

Effective Risk Facilitation: Understanding Styles

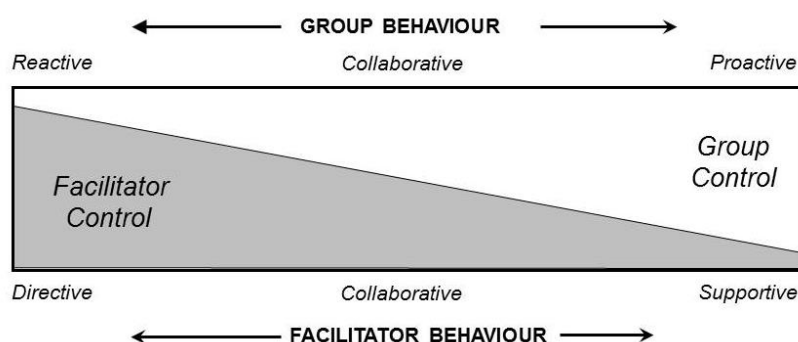
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When a facilitator is leading a group in a facilitated workshop or meeting, he or she can adopt a range of facilitation styles. These vary by the amount of control exercised by the facilitator compared with the degree of control allowed for the group. On one extreme, the facilitator has almost complete control over what happens in the workshop or meeting. By contrast, at the other extreme the group has near-total control of proceedings. Between these extremes lie various shared positions in which the balance of control differs between facilitator and group.

Although the range of possible facilitation styles is continuous, we can distinguish three zones:

- **Directive/Reactive.** The facilitator takes the lead to direct the workshop, while the group follows the facilitator reactively. In Directive mode, the facilitator is in charge, leading from the front, telling people what to do.
- **Collaborative.** Facilitator and group work together to achieve the best outcomes from the workshop or meeting. In this mode they act as partners, with the facilitator standing alongside others and acting as a member of the group.
- **Supportive/Proactive.** The group takes the lead proactively, setting the agenda and driving the workshop, with the facilitator in a supportive role. Here the facilitator is more like a helpful friend, standing behind the group, advising and helping them when necessary.



The risk facilitator can use a range of different styles, but when is each style appropriate in a facilitated risk workshop?

The Directive style is appropriate at the beginning and end of a risk workshop, when the facilitator needs to give the workshop a clear start (clarifying objectives, defining the agenda and setting ground rules), and when the workshop is closed out (dealing with outstanding issues and questions, summarising outcomes and clarifying next steps). Both of these stages work best when the facilitator takes charge to provide the necessary input and guidance to workshop participants.

Alternative facilitation styles can be used in the mid-part of the risk workshop, when risks are being identified and assessed, and when risk responses are developed. The choice of style depends on the maturity and experience of the group. With a more mature group the facilitator can adopt a more Collaborative or Supportive style, allowing the group to take more responsibility for the workshop. However if individuals in the group are less experienced, the facilitator may need to stay in Directive mode, to keep the workshop on track.

The role of risk facilitator is a key contributor to the success (or otherwise) of the risk process, particularly in determining whether the risk workshop achieves its objectives. By choosing the right facilitation style, risk facilitators will ensure that each workshop meets its goals effectively, so that risk can be managed properly.

To provide feedback on this Briefing Note, or for more details on how to develop effective risk management, [contact the Risk Doctor \(info@risk-doctor.com\)](mailto:info@risk-doctor.com), or [visit the Risk Doctor website \(www.risk-doctor.com\)](http://www.risk-doctor.com).

About the Author



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Dr David Hillson CMgr FRSA FIRM FCMI HonFAPM PMI-Fellow is The Risk Doctor (www.risk-doctor.com). As an international risk consultant, David is recognised as a leading thinker and expert practitioner in risk management. He consults, writes and speaks widely on the topic and he has made several innovative contributions to the field. David's motto is "Understand profoundly so you can explain simply", ensuring that his work represents both sound thinking and practical application.

David Hillson has over 25 years' experience in risk consulting and he has worked in more than 40 countries, providing support to clients in every major industry sector, including construction, mining, telecommunications, pharmaceutical, financial services, transport, fast-moving consumer goods, energy, IT, defence and government. David's input includes strategic direction to organisations facing major risk challenges, as well as tactical advice on achieving value and competitive advantage from effectively managing risk.

David's contributions to the risk discipline over many years have been recognised by a range of awards, including "Risk Personality of the Year" in 2010-11. He received both the PMI Fellow award and the PMI Distinguished Contribution Award from the Project Management Institute (PMI®) for his work in developing risk management. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the UK Association for Project Management (APM), where he has actively led risk developments for nearly 20 years. David Hillson is an active Fellow of the Institute of Risk Management (IRM), and he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) to contribute to its Risk Commission. He is also a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and a Member of the Institute of Directors (IOD).

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