

# **Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions**

## **An Information Engineering Technique**

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### **Introduction**

This article provides a practitioner's view of a technique used for gathering information from a group of Subject Area Experts (Business Partners and Technical Partners). A variety of different objectives are achieved using this technique. These could include development of an Enterprise Data Model, Logical Data Model, or a Physical Data Base Design. It also works well to identify Function and Process requirements. It has been used successfully for Total Quality Improvement analysis projects. This article will provide an overview of the Facilitation Process. I recommend that you call Mr. Gary Rush, M. G. Rush Systems, Inc., Barrington, IL. 847-304-1464, if you are interested in obtaining formal training in Facilitated information Gathering.

I will discuss how this technique fits into an Information Engineering Approach to Business Systems Development. I will discuss how ICASE tools can assist in the recording of the findings of a Facilitated Information Gathering Session.

I will discuss the benefits, objectives, Critical Success Factors, roles and responsibilities as well as the potential risks of using Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions.

I will illustrate my preferred room layout and discuss the important factors to consider when you conduct a Facilitated Information Gathering Session.

This article discusses the pre-session planning, the execution of the session and the post-session requirements.

I would like to discuss with you a practitioner's view of a technique called Facilitated Information Gathering and discuss how this technique can be used within an Information Engineering environment. This is the generic name for organized meetings with a predetermined objective. You may have heard these referred to by IBM as Joint Application Design (JAD) sessions, or any one of several other TLA's.

In any discussion I believe that it is important to have a common understanding of the terms being used. Therefore, I would like to begin by providing the definitions for a set of terms that you probably see a lot these days. I will be using these terms within this discussion so I want to provide my view of the definition of them, because I view them as inseparable parts of the Facilitated Information Gathering Technique:

Facilitated Information Gathering Session,  
CASE,

ICASE,  
Information Engineering, and of course, the ever popular,  
TLA.

- Definition of Facilitated Information Gathering Session

A Facilitated Information Gathering Session is the process of using a structured meeting format with a group of Business Partners and/or Technical Partners to define and record business requirements. These sessions follow a predetermined agenda developed to obtain a designated deliverable. Facilitated Information Gathering Session can be used to achieve different objectives within the Information Engineering approach to business systems development. These objectives may consist of the development of an Information Strategy Plan, the identification and documentation of the data or process requirements for a business area, or even the very detailed objectives like the development of screen and report formats, or the recording of process specifications.

