



Case Study: York Regional District School Board

The York Regional District School Board is Ontario's third largest board with an enrolment of over 122,000 students. With shifting budgets, new teaching initiatives and the pressure to find innovative ways to maximize student outcomes, leaders within the board rely heavily on their staff to be active participants in deciding how their schools or departments will adapt to their ever-changing environment.

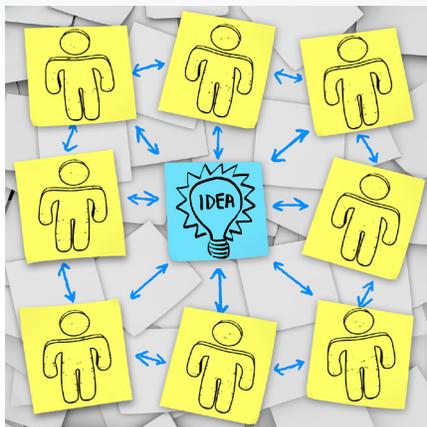
It is no wonder that the Board recognizes the importance of a "professional work culture with shared decision making, engagement and inclusivity". The ability to facilitate meaningful dialogue in a way that empowers staff to be part of the decision making process is not an easy one, particularly for teachers who are moving from leading their classrooms to becoming part of a decision-making team.

The Challenge

York Region's Leadership Development Team (LDT) was tasked with defining competencies and respective training for ensuring school staff are more prepared to take the lead on facilitating meaningful dialogue and decision-making. The venue targeted for such dialogue typically occurs in the context of a 'meeting'. The LDT identified the following challenges within the Board's meeting culture:

- meetings held without a clearly identified purpose
- leaders more comfortable influencing thinking rather than engaging and pulling ideas or solutions from the group
- too many meetings
- trouble sticking to the agenda
- lack of consistent process for 'how' meetings are to be run
- difficulty managing disruptions or difficult dynamics in the meeting
- lack of participation from some and over-participation by others
- lack of confidence managing "difficult conversations" or conflicting ideas





The Solution

After completing a scan of various training options, the LDT decided to deliver Facilitation First's Facilitating Meetings With Ease to Administrative and board leaders, primarily because of the ability of participants to immediately apply the meeting process, tools and techniques in their next meeting. The LDT also found that the trainer's depth of facilitation experience allowed for more meaningful dialogue around the learners' actual issues.

After receiving a workbook and resource text, participants experienced a highly interactive two-day workshop with six different meeting simulations, allowing them a safe environment to try new tools and techniques and receive peer and trainer coaching support.

The Outcome

The feedback from participants of this workshop has been overwhelmingly positive, so much so that scheduled workshops often have waiting lists due to positive word of mouth. The evaluations to date rate the workshop content and delivery an average of 4.7/5.

John Steh, Associate Manager of Leadership Development, reports that the board is experiencing many benefits as a result of the ongoing training including:

- efficiencies gained by staff now using a common language around the meeting process
- an increased confidence in dealing with more challenging discussions
- a better use of human resources by engaging all meeting participants in discussions
- an increase in staff morale as a result of feeling like they "have more of a voice".



John went on to say that "Principals and Vice Principals have become much more aware of how important remaining neutral is to increasing trust and engagement with staff". He is beginning to see the critical shift to a "facilitative mindset" in the leaders and although hard to measure, John feels this is having an impact on the quality of decisions made and an increased commitment from people contributing to an initiative or project.