# Facilitation of War Games:

# Roles and Responsibilities at the Naval War College[1]

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War Games conducted by the Naval War College's (NWC) War Gaming Department (WGD) come in all shapes, sizes and methodologies. The majority of events are one-of-a-kind games, designed to meet the objectives of the game sponsor and as a result, even veterans of games in Newport need to be guided through each specific game. Facilitators are assigned to each game to ensure that every player maximizes their participation.

## *Facilitation*

Facilitation focuses on how people participate in the process of learning or planning, not only on what gets achieved during meeting, conference or war game. A facilitator is a guide to help people move through a process together, not acting as a subject matter expert. That means a facilitator isn't there to give opinions, but to draw out opinions and ideas of the group members. The most important rule is that a facilitator is neutral and never takes sides. The "moderator role is to guide the discussion and listen to what's said but not to participate, share views, engage in discussion, or shape the outcome".[2]

Commercial board or video games come with a set of rules, instructions and processes on how to play the game. These games are generally not concerned with the amount of time it takes to become proficient at the game, although a game that is too cumbersome is not likely to be interesting enough to be a commercial success. Games in Newport are usually severely constrained by time due to player availability and budgetary considerations. A game is only as good as the players that participate; therefore a significant amount of effort is expended in

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[1] The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of Defense.

[2] Richard A. Kreuger, *Moderating Focus Groups, Vol 4* (Sage Publications,1998), 5.

identifying, recruiting and assigning subject matter experts to player positions. These experts are drawn from a variety of organizations and are normally limited in the amount of time they can spend in Newport away from their desks. Costs associated with player travel, lodging and meals, no matter what agency is covering those costs, are also an important planning factor and limit the number of days allocated to conduct a game. Facilitators are incorporated into the game design to mitigate those time constraints by expediting the players' ability to assimilate the game rules, instructions and processes.

## *Role in WGD Game Management Process*

Games recently held in Newport have had more than 300 participants and upwards of 8-10 player cells. The scope of an event this size is obviously too great for a single facilitator, therefore, the WGD has developed its own methodology for creating and conducting war games and published the War Gamer's Handbook.[3] A game project management team includes a director, designer, developer, analyst, adjudicator and logistician and is organized and responsible for making all the preparations to bring a game to life.

Michael Williamson states that there are Ten Principles of Facilitation: [4]

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| 1. Preparing for Success | 6. Managing Dysfunction |
| 2. Getting the Session Started | 7. Consensus Building |
| 3. Focusing the Group | 8. Keep Energy High |
| 4. Power of the Pen | 9. Closing the Session |
| 5. Information Gathering | 10. Setting the Agenda |

The game designer will build the game to meet the objectives of the sponsor (principle 10). When a determination of how many player cells will be required is made, the designer will begin recruiting for facilitators, both from within the WGD and from outside the organization if appropriate.

The core facilitator competencies as defined by the International Association of Facilitators include:

A. Create Collaborative Client Relationships
B. Plan Appropriate Group Processes
C. Create and Sustain a Participatory Environment
D. Guide Group to Appropriate and Useful Outcomes
E. Build and Maintain Professional Knowledge
F. Model Positive Professional Attitude [5]

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[3] Shawn Burns, ed., *War Gamers' Handbook: A Guide for Professional War Gamers* (Newport, RI: Defense Automated Printing Service

[4] Michael Williamson, *The Secrets of Facilitation* (Jossey-Bass, 2004)

[5] "Foundational Facilitator Competencies", Version 1.0,www.iaf-world.org, 2003

What should you expect from a facilitator if you are a participant in Newport, or more importantly, what will be expected of you if you are recruited to be a facilitator? The game designer will have drafted a game specific facilitator's guide. This draft contains the game objectives, deliverables, schedule, overview and breakdown of activities and will be the playbook for conducting the game. When assigned to the game, the facilitator receives the draft guide and he or she becomes a member of the development team. The facilitator will work with the designer and developer and continue to update the guide as the game mechanics are refined during development, testing and rehearsal phases (principles 1,2). The specific mechanics for each game can vary greatly in their complexity and will be documented in the facilitator guide. A WGD faculty member will serve as the lead facilitator for those games where there are facilitators from outside the department and be responsible for the facilitator guide.

The responsibilities of a facilitator are the same for every event, to help the participants navigate their way through the game, encourage discussion and the sharing of opinions and knowledge. Williamson refers to principles 3-5 as the Facilitation Cycle, what the facilitator is doing during each game session. Principles 6-8 are techniques the facilitator uses to successfully accomplish the objective for each game session. The WGD conducts staff professional development training discussing these topics in greater depth. The game analyst has provided the designer and developer the research questions and data requirements aligned with the game objectives. What needs to be accomplished to generate that data is standardized across all game cells, but how each facilitator chooses to interact with their cell in order to complete the requirements is dependent on each facilitator's personal style because "each individual brings unique skills and abilities to the moderating experience. Copying the style of another doesn't work if it feels artificial to you".[6]

The facilitator will meet with the game director and analyst after each session to evaluate the event up to that point and determine if there needs to be any modifications to the game. During post game analysis, the facilitator may be asked to assist in the interpretation of player comments.

### *Summary*

The Naval War College War Gaming Department recognizes the importance of facilitation in the widely varying events that they design and conduct. Providing professional development sessions on the subject has increased the effectiveness of each facilitator. Incorporating the facilitator into the development team has improved the overall player experience in each game. These practices improve the ability of the WGD to deliver events that successfully meet the objectives of the game sponsors.

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[6] Richard A. Kreuger, *Moderating Focus Groups, Vol 4* (Sage Publications,1998), 7.