- Definition of CASE and ICASE

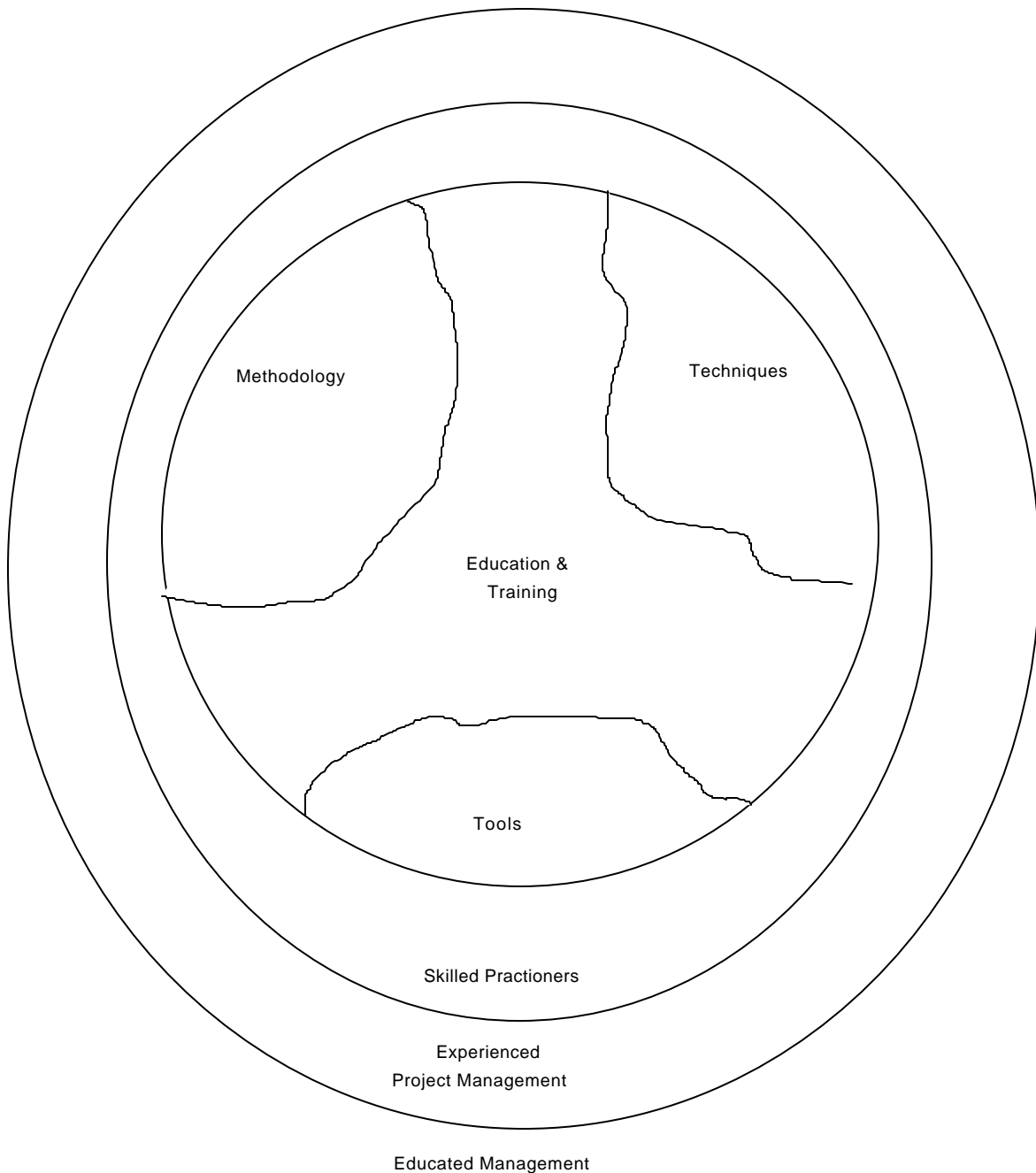
Computer Aided Systems Engineering is what I mean by the acronym of CASE. Computer Aided means the use of automated tools for the business systems development process. This incorporates much more than the traditional processes used within Management Information Systems organizations to develop computer application software to support specific business requirements. That concept is quite often referred to as Computer Aided Software Engineering. This tends to focus only on the lower CASE (design and construction) phases of the business application software development life cycle. I refer to this lower CASE approach as the WISC Methodology (WHY ISN'T SOMEONE CODING, AKA WATA - Where are the Applications). My definition of CASE also includes: the development of an Information Systems Plan to identify where Information Systems can be used to support business goals and objectives, and the identification and prioritization of Business Areas that should be analyzed to determine what data is needed to support this business area. This will also allow the organization to decide what processes should be performed on that required data. It is possible to find a wide array of tool vendors that propose to sell you their CASE tools to do any thing from etch-a-sketch drawings to sophisticated rigorous full systems development life cycle development diagrams that feed into application code generators. Some vendors (such as KnowledgeWare) and practitioners have now begun to discuss this later set of tools as ICASE tools. This stands for Integrated CASE. This new variation implies that several tools work together, with seamless interfaces, throughout the systems development life cycle, through integration into a common repository or encyclopedia. The information identified and recorded in the early phases of the business systems development life cycle is made available and used as appropriate in later phases of the life cycle, or during the life cycle phases of another project. This proposes to increase productivity by using work that is already completed and stored within the ICASE tools. A word of caution here: I believe the primary benefit of CASE or ICASE is not initially higher productivity; it is the development of more functionally complete systems. Productivity gains will occur

after you have completed the first couple of projects and when you attempt to enhance or make maintenance changes to systems that were developed using the Information Engineering Approach. All of the factors involved in becoming a proficient ICASE practitioner will actually cause your initial projects to take longer than if you used the traditional WISC Methodology approach. As you work your way up the learning curve, and begin populating the ICASE repository, you will begin to achieve the productivity enhancements that some people propose as the first benefit of ICASE.

I believe there are several components that must exist and be used together to make the culture of the Information Systems Development utilizing CASE or ICASE the worthwhile process that it can become. These include:

Methodology,  
Techniques, and  
Tools.

## Information Systems Development Culture with CASE



In order to use ICASE to change your business systems development culture to be more effective, you must establish a layer of skilled practitioners around the ICASE components. These skilled practitioners must be supported by experienced Project Managers, which in turn are supported by a well-educated and informed executive management team.

Last and far from least, all of this is wrapped within a nearly impregnable layer of the business' culture. The development of Information Systems is by comparison an easily attained task, compared to the challenges of modifying an organization's culture.

Do you have any illusions as to why it is such a challenge to implement ICASE within your organization when you look at it from the framework of all of the interrelated components?

The components of ICASE work together best when supported by significant doses of education and training. If you have any confusion understanding why I propose these as separate considerations, think about this in light of a story related to me several years ago. I have three teenage children, so this story definitely struck home for me. Would you prefer that your children participate in school classes for sex education, or sex training (there may be value, or need for both, but what is your objective?). I find it very important to provide education to management about the process and benefits of Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions, and it is necessary to provide training on how to perform the tasks of the sessions to the practitioners that will be involved in ICASE projects using Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions.

- Definition of Information Engineering

Information Engineering has many formal definitions provided by successful people like James Martin and Clive Finklestein, but I prefer a less formal definition as an Information Engineering practitioner. I like to think of Information Engineering as a set of methods, tools and techniques for getting the **right information** to the **right people** at the **right time** within a specific business or culture. If we could achieve that on a consistent basis I think we could declare ourselves successful, as an Information Services Industry.

Information Engineering is not business as usual, it is a revolutionary way to achieve strategic advantages for our organizations through the use of Information Systems. It is based upon the following Information Engineering Principles:

Educate the project team to use **data centered requirements definition, from an Enterprise wide perspective**. This principle is a strategic objective that will require major culture change in many organizations in which people or organizational units think that they own their data. Data is an Enterprise resource and must be defined, recorded and maintained as an Enterprise asset that is not duplicated, but is available to all who need access to it.

