Chapter 1: Analyze and Apply Critical Judgment

The CCSF™ standards embody the art and science of facilitating sustainable, systemic improvement and innovation, emphasizing the role of the professional in guiding collaborative efforts. The first CCSF™ standard, *Analyze and Apply Critical Judgment*, reflects the work you must do in preparation to guide and engage others in systemic improvement efforts. It is the first step in preparation to lead collaborative decisions, actions, co-creation, and implementation of solutions that are embraced and supported by stakeholders.

Because sustainable performance improvement requires collaboration, the facilitator begins by gathering and analyzing information, research, data, and artifacts to uncover the systemic factors influencing performance, including the group, organization, or community ability to collaborate for shared success. This critical review enables the facilitator to identify and address barriers that may hinder the adoption of new behaviors, improved practices, and the creation of a lasting culture that fosters success for all.

Collaborative success requires two roles to be performed well: facilitation and participation.

If you have chosen or been chosen to act as a facilitator, or have inherited this role alongside other responsibilities, it is essential to recognize the trust placed in you. This trust assumes you possess the tools, processes, and skills needed to help others succeed together. The competencies required for this role are complex and highly sought after. They enable you to lead, consult, manage projects, or excel in any role requiring coordination, collaboration, and co-creation.

Even if you've been assigned this role, your effectiveness ultimately depends on the willingness of those you support to engage in the process. Facilitating connection, coordination, collaboration, and co-creation is not just a linear progression; it's a continuous cycle. People, organizations, work, communities, and conditions are always evolving, requiring you to adapt and support each element consistently.

Focusing solely on a project or opportunity at a time, rather than fostering ongoing collaborative improvement, innovation, and fidelity of implementation, can leave you trapped in a cycle of starts, stalls, and setbacks. This may result in a constant sense of starting over or scrambling to regain momentum, rather than building on existing progress and driving sustainable growth. Persistence is vital. By applying the mindsets, processes, and tools in this Playbook, you can build resilience and maintain hope that meaningful change and achievement are possible. With these resources, the challenges of the role become more manageable, empowering you to guide others with confidence and purpose.

You also are responsible for building the capacity of those who participate in collaborative efforts. You must design processes that move groups from discussion to decisions, and guide inquiry without prescribing solutions. You must maintain neutrality while guiding sound processes and focusing on outcomes. You keep attention on the "Big Rock" that requires collaboration and support implementation, accountability, and sustainability. As you guide the process without directing or telling you help others fulfill the second critical role, participation.

Participants contribute expertise while engaging in shared learning and shared responsibility for outcomes. Both roles matter. Both require skill and demand intentional practice. This Playbook supports doing both.

Assessing Professional and Personal Success Competencies

Being an effective facilitator or participant requires advanced professional and personal abilities. This Playbook will support you in how to guide this work with the needed mindsets and skills; however, you must be committed to your continuous learning, development, and application of it.   Use *Tool 1.1, The Professional Competencies Assessment* to self-assess.

Tool 1.1 Professional Competencies Assessment

Guidelines: Rate each from 1 – Novice, 2 – Developing, 3 – Proficient, 4 – Role Model

_____Systems Thinking

Understanding the interconnectedness of people, processes, and systems to address root causes of performance issues.

_____Collaboration and Facilitation

Expertise in guiding teams through productive dialogue, co-creation, and consensus-building.

_____Data Analysis and Decision-Making

Ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data to inform strategies and measure progress.

_____Change Management

Skills to lead and support organizational or community transitions effectively.

_____Project and Process Management

Proficiency in planning, organizing, and executing initiatives to achieve objectives.

_____Communication and Influence

Clear, concise, and persuasive communication to align stakeholders and build trust.

_____Instructional Design and Adult Learning

Designing, delivering, and engaging in effective learning experiences to build capacity in ourselves and others.

_____Problem-Solving and Innovation

Applying creative and critical thinking to develop practical and innovative solutions.

_____Knowledge of Performance Improvement Models and Tools

Familiarity with frameworks like the Human Performance Technology Principles & Practices; Observe, Orient, Decide, & Act Loop; Appreciative Inquiry; Lean; or Six Sigma to drive improvement efforts.

_____Building and Maintaining Relationships

Networking and partnership development to foster collaboration across diverse groups and sectors.

Success in this role involves balancing these professional competencies and applying them based on the unique context of the performance challenge. The ability to engage and empower stakeholders while maintaining focus on outcomes is at the core of a Collaborative Success Facilitator 's expertise. Use Tool 1.2 The *Personal Competencies*

Assessment to self-assess attributes and skills that reflect your character, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Tool 1.2 Personal Competencies Assessment

Guidelines: Rate each from 1 – Novice, 2 – Developing, 3 – Proficient, 4 – Role Model.

