



Popcorn PowerPoint

Digging into small group-based extension and the (overlooked) art of facilitation

11 April 2022



Workshop content

The art and science of facilitation

- How to adopt a facilitation mindset
- The tools and techniques required for working with groups
- How to design questions that engage, provoke and liberate
- How to apply facilitation in other settings: meetings

The ways we learn

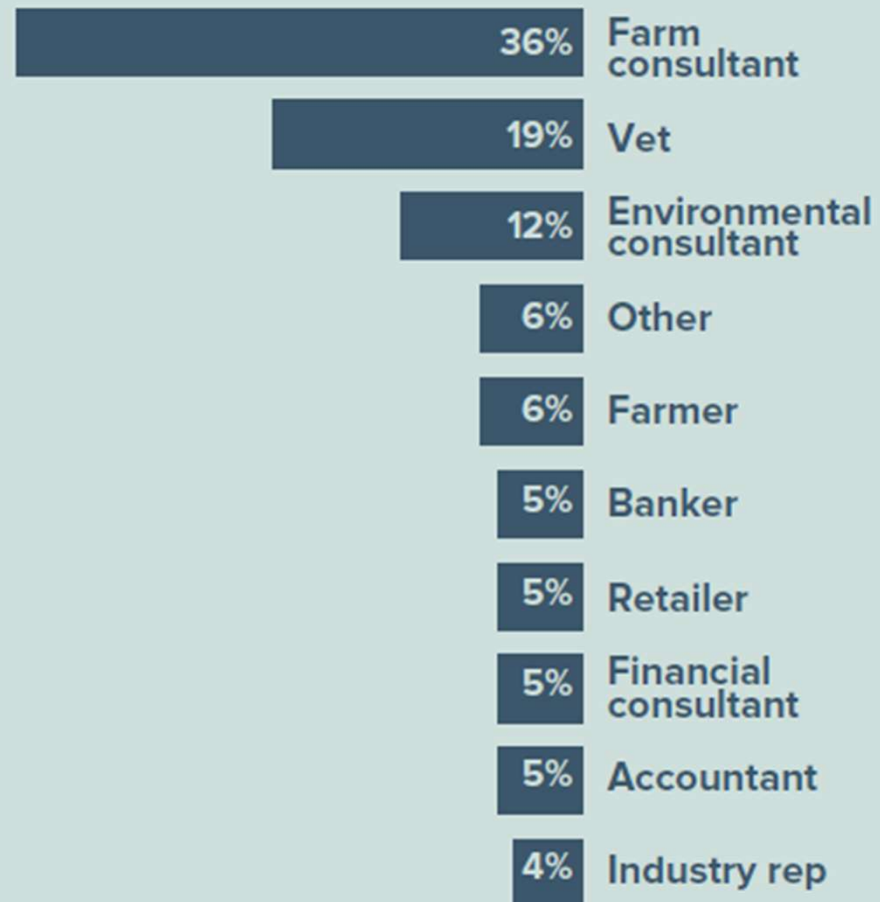
- How to understand and acquire skills
- How the brain learns
- How neuroscience and behavioral psychology
- Strategies to facilitate real learning

Learning design

- Key elements of an effective learning programme
- How to design for maximum learning
- How to use Information and experts
- How to design and outline an event you are going to run

Action Network Fundamentals and Extension Design workshop
 RMPP developed a two day workshop for rural professionals or farmers looking to run an Action Group/s under **RMPP Action Network**. Training included designing and managing an extension programme to increase farmer participation in their own learning and how to apply this to their own business

Types of facilitators



Percentage of group members valuing group support

Action Group
at the start

37%

Action Group
two years in

51%



From UMR interviews Facilitator drawbacks

- A lower rating of the group was often associated with weaker facilitation
 - Facilitators in these cases were perceived to be disorganised and lacked good communication
- Not pulling farmers into line when needed
- Managing the tension between achieving outcomes but not pushing the group too hard, and reading the group

Facilitator is a connector to expertise and brings focus – (Manawatu, male)

The facilitator was a good choice, as she has been in the district a long time, so she is well known, and her credentials have been well proven, so she is not a new kid on the block.

Her skillset and contacts are vital, she has got some awesome contacts that she is able to bring in as experts. She has just got such a wide range of people that she knows, it is fantastic really. She has got a very good practical knowledge being a farmer.

Additionally, she runs at least one other group. [Do you think that is beneficial?] It is good because we got an expert up from AbacusBio and he basically did two days in a row. So he did her other Action Group and then our Action Group on the next day. So it was good to have that. If they have to travel a long way it is good, they can come up and stay the night and do two groups.

Also, she is really good at focusing on a direction. We gave her a couple of ideas and she came up with a date and she said we will go through this, this and this and it was just perfect for what we needed that day.

Also on the Action Group days, she is very good at controlling the group and keeping us on track. Keeping [Name] under control.