Data Requirements should be defined and recorded as the first step of an Information Engineering project. These requirements will assist in the documentation of the boundary and scope of the project. They will also provide a solid foundation for the development of non-redundant shared data architecture for future business systems.

Encouraging the formation of **a partnership between the Business Partners** (previously referred to as "those Users") **and the Technical Partners** (previously referred to as "those

programmers") within an organization to achieve a mutually advantageous strategic advantage through the application of Information Technology in support of a business objective.

Establishment of **significant participation of key business partners** to provide the business requirements for new business systems. This does not mean you provide the people who are available. It means you provide the people that you cannot possibly do without for a minute. These people are defining how you will compete within your marketplace for the next few years! Who would you prefer to have making these decisions and defining those requirements?

Establishment of **Project Management by the Business Partner** to ensure the attainment of their business requirements, not just computer systems requirements. This also implies sharing the responsibility for the success or failure of the project. If the project succeeds the technical partners and the business partners both win, but if the project fails, both partners must be held accountable.

Establishment of a culture that requires (or allows) **participation of the Technical Partners** to provide only the methodology, technique, tool and technology expertise. These people are Information Systems technicians. They should decide what technology to use to achieve your business requirements. They should not be the ones to decide what your business requirements are for this new business system. I have been told by some business partners that they think the development of Information Systems takes too long, and they just want the Information Systems people to throw something together and then implement it. If it does not quite meet all of the business requirements, then we will modify it until it is satisfactory. I believe that this is one of the factors that have caused us to end up with the poor quality systems that we have in some businesses today. Business Partners should be responsible for the identification of the business functional requirements, and the Technical Partners should be responsible for determining how to achieve the designated requirements using available technology. This concept becomes one of the most significant culture change issues in some of the Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions I have participated in.

Provide for the **use of computer graphics** to document business requirements. Many techniques, such as entity Relationship Diagramming and Data Flow Diagramming that have existed for years can now be effectively supported with these computer graphics tools. These computer based (ICASE) tools contain Artificial Intelligence or Expert Systems with rules about the use of techniques. The enforcement of these rules will assist your project team in the development of more rigorously correct models using techniques such as Data Analysis (Data Modeling) and/or Structured Analysis (Process Modeling).

Provide for the **use a common repository** to store and share information recorded in other phases of the systems development life cycle. Information recorded within the repository during previous projects can provide a productivity boost for future projects

and maintenance of existing Information Systems. This is one of the major principles of ICASE, and one reason it promises productivity over and above the traditional CASE approach to systems development.

- Definition of TLA

TLA is my three-letter acronym for a three-letter acronym (or a two letter acronym, if you prefer) used to refer to commonly used business terms. I find most businesses and many industries have commonly used TLA's. One of my objectives during Facilitated Sessions is to document the name and definition of these TLA's. I continue to be surprised how often the use of TLA's actually ends up referring to inconsistent names and definitions, even though everyone presumes that they are communicating effectively when they use their TLA's.

Now that I have provided my view of the definitions within the environment in which we conduct the Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions, I would like to discuss the significant aspects of a session.

- Benefits of Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions

The major benefit of a Facilitated Information Gathering Session is that you can obtain and validate business requirements in a shorter time frame by involving all participants (or at least a representative set of participants) who have a stake in the outcome of the session.

This approach is far more productive than the traditional serial interview process because it provides a structure for focusing on issues and resolving them. This is more effective than presuming that you can continue the development process and resolve the issues after the system is developed and implemented.

A significant benefit of Facilitated Sessions is the enhanced communication that occurs among the participants of the session. I have Facilitated Sessions in which participants have stated after the session that this was the first time that they really understood the business issues and the implication of the various choices. They were also pleased that they now had a better understanding of what their associates were trying to accomplish in their job and how their own work influenced other's tasks.

An additional dimension of the improved communication benefit is the enhanced education that occurs for people who attend the sessions and simply observe the process. This is a very effective technique for people who are newly assigned to a business position. They can quite often get more insight about their job during a series of Facilitated Sessions than they could in many weeks on the job.

Facilitated Sessions allow rapid accumulation of requirements or development of the desired deliverables. The sessions can be used to record high level business requirements

or technology specific requirements. The group of participants working together not only define requirements more quickly, they also have the forum and the knowledge to resolve issues if conflicts or disagreements arise during the sessions. Facilitated Sessions allow you to eliminate the tedious cycle of serial interview that tend to cause a geometric expansion of complexity as you interview more and more individuals who provide slight variations in each others views.

This approach to requirements gathering provides an education for participants by exposing them to the views and opinions of the other participant. This education is enhanced because the sessions are conducted in a formal but flexible manner to enhance each participant's involvement, but limit the 'blue sky' tendency encountered in less focused group sessions.

