

Facilitation Skills Inventory (FSI)

Frequently Asked Questions

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Introduction

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO be part of an organization today and not take part in meetings: staff meetings, planning sessions, conference calls, focus groups, community forums, annual retreats—the list is endless!

With all of these meetings and the growing emphasis placed on building consensus, more and more professionals in a wide range of fields are becoming aware of the need to develop their facilitation skills.

The *Facilitation Skills Inventory (FSI)* has been created to provide a structured feedback mechanism for individuals seeking to become capable facilitators. It also provides a mechanism for organizations wishing to train and certify their internal facilitators.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the *FSI* designed to achieve?

The *Facilitation Skills Inventory* provides a structured feedback mechanism that can be used to guide facilitator development. The *FSI* can also be used as a vehicle for certification by organizations wishing to recognize the facilitation capabilities of their people.

What specific skills or knowledge does the instrument cover?

The *FSI* describes twenty skills that are essential to the effective practice of facilitation. These twenty skills are organized into four categories: core skills, personal deportment, group management, and process management.

What types of questions are in the instrument?

The *FSI* is an observation-based instrument. The twenty skills are described in detail so that they can be easily observed and rated by a skilled facilitator.

How is the assessment scored?

Observers make detailed notes while watching the facilitator in action. They then score the facilitator on a scale of 1 to 5 in each of the twenty elements of performance.

The scores are transferred onto a scoring sheet that provides a profile of the facilitator's performance in each of the four skill categories, plus an overall score.

What is the assessment designed to measure?

The *FSI* is designed to assess the extent to which facilitators exhibit the twenty skills described in the instrument. The scoring process identifies whether a facilitator is operating at the Developing, Accomplished, or Advanced level.

How are the results presented, and what do they reveal?

After the observed session, detailed feedback is provided to the facilitator in a private session. The facilitator can ask questions and receive helpful suggestions for improvement. The facilitator is also given a copy of the observation notes so that he or she can use that information to create a personal development plan.

The notes reveal the areas in which the facilitator performed well, in addition to those areas that would benefit from further development.

If the organization plans to provide certificates of achievement to facilitators, the scored results are provided to the person administering the instrument.

What individual components does the program include?

The *Facilitation Skills Inventory* package consists of three components: (1) an Administrator's Guide, which describes the *FSI* and how it was developed and provides all of the information necessary to administer the *FSI*; (2) a Participant Guide, which includes a copy of the *FSI* and which is used by the facilitator to assess his or her skill level and to develop a plan for improving his or her skills; and (3) an Observer Guide, which is used by those who will observe the facilitator during an actual session or meeting and then provide feedback.

What components do I need to purchase to start?

To use the *FSI*, each organization must purchase one copy of the Administrator's Guide, plus one copy of the Participant Guide for each person who wishes to be assessed, plus one copy of the Observer Guide for each observer.

Who is the *Facilitation Skills Inventory* designed for?

The *FSI* has been designed to assist anyone who wishes to improve his or her facilitation capabilities. This is a very broad group that includes

leaders of process improvement teams, project managers, leaders of new product start-ups, consultants managing complex contracts, teachers who work in a team-teaching environment, and community leaders who conduct public meetings. It also includes front-line supervisors who have been recast as team leaders and managers shifting to a more facilitative leadership style.

How long does the program take to complete?

Participants should expect to spend from thirty to sixty minutes reading the *FSI* descriptor and completing a self-assessment. The reflection questions in the Participant Guide take an additional thirty minutes to complete.

It is recommended that the observed session be ninety minutes in length. At the conclusion of that session, the facilitator can expect to take part in a feedback session of about an hour's duration.

How much preparation time is involved?

The program administrator will have to coordinate the efforts of the facilitator and the observers. The facilitator will need to select appropriate observers. The observers will have to thoroughly review the Observer Guide to familiarize themselves with the contents and process.

What's unique or different about this instrument?

While a number of facilitator competency assessments currently do exist, no single instrument is currently well known or widely used. Also, most of the currently available instruments appear to have been developed without the degree of testing and validation needed.

The *FSI* identifies a clear standard of performance that can be used to anchor training activities and to guide hiring decisions. No other facilitation skills instrument is as well positioned to become ubiquitous in the field.

How has the assessment been verified and tested?

The *FSI* is based on content analysis of facilitator skills in task group processes. Nine expert facilitators contributed to the first draft. A panel of four facilitators refined the inventory, and a final panel of three subject-matter

experts indicated their concurrence on the skill and weights associated with facilitation. A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the *FSI*. While the sample was relatively small due to the difficulty of identifying organizations willing to release the data, the outcome showed that the *FSI*, when used by skills observers, to be a reliable inventory capable of identifying a facilitator's performance level.

About the Author

INGRID BENS IS a consultant and trainer whose special areas of expertise are facilitation skills, team building, and conflict management. She has a master's degree in adult education and more than twenty-five years of experience as a workshop leader and organization development consultant.

Through her popular facilitation skills workshops, Ms. Bens has trained tens of thousands of facilitators throughout the United States and Canada. She is also the author of three Jossey-Bass publications: *Advanced Facilitation Strategies*, *Facilitating to Lead*, and the best-selling *Facilitating with Ease!*

She is the principal partner of Participative Dynamics, a consulting firm located in Sarasota, Florida, and the founder of Facilitation Tutor, which provides facilitation skills e-learning on the Internet.

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