Facilitator helped provide accountability and focus – (Southland, male)

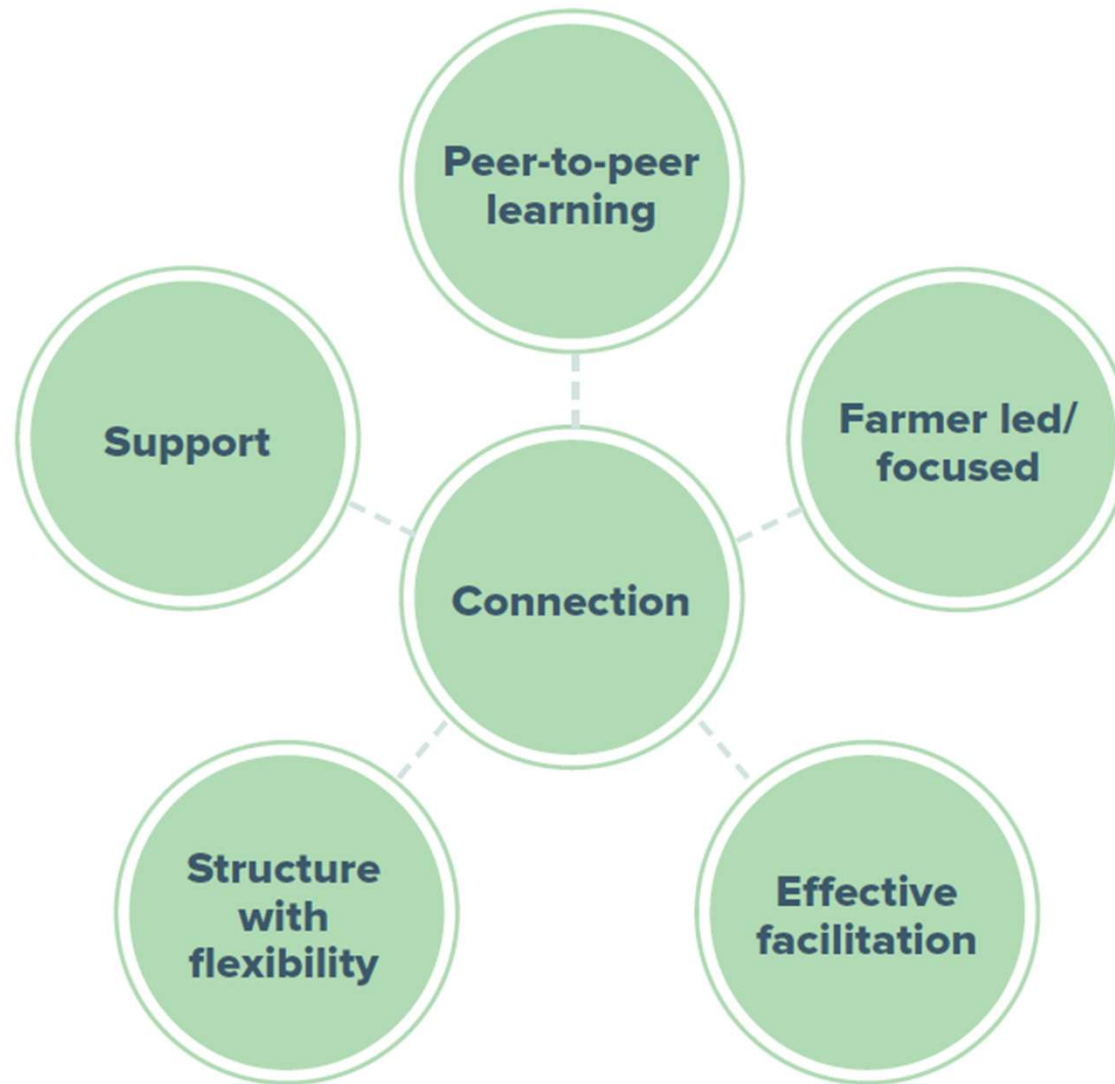
In the past, I have been in a farm discussion group that was started up 40 years ago. There are a few of them around we meet once a month and decide on a topic that is relevant.

However the Action Group, is more detailed, it is focused on one thing. [Is that good?] Yes. It is the simple things like the data that our facilitator has put together it is more accurate, and you get a lot more information out of it. Whereas if you have got a farm discussion group day you look at farming practices and theoretical results, but you don't actually see too many facts. It is all about the cost of dry matter and what you gain, profit per kg of dry matter basically.

At first our facilitator was feeling her way through it as well as we were, it was all fairly new. She probably could have been more decisive at times and told us we were doing this, but she was probably trying to find a balance. [Trying to find a balance would be quite hard.] Especially with farmers, they are all different. Some are more aggressive in their approach to things than others. I am probably more laid back and go with the flow.

What was useful, was all the information she came up with, she put a lot of work into it. [Collating the information?] All the data. There is a lot of work in that. We couldn't have done it without her, if we didn't have someone like that it wouldn't have happened.

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From UMR interviews Great group dynamics

- Well managed groups lead to significant confidence building and sustained change
- This needed:
 - Honesty and transparency
 - Like-minded members (i.e. positive about industry and change)
 - Setting ground rules at the start

Members feel valued and everyone has their say (Northland, female)

***In the past** we never really had a facilitator to organise a day for us. We have been to see top farmers before but that is more like they are mentoring you. Whereas when we are altogether in the Action Group everyone feels quite equal and gets a chance to bring different things to the discussions.*

***Now that we have been together for a while** and we are familiar with each other it is kind of really relaxed and everyone has their say.*

Being in a group of positive like-minded farmers is refreshing. It is nice to be around people who have got the same drive. People that are in these groups want to learn; they want to get better and they are positive about the farming industry really.

The group days are made enjoyable for everyone. Because there is no judgement or anything like that. It is more of a group feeling now than individuals the small group set up allows this to happen I would say. And obviously the facilitator started us off really well with ground rules and things.

“Facilitation training has given me the techniques and methods to build strong relationships and to extract answers from the room, not from me.”

**BYRON TAYLOR,
TAIHAPE ACTION GROUP
FACILITATOR**