This technique supports the Information Engineering approach to Systems Development. It can use other I.E. techniques such as Data Modeling and Process Modeling to enhance the effectiveness of the session by recording the findings in a combination of diagrams supported by textual information. The ability to record the findings of the group into an ICASE tool adds to the efficiency of the session by allowing quick turn around of the groups requirements, providing a standard format for requirement recording and providing for efficient update and refinement of the material recorded during the Facilitated Sessions.

- Objectives of a Facilitated Information Gathering Session

The primary objective of most sessions is to define and record requirements for a predetermined segment of the enterprise. This is most often accomplished by gaining the participation of all significant personnel within the scope of the session you are conducting.

A secondary objective is to identify and document issues that are beyond the scope of the session, but that potentially will have an impact on the findings of the session.

- Critical Success Factors of a Facilitated Information Gathering Session

There are a series of things that must be accomplished in order to successfully conduct a Facilitated Information Gathering Session. These include:

- The Facilitator must be experienced in group session leadership. They need to work with the Project Manager to keep the session on track and keep the discussions focused on the designated objectives.
- Objectives of the sessions must be clearly defined and understood in advance. This is probably the single most common issue raised by participants that come out of session without having achieved their objectives. They were not clear about the session objectives, or the situation in which other participants did not know or understand their objectives.

- Deliverables must be clearly defined in advance. This critical success factor is related to understanding the objectives. The form and content of the designated deliverables must be clearly documented before the session and explained and illustrated at the beginning of the session.
- Participants must be carefully chosen to provide relevant expertise. You want to use the people who know the most about the topics to be discussed, and/or the requirements to be documented. Most sessions are involved in defining requirements that will become the basis of an automated business system. Can you afford to staff the sessions with people who are available simply because they have nothing else to do at the time?
- Participant's roles and responsibilities for the session must be well defined in advance. Each person deserves to know what they are expected to contribute, as well as knowing what other participants in the session are expected to contribute.
- The session agenda must be defined in advance. I am amazed at the number of meetings I have been invited to that have not provided an agenda. The old adage "If you don't have a target, you are guaranteed not to hit it" applies here. Make sure that all participants understand what the session intends to accomplish, and what they intend to produce as a result of your session.
- The scope of the session must be controlled during the session. Do not allow "scope creep" or "design drift" during your sessions or you may not have time to fulfill your objectives. I work with the Project Manager who set up the session to test periodically to make certain that we are still on track and continuing to be productive.
- Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions work best as an iterative process - don't try for perfection in every session. I heard a comment a short while ago, "that perfection is the enemy of good." Striving for perfection can consume an incredible amount of time. I use two principles here.  
 First, try to get 80% of the benefit by investing the first 20% of your time. I find you can invest an enormous amount of time trying to get every aspect developed perfectly. I encourage participants to get their initial ideas recorded and then review the entire scope, rather than trying to get every detail developed for some aspect of the session. Often this aspect may not even exist in the final view of the requirements.  
 Second, I understand that group sessions strive for consensus among the participants; however, I find very few companies that can afford the time to allow the group to arrive at consensus on all of the issues that come up during the various discussions. I have coined a phrase that I refer to as, "Violent Agreement." I want the group to work through the various issues until they reach a point of "Violent Agreement," which means, they each have satisfied their minimum requirements even though they may not have achieved every single aspect of every objective they have. While facilitating sessions I will occasionally test the situation when two or more participants get into really heated discussion that does not seem to be making any headway by asking if they have achieved "Violent Agreement" yet. This provides a bit of comic relief, but it also gives each

participant an opportunity to sit back and quickly assess their position. Often we are able to move on to more productive activities at that point.

- Roles and Responsibilities of Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions

A Facilitated Session can take many forms or have one of many objectives, however, the attendee's roles generally consist of:

- Executive Sponsor
- Project Manager
- Participants
- Recorders
- Facilitator, and
- Observers

I will list the key responsibilities for each of these roles to be fulfilled during a session. The responsibilities for the predefined roles include:

<u>ROLE</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
Executive Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set the purpose and scope of the project,</li><li>• Specify the objectives of the Facilitated Session,</li><li>• Define constraints within the session or project,</li><li>• Be the ultimate decision maker for strategic issues,</li><li>• Manage strategic aspects of project, and</li><li>• Approve funding for the project.</li></ul>
Project Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manage the tactical aspects of the project,</li><li>• Provide technical and business quality reviews,</li><li>• Assist Facilitator with pre-session and post-session planning,• Provide decisions on tactical and technical issues during Facilitated Sessions, and</li><li>• Identify, assemble, and manage session participants.</li></ul>
Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attend (on time) all scheduled session,</li><li>• Provide input during sessions related to participant's experience or expertise,</li> <li>• Conform to the agenda and guidelines of the sessions,</li><li>• Assume responsibility for content of the deliverables of the session, and,</li> <li>• Achieve consensus with other participants.</li></ul>

