécois de la recherche sur la collaboration](#) (OQRC) proposes this short paper to reflect on the various mechanisms necessary to a good collaboration within enlarged project teams: facilitation, animation and coaching. Please write to us if you have any comments or questions: [coulombe.caroline@uqam.ca](mailto:coulombe.caroline@uqam.ca)

1. **Julie Monette**, PhD candidate, Sciences technologie et société, UQAM
2. **Caroline Coulombe**, Professor, École des sciences de la gestion, UQAM
3. **Daniel Drouin**, [IPDA](#) president and consultant [Drouin Consultants](#)

### **Introduction**

This short article presents facilitation, animation, and coaching as different components of practice facilitation serving distinct purposes and different roles as practice strategies. Facilitation in the construction industry involves guiding and managing group interactions to achieve specific goals or outcomes related to project planning, decision-making, problem-solving, or even collaboration.

Collaboration in the context of the construction industry occurs in various type of realization modes from traditional waterfall projects which includes IDP (integrated design project) practices to alternative modes such as collaborative PDB (progressive design-built mode) and especially, in a very integrated manner, within Integrated Project Delivery processes. Collaborative practices such as facilitation can be viewed as a multicomponent implementation strategy used to improve the capacity of IPD practices<sup>1</sup>. Facilitation practices in the construction industry often involve the contribution of an external facilitator: a person contracted in a similar way as consultants, who works outside of the organization to conduct the facilitation.

Research members of the OQRC and D. Drouin had the chance to navigate projects that solicited one technique or another, some were even combining technics. As both practioners and researchers do not totally agree on definitions and optimization of these practices, we offer in this paper an overview of each technic as the literature covers it, and as practice, as we encountered it, to present our own integrated model as a piece of reflection.

In the coming section, you will find the differences and the integrative zones between facilitation, animation and coaching that external facilitators and organizations need to consider and clarify in the context of the construction industry IPD processes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Walunas et al., 2021, p. 1

## **Section 1- The three components of an integrated model of intervention within collaborative realization modes**

---

### **Facilitation**

This section views facilitation as the overview of an entire process as opposed to individual events, more related to the animation component of facilitation. From this point of view, facilitation consists in the preparedness to customize the process for each task; and « taking the time to consider the contextual influences of not only the specific organization but also across the variety of industry groups. »<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative research results agree that effective facilitation preparedness process is associated with thoroughness, being clear about the outcomes, ensuring that people who attend the briefing have decision-making authority. Adequacy of time for the task and choosing the appropriate timing of the event are also important. Trust being one of the important dimensions of collaboration<sup>3</sup>, effective facilitation is also correlated with people trusting the worth of facilitation as well as the people directly involved. It is also said beneficial when the project manager and the facilitator have an existing positive relationship.

---

### **Animation**

Typically, when speaking about facilitation, one thinks of the animation component first, indicating that it is in the forefront of the thinking on facilitation. Animation is the facilitation component related to the event, or series of events like strategic planning retreat, community workshops, thematic resolution meetings. As per research results, there are 3 key elements within that animation component of facilitation: the facilitator, the group processes and the participants.

Organizations and project managers often see the facilitator as highly significant for a successful animation. Also discussed in research is the need for the facilitator to use the language of the organization, a use a language style that suits the group. Although feelings of alienation may occur when facilitators use « corporate speak » like acronyms.

Facilitators have influence on the animation processes. Research says that facilitators need to influence group processes encompassing the « application of suitable techniques and the handling of group dynamics ». This implies the need for facilitators to manage the over-reliance of excessive use of Standard Processes, « resulting in inflexibility and lack of customization, often attributed to insufficient personal communication and planning, potentially leading to dissatisfaction with the facilitator's fee-to-service value. Statistics<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Wardale, 2008, p. 56

<sup>3</sup> Coulombe et al., 2022-2023.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey et Coulombe, 2022.

demonstrate that is much more complex than a simple cause to effect analysis. Animation technics and success do not depend only on a few participants but also on the format chosen (completely at distance, comodal, face to face), the clarity of the aim shared by all members, the collaborative tools mobilized to reach sub-objectives, etc.

Facilitators often perceive participants as the most important factor of an effective animation. Therefore, great significance is given to participant numbers and appropriateness, their willingness to participate and readiness to contribute to the conversation. In that context facilitators are required to demonstrate flexibility with the processes used, and sometimes go beyond the limits of process facilitation to that of coach.

---

## Coaching

The last differentiating component of facilitation is the coaching component. Recent research says coaching in the facilitation role “increases team responsibility for providing content and managing the process”<sup>5</sup>

As seen below, organizational coaching is often distinguished from facilitation according to 5 components: focus of work; relationship; emotions; process; and roles.

