

CPS Facilitation Manual:

An Executive Summary of DiNunzio's 2001 Master's Project
by
Janie E. MacDonald, International Center for Studies in Creativity

Introduction

Creativity and order are often perceived as diametrically opposing forces -- mutually exclusive of one another. Common sense may dictate that placing too much order, too many constraints or requirements upon the creativity process, may impede creativity itself. A distinction needs to be maintained between the content, that which is accomplished and the process of creativity. The content may appear spontaneously creative, yet the process may need to be carefully planned. As with any other endeavor, good order – the organization of resources and the process can enhance the experience for all involved participants. Beyond the isolated, individualistic creative experience, “[e]mployers are encouraging employees to share their ideas and opinions. All over the world, teams are formed within companies to explore challenges, generate ideas, and prepare for action. Therefore, there is an increasing need for effective facilitators to lead these teams” (DiNunzio, 2001, p. 1).

DiNunzio Master's project recognizes the importance for effective facilitators of Creative Problem Solving (CPS) and investigates the perceived needs of students at the State University of New York College at Buffalo (Buffalo State College) who were undergoing formal training as CPS facilitators. Based upon a needs analysis, DiNunzio created a manual to further enhance the learning of future students enrolled in the facilitation training course.

Pertinent Background / Content

DiNunzio's project specifically focuses on facilitators of Creative Problem Solving (CPS). “Currently at the Center for Studies in Creativity [recently renamed the International Center for Studies in Creativity] there is a course offered that focuses on training facilitators for Creative Problem Solving” (DeNunzio, 2001, p. 1). Within this course, there exists a “need for an all-inclusive document to support the development of process management” (p. 7). Thus the stated goal of this Project was “to create a manual [comprehensive and user-

friendly] that [will] help strengthen both the program and the students' abilities to facilitate” (p. 8).

Nature of a Facilitator

“A facilitator is a person that intervenes to help a group increase its effectiveness” (Schwarz, 1994, as cited in

DiNunzio, p. 1). However, it needs to be clarified that “[w]hen working with a group, the facilitator has no decision making authority and is focused primarily on

improving the way the group identifies and solves problems, therefore increasing their effectiveness” (p. 1).

Furthermore, a “facilitator is the process expert and has the unique responsibility of trying to balance the process [procedures used to attempt to solve a problem] and content [what gets accomplished] of a session.... It is through this balance that a facilitator is effective” (DiNunzio, pp. 1 - 2).

According to Walgren (1998), among the distinguishing characteristics of good CPS facilitators are:

Flexible and creative use of the process
Ability and skill to lead a CPS session successfully
Confidence in the process and tools and the ability to use them
Involving the right people the right way
Listening to the client and resource members
Intrapersonal and group dynamic skills
Talented use of many tools, both diverging and converging
Anecdotes that relate to use of the process
Trusted to maintain confidentiality and act ethically
Objective resource
Respected resource and credibility

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Equally as important as defining *what a facilitator is* is stipulating what a facilitator is not. A facilitator should not be perceived as a:

facilitation and the ability to stimulate creative thought is vital for companies to experience success in the future” (pp. 3 - 4).

- *Flip-chart Secretary* who simply records information from the meeting and displays it on flip-charts;
- *Scapegoat for the Group* who is blamed if the decisions made by the group are ineffective and do not succeed

(Vehar, Firestein, & Miller, 1996, as cited in DiNunzio, pp. 2 - 3).

“The facilitator is there to manage the [CPS] process only” (DiNunzio, p. 3).

Necessary Facilitation Skills

The [International] Center for Studies in Creativity at the State University of New York College in Buffalo (Buffalo State College) offers a course *Facilitating Group Problem Solving*. Early in the semester, each student completes a self-evaluation form: *Facilitating Creative Problem Solving in Small Groups* (see DiNunzio, Appendix) to determine his/her baseline level of competencies on six skill areas considered necessary for effective facilitation:

1. CPS Knowledge;
2. Communication;
3. Logistics;
4. Group Dynamics;
5. Meeting Environment; and
6. Process Management.

“The combination of [these] six skill areas deemed necessary for effective CPS DiNunzio offered the analogy of facilitation as a “six-piece puzzle” (p. 4). The puzzle is incomplete if the facilitator needs

development in any of the six areas. The self-evaluation highlighted areas where students felt they lacked support for managing the process, even though they had received training in CPS prior to taking the CRS 610 class.

Review of available resources

DiNunzio, through her analysis of the publications currently utilized to support the CRS 610 course, further recognized an impoverishment in training resources specifically designed to bridge the gap between the theory of facilitating to the application of the facilitation of Creative Problem Solving.

Methods

In the Summer of 2000, students in CRS 610: *Facilitation of Group Problem Solving* completed a Card Sort on the six skill areas of an effective facilitator. Students were familiar with the skill areas because they had already received training in facilitation and had taken a self-evaluation of perceived / felt competency in those areas.