____Emotional Intelligence
Self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills to navigate interpersonal dynamics.

____Adaptability and Resilience
Flexibility in responding to changing conditions, setbacks, and challenges with persistence and optimism.

____Growth Mindset
Openness to learning, feedback, and continuous self-improvement

____Empathy and Active Listening
Genuine understanding of diverse perspectives and the ability to engage others meaningfully.

____Cultural Competence
Awareness of and respect for cultural differences to foster inclusivity and equity in collaborative efforts.

____Accountability and Integrity
Commitment to ethical practices, transparency, and taking ownership of responsibilities and outcomes.

____Conflict Resolution
Ability to mediate disagreements constructively and maintain positive relationships.

Preparing to be an Effective Facilitator

One of the most important mind-shifts that allows you to be effective in your role is consciously recognizing the need to become and remain neutral in order to facilitate engagement, ownership, and effective outcomes. Neutrality means you are not predisposed to a specific solution or innovation but are using your skills and tools to help people and organizations with different points of view and expertise to achieve needed results together, results for which they set and share goals. Your goal is to guide them

through their journey of exploration, installation of solutions and innovations, and the phases of successful implementation and iteration.

If you find yourself focusing on who you need to convince to see things your way or adopt your vision, you are not beginning your journey as a facilitator. Facilitation is not about persuading others to align with your perspective or executing your predetermined plan. Instead, it's about creating an environment where diverse voices can be heard, ideas can be co-created, and a shared vision can emerge.

Facilitation requires stepping back from the mindset of control or influence and stepping into the role of a guide and enabler. Your goal is to foster collaboration, build trust, and help the group navigate toward solutions they collectively own. When participants feel that their perspectives are valued and their contributions are shaping the outcomes, their commitment to success is stronger and more sustainable.

Starting your journey as a facilitator means shifting your mindset from "convincing" to "engaging." It involves asking questions instead of making statements, encouraging dialogue instead of directing decisions, and supporting the process rather than dictating the outcome. The power of facilitation lies not in getting others to see your vision but in helping the group create a vision together that they are motivated to pursue.

The work of Standard 1 begins with your personal analysis to "wrap your mind around" the current state of performance and the needed or desired state of performance. This enables you to think about what factors might be causing the gap between those states. Taking time to do a personal analysis before engaging others, prepares you to help others appropriately use the data they already have or can access, question the relevance and utility of the data to support improvement, validate the data to confirm it accurately reflects what is intended, and interpret the meaning or implications of the data.

It includes using both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data can be counted, measured, and expressed using numbers. Qualitative data is descriptive and conceptual. Qualitative data can be categorized based on traits and characteristics. When data does not exist, this will require you to use processes and tools to convert information to data.

This analysis and critical review allow you to personally:

- Develop an understanding of the systemic "as is" state of performance.

- Identify the barriers in the work, workers and workplace that are limiting improvement, as well as the strengths to be leveraged.

- Determine the gap between current behaviors, capacity and practices and results and those expected, required, and valued.

- Scan the culture and identify the underlying assumptions and beliefs that are limiting progress, as well as those that can be leveraged to support progress.

- Identify past successes, strengths, and aspirations that can be built upon to set and achieve shared goals.

- Prepare to engage those who must collaborate through data collection, analysis and identification of needs and opportunities so that understanding and ownership can be established over time.

To be an effective Collaborative Success Facilitator you must focus on outcomes and measurable results and display working knowledge of data collection, analysis, and measurement, including:

- The various types of data that are readily available.

- The types of data that will require additional effort, tools, and processes to collect.

- The types of data that allow study of causal relationships and leading or predictive indicators of performance.

- The types of data that give insight into the processes and performance factors inherent in the *work*, the *workers,* the *workplace,* and the *marketplace.*

- The types of data that give insights into past successes and accomplishments and existing or potential success factors.

- Appropriate methods of initial data collection and study that will facilitate those who do the work to commit to improving performance and innovating solutions.

By using the early phase of data collection and analysis to personally understand the needs, gaps, opportunities, and performance levels, you will be in a stronger position to later demonstrate to those you are guiding and supporting that your focus is on achieving results and outcomes. This approach sets the tone for engaging them in gathering the relevant data, measuring their own performance, and taking necessary actions to improve.

When you show that you are seeking data and analyzing performance factors that are *systemic*, you are helping others understand that performance improvement is not a simple task. Instead, it involves recognizing the interconnectedness of many factors that contribute to performance gaps . *Systemic* refers to the idea that performance issues do not exist in isolation but are influenced by broader patterns and structures within the organization, team, or system. This perspective helps everyone involved realize that addressing performance gaps requires solutions that consider the whole system and address underlying causes at multiple levels, rather than quick fixes or isolated actions.

