

TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF FACILITATION TECHNOLOGIES INTO THE COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

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The article analyses the implementation of the facilitation approach within the professional training system for civil servants at a regional branch of the Academy of Public Administration. The study explores the synergy between the competency-based model and group facilitation methods during the 2024–2025 period. The author details practical cases of conducting training and retrospective sessions. Based on a SWOT analysis, the advantages and risks of utilising facilitation in the public sector are identified. Particular attention is given to the ORID method (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional) as a fundamental mechanism for professional development and institutional growth.

Keywords: *facilitation, public service, competency-based approach, ORID, retrospective sessions, professional development, Academy of Public Administration.*

INTRODUCTION

The current stage of modernisation of the public administration system in the Republic of Kazakhstan is characterised by the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) principles. This concept entails the transformation of state institutions into service-oriented structures, whose performance is evaluated through the lens of efficiency and the quality of public service delivery². Within the framework of this paradigm, the professionalisation of the state apparatus necessitates a transition to a competency-based learning model. This implies a priority on practical skills and the ability of civil servants to make informed managerial decisions amidst high legal and social dynamics.

A central objective of human resources professional development in 2024–2025 has been the overcoming of inertial educational formats and the introduction of active interaction tools. In this context, facilitation is regarded as a scientifically grounded technology for managing group processes, aimed at achieving consensus and collective problem-solving of professional tasks. The integration of facilitation approaches into the activities of the regional branch of the Academy of Public Administration is driven by the need to develop soft skills and foster the innovative potential of civil servants.

The purpose of this article is to provide a systematic description of the experience of embedding facilitation and retrospective sessions into the process of advanced training and retraining of personnel. The author aims to analyse the effectiveness of these methods for developing professional competencies and to identify the specificities of their application within the public sector of Kazakhstan.

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² Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 416-V ZRK (23 November 2015) "On Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan". <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1500000416>

METHODOLOGY

The current research is based on a comprehensive approach that integrates theoretical analysis with empirical methods for studying educational processes. The methodological framework employed is constituted by systemic and competency-based approaches, within which the professional development of a civil servant is viewed as a process of forming sustainable behavioural indicators.

To achieve the research objectives for the 2024–2025 period, the following methodological approaches were employed:

1. **Participant Observation.** This method was utilised by the author during facilitation sessions for civil and public servants at the regional branch of the Academy of Public Administration. This approach enabled the recording of qualitative changes in group dynamics and participant engagement levels during the transition from traditional formats to facilitation methods.
2. **Pedagogical Design Method.** The author developed and piloted original scenarios for training sessions. The design process included the adaptation of International Association of Facilitators (IAF) tools to the specific context of the civil service in Kazakhstan. Specifically, algorithms for applying the ORID method were developed to enhance the emotional intelligence of rural akims and to address issues within the sphere of land relations.
3. **Retrospective Analysis and Self-Analysis.** A vital component of the methodology involved analysing the outcomes of strategic planning sessions (for instance, for the Labor Mobility Center of the Pavlodar Region). The use of retrospective sessions allowed for an assessment of the effectiveness of the implemented tools and the identification of barriers hindering productive group work.
4. **Action Research.** The research methodology relies on the "planning – action – observation – reflection" cycle. Data obtained during the author's 2024 thesis defence on the design of facilitation sessions served as the foundation for the subsequent scaling of this experience.
5. **Qualitative Analysis of Feedback.** The systematisation of participant feedback and survey results enabled the verification of the hypothesis regarding the positive impact of facilitation on the level of satisfaction with the learning process and the degree of readiness among servants to apply the acquired skills in practice.

The selected methodology ensured the objectivity of the findings and provided a basis for justifying the necessity of integrating facilitation technologies into the systemic process of professional development for state apparatus personnel.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF FACILITATION IN THE GROUP WORK SYSTEM

In contemporary scientific literature, facilitation is defined as a method of organising group activity aimed at increasing communication efficiency and fostering the achievement of collective results. It is essential to establish a clear distinction between facilitation and other forms of group work. Unlike moderation, which focuses on technical adherence to the agenda and the structure of the discussion, facilitation is directed toward managing the psychological and cognitive dynamics of the participants.