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Recorders    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Facilitator to determine optimal recording techniques and medium,</li> <li>• Understand objectives of session,</li> <li>• Understand the process that will occur during a facilitated session, session</li> <li>• Understand how to communicate with Facilitator without disrupting the session,</li> <br/> <li>• Record the content of sessions,</li> <li>• Refrain from assuming the role of a session participant,</li> <br/> <li>• Publish the complete contents of session, and</li> <li>• Assist Facilitator in pre-session and post-session activities.</li> </ul>                           |
| Facilitators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with Executive Sponsor and Project Manager to understand scope and objectives,</li> <br/> <li>• Meet with Project Manager to identify participants and participant's roles,</li> <li>• Meet with Recorders to plan and execute session logistics,</li> <li>• Avoid responsibility for the session content,</li> <li>• Manage pre-session and post-session activities,</li> <li>• Ensure an opportunity for each participant to contribute,</li> <li>• Maintain a list of issues that are beyond session scope, and</li> <li>• Assign follow-up responsibility for issues before session ends.</li> </ul> |
| Observers    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person that is attending this session to better understand the facilitation process, and</li> <li>• Is attending session for educational purposes, but</li> <li>• Does not participate in any aspect of the session.</li> </ul>   |

- Potential Risks of Facilitated Session

There are many benefits to be obtained from a Facilitated Session, but it is also important to understand that there are some risks in conducting these sessions. Some of the challenges that can be encountered that might undermine the success of your sessions include:

An unprepared or untrained Facilitator can destroy the session by not knowing what to do, not knowing how to obtain the designated deliverables, or not knowing how to

handle the meeting participants. Always use a trained Facilitator and allow sufficient time for preparation of the Facilitator and the session participants.

Remember, "the person who holds the chalk controls the content of the session deliverables!" It is very important to have an impartial Facilitator. Even when a Facilitator is impartial, they can influence the content, direction and outcome of the session. By having an impartial Facilitator you can reduce the risk of intentional influencing of the session results.

The same risk applies to the Recorders; they have the last say in the matter of the content of the session deliverables. It is important that they be impartial, and trained to record the essence of the conversations without corrupting the meaning. The Recorder is not expected to be a Court Recorder and capture every word; they want to record the essence of the discussions. In order to control this risk, I recommend that the Project Manager and the Facilitator review all recorded material and then distribute all session deliverables to participants for their review and revision.

Do not, during a Facilitated Session, confuse activity with results. I have seen sessions locked in "Paralysis of Analysis." People are very active and everyone is involved, but no progress is being made. I have seen sessions in which "Design Drift" has occurred and everyone is very actively involved in designing the ultimate system, unfortunately, they did not have unlimited time nor budget. They had totally lost sight of their original objectives

Do not confuse quantity with quality. I have seen sessions in which volumes of material has been recorded and large numbers of diagrams have been developed. When I reviewed the quality of the content, I found that the session had not succeeded in capturing the business requirements for the scope designated at the beginning of the session.

Politics can still undermine the results of the Facilitated Session. If people come into the session with an objective to achieve their personal goals instead of the goals of the team, they can influence, or side track the entire session. If people are operating from hidden agendas, it is very difficult to control them. It is the responsibility of the Facilitator, working with the Project Manager, to identify and attempt to control this situation. The most extreme action I have seen is when a person is asked to leave the session after repeated attempts to get them back to the group's agenda and objectives had failed.

Sending the wrong participants will guarantee the wrong results. If people are sent to a session just because they are available and have nothing better to do, you had better be cautious. I like to work with the Project Manager before the sessions to learn who is participating, who they represent within the organization, and what knowledge or expertise they are expected to contribute to the session. My preference is to get "the best and the brightest" people involved in the sessions. In many cases we are defining and documenting the desired business requirements to support the business for the next five to ten years. I believe there is no greater responsibility these people could have than to provide their subject matter expertise for these future requirements. I have had all of the

standard arguments about needing these people to keep the business operating. I can understand the desire, but don't these people ever get to go on vacation, or get ill for a day or two? Does the business stop running during these absences? Let us get the most knowledgeable people and define the most functionally complete set of business requirements possible.

Scope creep can kill a project. Fred Brooks, in his book, *The Mythical Man-Month* (Addison-Wesley), warned us not to try to put ten pounds into a five-pound bag. Somehow, we forget this very basic principle. We may often fall victim to the traditional "Oh yes, we can add that small enhancement," it will not expand the scope by much! During Facilitated Sessions the Facilitator and Project Manager must both work to maintain the original scope, and only allow changes to scope that are truly business requirements, not just nice to have bells and whistles. There is a strong tendency in humans to confuse **what we need** with **what we want**.

Know when you are finished. This is a risk that impacts inexperienced Facilitators quite often. How do I now when to declare victory and end the game? Facilitated Sessions must have predetermined agendas that state the session objectives. It is important to keep these objectives in mind and know when they have been achieved. I made a presentation for The tenth International Conference of The Entity Relationship Approach in 1991 (see the Proceedings Manual) in which I discussed, "The Importance of Using the Proper Level of Model". In the presentation I discussed the guidelines that I use to know when I have achieved the desired level of detail at the various stages of the Systems Development Life Cycle.

