

An Abstract of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis of:

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Facilitated Participation of Decision-Making in Collaborative and Learning Organizations

A literature search for facilitator's role and influence on group decision-making is barely existent; therefore, a field research study was conducted of three organizations that self-identified as learning or collaborative organizations. The thesis states, nonprofit organizations or cooperatives, where leadership looks to staff to solve problems and make important decisions, can make more effective decisions, improve decision-making skills and change goals of their organizational community or group, when lead by a facilitator. Criteria included participants choosing their topic, with the exclusion of supervisors or management, and that the organization self-identified as learning or collaborative organization. Participants were found from a nonprofit research institute, nonprofit bicycle cooperative and for-profit cooperative and were asked to participate in a facilitated workshop, fill out post workshop and two month follow-up surveys. The study was qualitative and the results are conjecture in nature. The results showed that topic was an indicator of culture and directly correlated to dominant talkers within each group. The dominant talkers were insistent on topic choice for the group, and caused the environment to be less nurturing of group participation and topic choice. Dominant individuals prefer more hierarchical forms of communication, where there is inequality, despite the environment of the organization. Equally important are the findings of the surveys which led to the conclusion that facilitation methods were an important factor, that facilitator neutrality was present, brainstorming activities had a high satisfaction rating and that there was less need for supervisory or leadership direction as a direct result of the workshop. More research needs to be conducted to determine the environment, where shared decision making is constant and evaluating dominant talkers, in order to give the facilitator neutral ground to work with the organization and facilitating workshops.