Within the educational process, facilitation fundamentally differs from traditional teaching and training methods due to the absence of an expert position that broadcasts ready-made

knowledge. The facilitator maintains a neutral stance and acts as the organiser of the discussion process, which enables the group to actualise its own practical experience to solve specific tasks. This ensures a transition from the passive perception of information to active analytical activity.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF FACILITATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

An analysis of the activities of government agencies in the OECD countries demonstrates a steady trend toward the use of participatory management methods. International practice confirms that facilitation is an effective mechanism for the development and implementation of public policy. In several developed nations, including Canada and the United Kingdom, facilitation technologies are integrated into strategic planning processes and engagement with civil society. In the United States, these methods are widely applied by federal agencies to optimise interagency cooperation and resolve labour disputes indicate that facilitation contributes to increased transparency in decision-making and the strengthening of institutional trust.³ The adaptation of this experience into Kazakhstan's educational practice in 2024 allows for the synchronisation of the national personnel training system with global standards of public management efficiency.

GENESIS AND INTERNATIONAL FACILITATION PRACTICES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Facilitation emerged as an applied discipline during the late twentieth century. Experts from the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) established the foundations of collective interaction methods in the 1970s (Stanfield, 2017). Their Focused Conversation Method optimized social discussions and increased citizen engagement in decision-making. These approaches later expanded into the corporate sector and public administration systems across Western Europe and North America.

Analysis of government operations within OECD countries confirms a steady trend toward participatory management. International practice proves that facilitation effectively aids the development and implementation of public policy. Canada and the UK have integrated facilitation technologies into strategic planning and civil society engagement standards. This fosters transparency within government institutions and strengthens public trust.

US federal agencies widely apply these methods to optimize interagency cooperation and resolve labor disputes. Implementing facilitation helps harmonize the interests of diverse social groups and minimizes risks during the execution of government programs. Adapting this experience into Kazakhstan's educational practice synchronizes the national personnel training system with global standards of public management efficiency.

FACILITATION METHODS

The Focused Conversation Method (ORID): Structure and Objectives

Implementing participatory management concepts within a professionalized civil service requires verified tools. This section presents group work methods systematically tested in the regional branch of the Academy of Public Administration (Omarova,2024) . The primary focus remains on the Focused Conversation Method (ORID) and retrospective sessions. These serve as mechanisms for integrating individual experience into collective management decisions.

³ International Association of Facilitators (IAF). <https://iaf-world.org/>

The choice of these tools stems from their capacity to structure group thinking. They facilitate the transition from recording isolated data to formulating evidence-based action plans.

The Focused Conversation Method, more commonly known by the acronym ORID, represents a sequential technology for managing group information analysis. The objective of this method is to structure the group's thinking process to transition from the recording of fragmented data to a well-grounded plan of action. The ORID model comprises four sequential levels of experience processing.

- The **Objective level** is aimed at collecting and verifying facts. Within the process of civil servant training, this stage involves recording quantitative indicators of program implementation or the specific parameters of legal cases.
- The **Reflective level** focuses on identifying the emotional reactions and internal associations of the participants. In the public sector, this stage is critically important for recognising the level of psychological tension when dealing with public complaints or operating under crisis management conditions.
- The **Interpretive level** involves analysing the significance of the information obtained and searching for value-based meanings. At this stage, participants determine how the issues under discussion correlate with their official responsibilities and the strategic goals of the state body.
- The **Decisional level** is the concluding phase, aimed at formulating specific conclusions and algorithms for future activity.

The application of ORID in the 2024–2025 educational process has increased the practical relevance of seminars and ensured the transition from the theoretical mastery of competencies to their practical implementation.