- **Conducting a Facilitated Information Gathering Session**

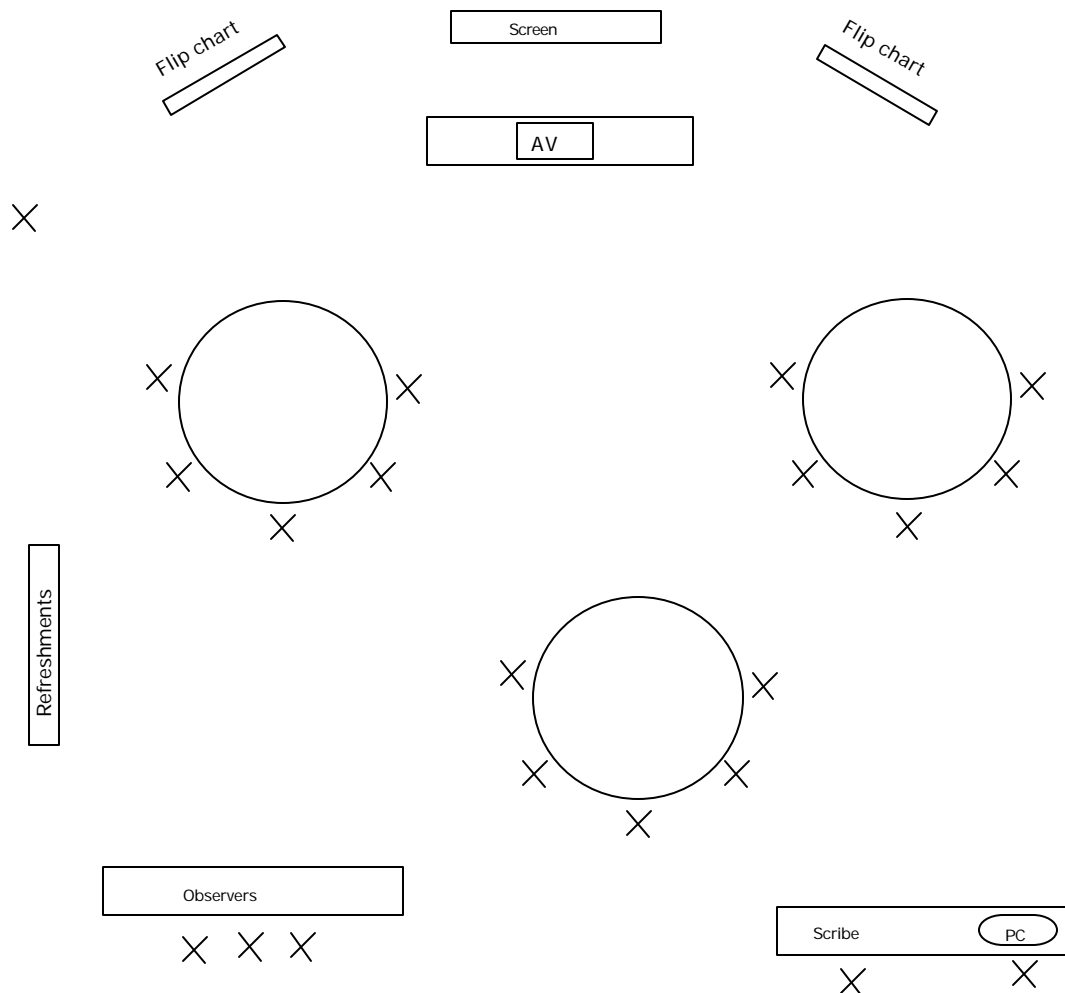
The Facilitated Information Gathering Session consists of at least three separate activities. These are the pre-session setup, conducting the session and the post-session wrap up activities. I would like to provide some insight into the process that I prefer to see in each of these related activities.

The pre-session setup activities include meeting with the Project Manager to schedule the sessions, define the scope, objectives, agenda and ground rules for the session. It is important to develop a list of participants, which identifies the title, and responsibility of all people that will be involved in the session. It is important to understand their role in the session, but it is even more important to understand the background of the people and know what they are expected to contribute, or at least understand what position or objectives they may have during the sessions.

I find it valuable to personally meet the Project Sponsor and discuss his or her objectives and expectations. I work with the Project Manager to develop an announcement letter to be distributed to the attendees that includes a letter from the sponsor, the agenda, and an objectives statement. In some sessions there may be some pre-session work that the participants need to perform prior to coming to the session. Be sure to indicate what this may be, and if necessary send copies to each attendee if there is critical material to be read before the session or to be referenced during the sessions. It is

valuable to meet with the key participants before the session so that you can discuss the process that will be used, the objectives to be achieved and the actions that will be expected from each of the participants.

The logistics of a Facilitated Session can significantly impact the results of the session. I tend to be very detailed oriented when it comes to setting up and executing these sessions. The old proverb, "anything that can go wrong, will go wrong," seems to be quite prevalent when setting up and facilitating these sessions. I have provided this diagram, which I use when setting up a session at a hotel meeting facility.



Recommended Facilitated Session Room Layout

Obviously there are many options for setting the physical layout of the room. This arrangement has worked best for me. I like round worktables because they allow more of a team environment instead of using classroom style set up with long narrow tables. The eight-foot round tables also provide more workroom for the participants to spread out if they have reference material for the session. I prefer having the recorders in the back of

the room, so that participants are not distracted by their activities. I have the refreshments (i.e., coffee, tea, juice, muffins) table inside the room. I have found that some people think better on their feet and some people think better on their seat, so by placing the refreshments inside the room, there is a convenient reason for people to get up and move around.

