

Roles and Responsibilities

Chairperson: runs the meeting according to defined rules, but also offers opinions and engages in the discussion if s/he chooses. Most often, the chairperson of any meeting is the official leader, who plays an active role as both decision-maker and opinion leader. Since chairs are not neutral, their major drawback is that they tend to influence decisions and concentrate power. It's not uncommon for a strong chairperson to make final decisions on important items.

Vice-Chairperson: serves in the absence of the Chairperson.

Facilitator: designs the methodology for the meeting, manages participation, offers useful tools, helps the group determine its needs, keeps things on track, and periodically checks on how things are going. A facilitator doesn't influence what is being discussed, but instead focuses on how issues are discussed. A facilitator is a procedural expert who is there to help and support the group's effectiveness. Because facilitators are neutral, they empower members. They rely on consensus and collaboration to reach important decisions. This results in decisions for which the whole group feels it has ownership.

Minute taker: takes brief, accurate notes of what's discussed and the decisions made. Also responsible for incorporating any notes on flip charts. Most often, minute-taking responsibilities are rotated among regular members of a work group. However, for special meetings or if resources allow, this role can be assigned to a neutral outsider.

Timekeeper: a rotating role in which someone keeps track of the time and reminds the group about milestones periodically. Not a license to be autocratic or shut down important discussions if they're running over. The use of an automatic timer will allow the timekeeper to participate in the discussion.

Scribe: a group member who volunteers to help the facilitator by recording group comments on a flip chart. Some facilitators are more comfortable asking others to make notes on a flip chart while they facilitate. This has the benefit of freeing the facilitator from the distraction of writing. Since having a scribe takes an additional person out of the discussion, it is an impractical strategy for small groups. It is a standard practice for facilitators to make their own notes. If a scribe is used, clarifying questions should always be channeled through the facilitator, instead of the scribe interacting directly with the members.

Note:

A very common role arrangement is to have a meeting leader who uses a chairperson approach to start the meeting and review the agenda, take care of the housekeeping and information-sharing portions of the session and then switch to facilitation in order to obtain input on specific topics.

Information quoted from: Ingrid Bens, *Facilitating with Ease! Core Skills for Facilitators, Team Leaders and Members, Managers, Consultants, and Trainers, 3rd Edition*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 150-151.