The “Card Sort” convergent prioritizing technique required the students to rank the skill areas one through six (one representing the skill they felt that they needed the most support with, through six representing the skill they felt the most comfortable with.) The data indicated the following ranking of development needs:

1. Process Management;

2. CPS Knowledge;
3. Group Dynamics;
4. Logistics;
5. Communication; and
6. Meeting Environment.

(pp. 5 - 6)

The students felt they had the greatest need for support in the skill area of Process Management. In Process Management a “facilitator focuses primarily on guiding the process, rather than engaging in the content issues. However, the facilitator must understand enough about the content to effectively manage the process. The facilitator must also make smooth transitions between tools/stages and clearly articulate the responsibilities associated with a CPS session” (Puccio, as cited in DiNunzio, p. 5).

According to Treffinger, “[t]here is a difference between knowing about Creative Problem Solving and knowing how to use it effectively with groups” (cited in DiNunzio, p. 6).

Through subsequent interviews of class members as well as personal reflection and review of the dynamics of the Process Management skill, DiNunzio determined that two areas required further consideration to strengthen the students’ knowledge of Process Management: Advice from Facilitators and Warm Up activities.

DiNunzio contacted and interviewed three (3) alumni of the Creative Studies Graduate program who were reportedly working in the area of facilitation: Gretchen Bingham,

Marie Mance, and Jonathan Vehar. Telephone interviews lasted from 45 - 90 minutes.

The survey questions designed to elicit the most effective information from the professional facilitators were:

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| 1. What is the most important thing you've learned about facilitating? |
| 2. What challenges/obstacles do you find that you repeatedly encounter as a facilitator and what do you do to overcome them? |
| 3. What advice could you offer to a facilitator going into task appraisal? |
| 4. How do you manage to gather enough information about the specific content of the session without affecting the CPS process? |
| 5. What suggestions can you make to a new facilitator to improve the quality of a CPS session? |
| 6. What tricks of the trade would you share with a new facilitator? |

(p. 11)

The area of Warm Up activities, was left to the discretion of DiNunzio based on her experiences and frustrations as a student within the CRS 610 class. Using her own needs as a starting point, she investigated (through casual conversations with other CRS students in project seminar class) and determined that others were frustrated by the "lack of appropriate resources for Creative Problem Solving activities" (p. 13).

The qualitative data based on the interviews of the three professional facilitators was compiled into six categories based upon the main idea of each interview question, including the categories: General Recommendations; Challenges / Obstacles Facilitators Repeatedly Encounter and What They Do to Overcome Them; Advice About Going Into a Task Appraisal; Managing to Gather Enough Information About the Content Without Affecting the CPS Process; Suggestions for New Facilitators to Improve The Quality of A CPS Session; and Tricks of the Trade (p. 12).

Outcomes

A major outcome of this study was the development of a *Guidebook for Improving Facilitation Techniques* geared toward students enrolled in the Center for Studies in Creativity, particularly to support the facilitation training in the CRS 610: *Facilitation of Group Problem Solving* course.

In addition, the manual contains:

1. Advice From Facilitators

Each advice category has its own page to enhance the reader-friendliness of the manual; other formatting considerations include: use of graphics, font decisions, physical length of sections... (p. 13). Also included are biographical sketches of each of the interviewed CPS professional facilitators.

2. Warm Up Activities

Based on informal conversations with fellow CRS students and personal experiences, three different types of activities were

investigated: Ice Breakers, Creativity Stimulators, and Multipurpose Activities (p. 13 - 14). DiNunzio chose activities for the manual that were user-friendly and appropriate for the CPS process.

Activities that were selected for inclusion in the manual were annotated and provided with the appropriate APA-style source reference so users of the manual could easily obtain more information / ideas by referring to the original sources.

Furthermore, suggestions were offered regarding how each activity could be directly applied to CPS.

To enhance the utility of the manual, case studies were incorporated into the *Guidebook*. These case studies, developed by Cory Wright, allow facilitators to practice and explore the CPS process at different stages.

Key Learnings

Finally, DiNunzio offered her own personal learnings about the process of completing the project, including:

DDiNunzio's References

Feldhusen, J. F., & Treffinger, D. J. (1977). *Teaching creative thinking and problem solving*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Isaksen, S. G., Dorval, K. B., & Treffinger, D. J. (1994). *Creative approaches to problem solving*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

1. “Creative thinking skills can be taught and everyone has the ability to be creative to their own degree.... [t]hese skills can develop over time with practice. There is a need for leaders who can release the creative potential in others....” (p. 17).

2. Creativity in education connection: Educators can be those leaders who can release the creative potential in others. Teachers promoting creativity need to “model creative qualities (i.e. deferring judgment, divergent thinking, constructive criticism), model the process of creative problem solving, conduct demonstrations that focus on the characteristics of products, and [establish] an environment that allows for success, failures, risks, and a try again attitude” (18).

3. DiNunzio identified the major challenge to the completion of the manual as the lack of literature with quality games and activities for facilitators to utilize. Thus, she threw down the gauntlet to present and future CPS professionals to pick up the challenge to bridge the gaps between learning about facilitation and practicing facilitating effectively with the proper tools.

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