Facilitated Sessions are mentally very demanding and often people are physically exhausted after a day or more in these sessions. It is important not to crowd too many people into too small a room. Make sure the temperature is reasonable, too hot and everyone falls asleep; too cold and everyone gets distracted trying to keep warm.

I find having refreshments served inside the room breaks up the routine of the session without losing control by allowing the participants to roam off out of the room looking for snacks. The refreshment table also acts as a catalyst to encourage discussions among the participants during breaks. I have seen sessions where issues that participants were struggling with were resolved by small groups of affected participants getting together at break and debating or analyzing each other's position.

I prefer to provide space for observers in the back of the room, preferably, near the door. So that they can come and go during the session without impacting the discussion.

I have tried many variations of audio/visual support and find that for my style the setup that works best is to have two or three flip charts on easels with color marker pens, an overhead projector with plastic transparencies (foils) for the presentation material. I have tried the high-tech approach with projectors hooked up to personal computers and find them to be beneficial for special purpose sessions, but a bit restrictive for regular sessions. I have used white boards and chalk boards, but find the same limitation with each of them. They eventually get full and you must erase the material. When I use flip charts, the material recorded can be posted on the walls of the room or referenced from time to time during the sessions. The use of multiple flip charts is also an aid to the Recorders who need to keep up with the discussions of the participants. By moving from chart to chart, they can see what we just discussed, if they had gotten behind in their recording efforts.

The final pre-session activity is to work with the Recorders to make sure that they understand what we will be doing and what I expect them to record during the sessions. The objectives of the sessions dictate the nature and level of detail that we will record during each session. I prefer to have one Recorder using a PC based CASE tool such as KnowledgeWare's Application Development Workstation (ADW) to record the essence of the session in a real-time mode. I have tried recording the sessions manually and then having someone enter the requirements into an ICASE tool after the sessions, but I find that you lose too much of the subtle detail that can be recorded if you are having the session recorded live. I do not expect the Recorders to be Court Recorders and get every word documented. I expect that we can record the essence of the conversation. When possible I prefer to have a second Recorder that acts as a scribe and assists the person that is recording live on the PC. Sometimes hardware failures or simply having too much to record in a short period of time causes the Recorder to get behind for short periods of

time. The Scribe can maintain manual notes on the session and supply them to the Recorder during slower periods of the session.

### The Facilitation Process

Conducting the Facilitated Session is primarily the responsibility of the Facilitator. The Facilitator is responsible for the management of the session, the achievement of the predetermined objectives, and the monitoring the quality of the information that is recorded. The participants, while conforming to the agenda, are responsible for the content of the session.

The Executive Sponsor should initiate the meeting with some opening comments about the benefits to be obtained from this project, and an indication of the level of support that senior management is willing to make to see this project succeed.

The Project Manager should introduce the project objectives and facilitate the introduction of all of the participants.

The Facilitator should then begin the session with a discussion of the ground rules for the session and obtain buy in from the group that they will conform to the ground rules, or change them to an acceptable set of ground rules. The Facilitator should also provide an explanation of the facilitation process so that all participants understand the expectations of each participant.

The activities of the session depend on the scope and objectives of an individual session. An example of a session might be to define the scope for a major new project that has been authorized. In this situation I use a Context Level Data Flow Diagram to document the view of the participants regarding their requirements for the scope of the project.

I prefer to limit sessions to three contiguous days. The participants all have real jobs to do in addition to participating in these sessions. I set Tuesday through Thursday for the sessions and leave Monday and Friday for the participants to keep up with their normal jobs.

The academic objective of a Facilitated Session is to assist the participants to reach a point of consensus. I find very few companies truly want to invest the time and staff resources required to reach consensus. I have modified this objective. As I mentioned before, I strive for the attainment of "violent agreement." What I mean by this is, I want to facilitate the group to a point at which each participant will agree that we have incorporated their essential business requirement. We may not have added every bell and whistle, but we have all of the necessary requirements accounted for by this effort. This technique also allows me to defuse confrontations, which sometimes occur during emotional moments by asking "Have we reached violent agreement here, yet?" This breaks the tension and allows everyone to assess whether or not his or her discussions are adding value beyond what has already been accomplished.

Several types of sessions focus on ever-increasing levels of data requirements. During these sessions it is important to use the correct question when you are trying to draw information out of people. An example is to ask, "What information do you need to perform this business process?" Do not ask how do you get the information you need, this question will get a detailed answer that will not help you define your data requirements.

During the session the Facilitator is responsible for getting everyone to participate. I find some people react and respond more quickly than others. The Facilitator must allow time for all people to get their thoughts out for discussion. In order to accomplish this, it is sometimes necessary to control the situation in which one or more people attempt to dominate the session.

Issues will sometimes come up during a session that will have some impact on the final deliverables produced by the session, but the issues cannot be answered or resolved by the participants within the time and resource constraints of the session. When this happens, I post the issue to an issues list and at the end of the Facilitated Session I work with the Project Manager and the participant to identify a person to take the responsibility for each issue. Taking responsibility does not mean that this person must resolve the issue. It means that the person will take the issue to the proper person outside the session to initiate some action to move toward resolution of the issue. The responsible person will continue to track the progress of the issue and provide feedback the Project Manager so that the team can be informed.