Development practice	Coaching	Consulting	Training	Facilitation
Focus of work	Development towards a desired future	Identifying and solving problems	Learning new generic skills	To ease a process of joint decision making or learning
Relationship	Equal partnership, co-creation of answers	Problem based expert-client relation	Expert helping and teaching the less experienced	Facilitator an impartial process-expert supporting the client creating answers
Emotions	Considered natural, subject of normalization	Mostly disregarded, if not informational	Integrated to support and challenge	Relieved for less uncertainty, nurtured for shared understanding
Process	Identifying and turning challenges into victories	Diagnosing problems and providing solutions based on data and information	Addressing clients' needs in acquiring new skills, starting from their current level, measuring progress	Designing and suggesting process and interventions based on the goals and needs of the client
Roles	Coach standing by and supporting clients in their own thinking and process  Clients accountable for their own change	Consultant gathers and analyses information, and advices the client  Client provides information, accountable for realizing solutions	Trainer provides knowledge and shares meaning, guides learning  Client accountable for the effort of learning	Facilitator remains neutral in terms of the subject, leading the process and helping in integrating perspectives and moving forward  Client accountable for the subject and related decisions

Table 1: Coaching compared to other practices of organizational development<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Walunas et al., 2021

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Bianco-Mathis & al. 2008, Chapter 1 in Hyypiä, 2022.

In coaching, the relationship is characterized by equality, promoting the client's development, while in facilitation, the expert consultant advises the client based on their expertise. Facilitation involves the facilitator helping the client navigate unresolved issues or disagreements to reach mutual decisions, with the client being the expert on the subject matter. Coaching and facilitation focus on empowering clients to find their own answers and make decisions, while the responsibility of the coach or facilitator lies in creating and supporting an appropriate process for the client's needs. Coaching aims at supporting development towards a desired future, while facilitation focuses on reaching conclusions and making decisions for specific questions, often related to that future<sup>7</sup>.

However, facilitators should evaluate the desirability of the coaching service, stressing the facilitator to understand and define the coaching role and goals of a specific coaching process in relation to the organization's strategic context and current situation. In reaching the organization's support and alignment, facilitators can look at the different four distinct roles for executive coaching<sup>8</sup> in boosting:

- 1) knowledge and skills
- 2) performance
- 3) professional development
- 4) broader coach's strategic agenda

---

## Section 2 – Integrated model of the components

Facilitation, animation and coaching play distinct roles in the construction industry, sometimes by the same individual or sometimes by different members of the project. We propose an integrated model of the 3 different components discussed above:

- 1) *Facilitation process preparedness* guide group interactions to achieve project goals,
- 2) *Animation* dynamizes group participation through visual or interactive materials to enhance communication, and;
- 3) Coaching provides guidance and support to individuals or teams to improve performance and achieve professional growth.

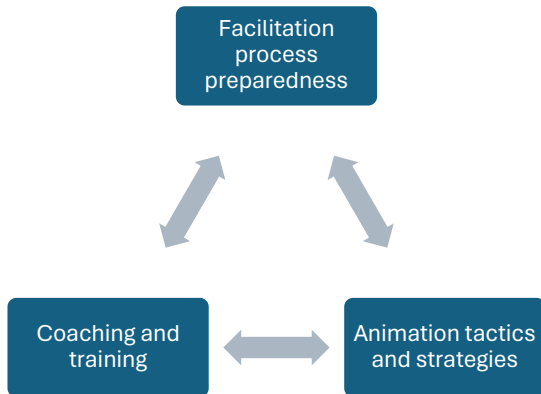
Each of these roles requires specific skills, expertise, and approaches to contribute effectively to construction projects. A generic model of competences for these distinct roles has been developed by Coulombe et Tremblay (2024) and is available [on request](#). For the purpose of this short paper, we expose our integrated model of facilitation components.

---

<sup>7</sup> Hyypiä, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Witherspoon and White, 1996.

Figure 1. Monette, Coulombe and Drouin's *integrated model of facilitation components in context of IPD construction projects* (2024)



Effective facilitation needs to have an ability to move flexibly between various components such as facilitation process planning and preparedness, group dynamic animation tactics and strategies, and mentoring the group with coaching, all the while « demonstrating a level of impartiality regarding the outcomes. » (Wardale, p. 55)

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article elucidates the component dynamics of facilitation, animation, and coaching within the context of the construction industry, particularly within Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) processes. By delineating the distinct roles and functions of each component, this article underscores the importance of an integrated approach to practice facilitation. It emphasizes the significance of facilitators possessing the ability to fluidly transition between various roles, including process planning, group animation, and mentoring, while maintaining impartiality towards outcomes. The integrated model proposed herein serves as a valuable framework for practitioners and researchers alike, offering insights into optimizing collaborative practices and enhancing project performance within the construction sector. As the industry continues to evolve, understanding and refining these components will be pivotal in fostering effective collaboration and achieving project success.