Retrospective Session: Methodology and Areas of Application

A retrospective session is a specialised facilitation format designed for the systematic analysis of completed work stages. Within the context of modernising public administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the retrospective serves as a tool for fostering a learning organisation culture.

The objective of a retrospective session is to provide an objective assessment of collective achievements and to identify systemic obstacles hindering effective performance. Unlike traditional reporting formats, a retrospective focuses not on the personal accountability of employees, but on the optimisation of work processes and interpersonal interaction.

The areas of application for retrospective sessions in the public sector include:

- **Completion of training cycles** at regional branches of the Academy to assess the quality of competency acquisition.
- **Evaluating the outcomes** of regional investment projects or strategic roadmaps.
- **Assessing the effectiveness of interagency cooperation** following the completion of joint activities.

The practice of conducting retrospective sessions within state bodies of the Pavlodar Region in 2024 confirmed their effectiveness in reducing administrative barriers within teams and improving the quality of internal management.

INTEGRATION OF FACILITATION INTO THE SYSTEMIC TRAINING OF PERSONNEL

The embedding of facilitation tools into the training process of civil and public servants ensures a synergy between theoretical preparation and practical experience. The primary advantage lies in the transformation of the educational environment into a space for the collective pursuit of solutions. However, the utilisation of these technologies necessitates a high level of instructor preparation in the role of a facilitator, as well as the audience's readiness for open dialogue.

The analysis of facilitation implementation in 2024–2025 demonstrates that the use of the ORID method and retrospective sessions contributes to the strengthening of institutional memory and the development of the adaptive capacities of civil servants. This supports the assertion that facilitation is an essential component of the modern system of continuous professional development within the framework of implementing New Public Management.

SWOT ANALYSIS: FACILITATION EFFECTIVENESS IN CIVIL SERVANT TRAINING

Strengths

- **Enhanced Mastery of Professional Competencies.** The use of facilitation ensures a transition from passive information perception to active analysis, which facilitates the consolidation of skills within the competency-based learning model.
- **Actualisation of Participants' Practical Experience.** The Focused Conversation Method (ORID) allows for the integration of servants' existing knowledge with new theoretical concepts, thereby increasing the practical relevance of the educational process.
- **Development of Collective Decision-Making Skills.** Facilitation stimulates abilities for teamwork and the joint development of managerial projects, which is critically important for the implementation of institutional reforms.
- **Reduction of Hierarchical Barriers in Learning.** The discussion process in a facilitative format minimises power distance within the study group, ensuring an open exchange of views between representatives of various job categories.

Weaknesses

- **High Requirements for Instructor Qualifications.** The effective implementation of sessions requires the academic staff to possess specialised facilitation tools, which highlights the problem of a shortage of trained trainers-facilitators.
- **Increased Time Consumption for the Educational Module.** Conducting full-scale sessions using the ORID method or retrospective analysis requires significant time compared to traditional lecture-based classes.
- **Complexity of Objective Individual Contribution Assessment.** In conditions of group interaction, it is difficult to differentiate the measurement of competency mastery for each individual participant.
- **Dependence on Group Dynamics.** The effectiveness of training is largely determined by the composition of the group and the readiness of participants for engaged dialogue.

Opportunities

- **Cultivation of a Learning Organisation Culture.** The systemic application of retrospective sessions within government agencies fosters the development of institutional memory and the continuous improvement of work processes.
- **Integration into Distance Learning Formats.** The advancement of digital platforms enables the conduct of facilitation sessions online, expanding the reach of trainees without compromising the quality of interaction.
- **Synchronisation with International Standards.** The application of participatory management methods aligns the national personnel training system with OECD practices and the principles of New Public Management.
- **Development of Proprietary Educational Products.** The availability of successfully piloted session scenarios (e.g., for rural akims) allows the Academy's regional branch to serve as a regional resource center.