A regular Facilitated Session will end with a discussion of the next steps to be carried out. These include the post-session activities and the identification of future scheduling requirements.

### Post-Session Requirements

After the Facilitated Session has been completed, all significant information recorded during the session should be reviewed for quality, content and form. It can then be distributed to the attendees. Remember, the objective of the session is not to have the Recorders act as court Recorders, but rather to have them record the essence of the session. Therefore, it is necessary to publish the results and give everyone an opportunity to determine if the essential requirements were successfully recorded.

The issues list and all relevant status information should also be distributed.

The participants review and refine the findings published by the Recorder. The Facilitator and the Project Manager work with the Recorder to refine any response and integrate it into the deliverables. There is a very fine line between what changes a participant can make to enhance what was meant and what can be allowed as one person's unilateral opinion that they want to incorporate into the deliverables. The responsibility to manage that fine line falls to the Facilitator and the Project Manager.

When all responses have been recorded the Project Manager will decide what additional sessions or tasks need to be performed. The Project Manager will work with the Recorders to schedule the sessions.

You are now ready to initiated another Facilitated Information Gathering Session for another project

## Conclusion

You have reviewed a technique for gathering information from a group of knowledgeable people. These people may be a group of Business Partners, a group of Technical Partners or a team made up of both. I have shown you that this technique can be applied at different levels of the business systems development process. Some of these include; Development of the Enterprise Data Model, Logical Data Models, and Physical Data Base Design. These techniques can be equally effective in the identification and recording of requirements for Function, Process and Total Quality Management Projects.

This article provided an understanding of how Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions can be used effectively within an Information Engineering Approach to Business Systems Development. This article also indicated how ICASE tools could be more effective through the successful use of Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions.

I have also laid the foundation to help you understand that the use of this Facilitation Technique really requires more than buying a new ICASE tool and hiring a Facilitator. To effectively use this technique, you must begin the process of changing the culture of your organization. This includes changing the way in which resources are allocated for the development of new business systems.

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Author's Bio:

Walter Moeller specializes in consulting and training for Data Warehouse Strategy, Information Systems Architecture and Business Systems Requirements Definition, Integrated Computer Aided Systems Engineering (ICASE), Information Engineering, Facilitation Leadership (JAD), Business Process Re-engineering, Data Architecture and Management of Organizational Change. Mr. Moeller is Practice Director and Senior Consultant with Principle Partners, Inc., he was previously Regional Director for KPMG Consulting's Data Warehouse Practice. Mr. Moeller was founder and Senior Consultant for Walter E. Moeller Consulting, Inc., prior to that he was West Region Manager with Axiom Information Consulting, Inc., he has over thirty years' experience in Management Information Systems Development. He has previously had five years' management consulting experience with the "Big Eight" (now "Big Six"), four years of which were with Ernst & Young (formerly Arthur Young) during which he was involved in providing consulting and training support for ICASE, Information Engineering Management, Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions and use of LogicWork's ERwin, as well as Sterling Software's Information Engineering Workstation and Application Development Workstation software development.

Mr. Moeller is a trained, certified facilitator with ten years of facilitation experience in a wide variety of industries and organizations. He is also a certified facilitation techniques instructor.

Mr. Moeller has assisted in the development of Computer Systems Development Methodologies for Information Engineering. He has developed and delivered executive as well as technical training for both Information Engineering Methodology, and Information Engineering (ICASE) tools, techniques and concepts. He has consulted with organizations using Information Engineering methodologies and Information Engineering tools, and assisted client's management and technicians to understand the culture changes that are needed in order to successfully implement Information Engineering and Data Architecture.

Mr. Moeller earned an MBA from the University of Missouri, Kansas City; he graduated with honors in acquiring his Bachelor of Business Administration degree. Mr. Moeller has published articles on Integrated Computer Aided Systems Engineering (ICASE), Information Engineering and developed a textbook chapter on Facilitated Information Gathering Sessions.

Mr. Moeller has made presentations to companies and professional associations on the requirements of implementing and using ICASE, Information Engineering, Data Warehousing, Data Management and Data Architecture. He is the founder and Past President of the San Francisco Bay Area CASE Users' Group, founding board member for the International CASE Users' Group, Past President of the San Francisco chapter of the Data Administration Management Association, and co-founder of the San Francisco Entity Relationship Diagrammers Group.

The author would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Gary Rush, President of M. G. Rush Systems, for his excellent training in facilitation techniques. He would also like to acknowledge the Partners and previous co-workers of the Arthur Young's Management Consulting Group from whom he learned immeasurable lessons about Information Engineering and Facilitated Techniques. The last and perhaps most significant professional acknowledgment goes to the many people he has met and worked with on various client projects in which he was able to use and refine his facilitation techniques.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my family for their patience and consideration while I was developing the skills to learn these techniques and then for the time to write this article.

Thanks to Chris, Jeff, Jon and Jennie Moeller!

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