Threats

- **Psychological Resistance to Change.** The conservative nature of the civil service and adherence to directive management methods may lead to the rejection of the facilitation approach, perceiving it as frivolous or redundant.
- **Risk of Procedural Formalisation.** Transforming facilitation into a mandatory but superficially executed regulation may discredit the method and reduce participant motivation.
- **External Institutional Constraints.** Insufficient support for innovative training methods from the heads of state bodies may neutralise the impact of skills acquired at the Academy once the servant returns to the workplace.
- **Budgetary Constraints.** The necessity of engaging external experts or procuring specialised software for session result analysis may encounter funding deficits.

CONCLUSION

The conducted research confirms that the integration of facilitation technologies into the training system for civil servants is a necessary condition for the modernisation of the state apparatus within the framework of the New Public Management concept. The piloting of the ORID focused conversation method and the implementation of retrospective sessions in the 2024–2025 period demonstrated the high efficiency of these tools for developing key managerial competencies. Facilitation ensures a transition from reproductive learning methods to productive forms of interaction, which contributes to the formation of adaptability and accountability among officials.

Facilitation ensures the transition from reproductive learning methods to productive forms of interaction (Martynova, 2011; Shtroo and Eliseenko, 2014). This fosters adaptability and accountability among officials. The primary observation during the testing phase was a qualitative shift in participant roles as they became active creators of management decisions.

A significant result was the alignment of participant positions and values regarding proposed courses of action. This achieved coordinated efforts and conscious group consensus on the chosen development path. The ability of civil servants to independently discover shared meanings and remove systemic barriers confirms the effectiveness of the implemented tools.

The results of the SWOT analysis indicate a significant potential for facilitation to strengthen institutional memory and improve interagency communications. At the same time, identified

risks, such as psychological resistance within a conservative environment and a shortage of qualified trainers, necessitate a systemic approach to their mitigation. The implementation of facilitation within the activities of the Academy's branch should not be fragmentary; rather, it must become part of a unified strategy for professional personnel development aimed at creating a flexible and socially responsible state.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATING IDENTIFIED RISKS AND THREATS

To ensure a sustainable positive impact from the implementation of facilitation approaches and to neutralise the threats identified during the analysis, the following measures are proposed:

1. **Systemic Training of Internal Facilitators.** It is essential to organise continuous training for the faculty of the Academy's branches in accordance with international facilitation standards. This will minimise the risk of low-quality sessions and ensure an expert base is available to support state bodies in the regions.
2. **Regulatory Integration of Facilitation Formats.** It is recommended to amend standard curricula to mandate the use of interactive methods and facilitation for at least seventy percent of total class time. This will help avoid a formalistic approach and ensure the practical orientation of training.
3. **Development of Specialised Methodological Case Studies.** To reduce psychological resistance among participants, session scenarios should be based on real-world regional management situations. Adapting the ORID method to specific tasks (e.g., land relations or the emotional intelligence of akims) increases trust in the method due to its evident practical utility.
4. **Information Support and Popularisation of Approaches.** Regular retrospective sessions and conferences should be conducted for the heads of state bodies to demonstrate successful cases of facilitation use. Understanding the value of these tools at the leadership level will ensure support for trainees when implementing acquired skills in the workplace.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation of Long-term Effects.** It is advisable to implement a post-course monitoring system to assess the impact of facilitation methods on actual job performance. Analysing dynamics in team interaction and the quality of decision-making will allow for timely adjustments to educational content and minimise the risk of procedural formalisation.
6. **Digitalisation of Facilitation Tools.** In the context of digital transformation, it is necessary to develop skills in using virtual platforms for conducting distributed sessions. This will ensure accessibility to quality training for servants in remote areas and reduce administrative logistics costs.

The implementation of these recommendations will allow for the transformation of identified threats into opportunities for qualitative growth and ensure the Academy's leading role in the professionalisation of the state apparatus of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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