By focusing on these systemic factors, you help create a shared understanding that meaningful and sustainable improvement requires a thoughtful, comprehensive approach. The goal is to identify and implement a range of solutions that are aligned with the overall system and that will lead to real, lasting changes and breakthroughs.

The focus on inquiry and data shifts attention away from the individuals involved and their roles, and redirects it toward uncovering the facts, rather than relying on assumptions or jumping to conclusions. Whether or not those you support have been directly responsible for past performance, they may carry assumptions based on their personal experiences, either from their current or previous roles, or from past experiences as customers, clients, students, or other stakeholders. For example, many people believe they understand how schools operate and how to improve them because they have been students or have had children in school. However, this is often a barrier to collaboration in school improvement efforts, as it oversimplifies the complexities schools face.

Schools, like many organizations, are complex "open systems" influenced by various external factors such as regulatory, social, demographic, and economic conditions. These factors impact how teaching and learning unfold, and the efforts required to ensure all

students succeed academically and in life. To help improve performance, it is essential to set aside these assumptions, recognize biases, and focus on understanding the systemic factors that impact performance. This includes acknowledging challenges like the impact of poverty on student performance and other contextual elements that may hinder success.

In every sector and organization, systemic factors can influence performance. Your role as a facilitator is to help stakeholders recognize these factors and avoid common pitfalls that could prevent them from achieving their goals. The tools and techniques in this Playbook are designed to help you facilitate change and innovation, but a frequent challenge is putting aside your own views. It is crucial to work from data and facts, not intuition or assumptions. While your knowledge and experience are valuable, Standard I encourages you to pair your insights with data analysis and critical judgment. This ensures you are guiding others effectively and avoiding premature solutions.

As noted, to function effectively as a Collaborative Success Facilitator, you must gather both qualitative and quantitative data through effective questioning. Quantitative data alone only provides a partial view of performance. Your inquiry must be unbiased, focusing on understanding deeply what is happening and why. When choosing who to interview or survey, be deliberate. Honor the roles, authority, and perspectives of the people you are engaging to ensure they feel respected and understood.

Using Empathy Interviews to Collect Qualitative Data and Information

An empathy interview is a structured conversation designed to understand someone else's experience, perspective, needs, motivations, and constraints, not to persuade, solve, or judge.
Its purpose is to help collaborators:

- See the work through others' eyes

- Surface assumptions and blind spots

- Build trust and psychological safety

- Design solutions that reflect real needs, not guesses

Use Tool 1.3 *Empathy Interview Tool* to understand "What is it like to be you in this situation?"

Tool 1.3 Empathy Interview Tool

Guidelines for when to use this tool:

- Before designing solutions or initiatives.
- When collaboration feels stuck or misaligned.
- When key stakeholders feel unheard or resistant.
- When decisions affect people with different roles, power, or context.

How to Do an Empathy Interview

1. Set the Frame (2–3 minutes)

   - State the purpose clearly: to understand, not fix..
   - Emphasize respect and confidentiality.
   Sample opener:

   "I'm here to understand your experience so we can make better decisions together, not to respond or solve today."

2. Ask Experience-Based Questions

   Choose 3–5 questions that focus on what it's like to be them in this situation. For example:
   - Can you walk me through a typical day when this comes up?
   - What feels most challenging or frustrating?
   - What matters most to you here?
   - What pressures or constraints are you navigating?
   - What's working better than people might assume?

3. Listen Deeply

   Talk less than you think you should. Allow silence. Notice emotion, tone, and energy.
   Reflect what you hear using phrases like:
   - It sounds like…
   - What I'm hearing is…
   - It seems the hardest part is…

4. Gently Probe for Meaning

   Go deeper, not wider:
   - Can you say more about that?

- Why is that important to you?
- What happens when that doesn't go well?

5. Close with Appreciation

Thank them for their honesty. Name what you learned. Do not promise outcomes you can't control.

What to Avoid:
- Jumping to solutions.
- Defending decisions or explaining the system.
- Asking leading or loaded questions.
- Minimizing or correcting feelings.
- Treating it like a survey or interrogation.

Capture Output Immediately After by Briefly Noting:
- Key themes you heard.
- Needs or constraints surfaced.
- Assumptions challenged.
- Questions this raises for the group

An empathy interview asks, *"What is it like to be you in this situation?" and* listens long enough to truly hear the answer.

After the interviews, empathy interviews are translated into quantitative data. Empathy interviews generate rich qualitative insight. To support prioritization, decision-making, and shared understanding, those insights can be translated into simple quantitative patterns, without losing their human meaning.

Use Tool 1.4 *Empathy Interpretation Guide* to quantify common needs and constraints and compare perspectives across roles or groups. It can be used to prioritize actions based on evidence and communicate findings clearly to leaders and teams.

Tool 1. 4 Empathy Interpretation Guide

Step 1: Identify Common Themes
After interviews, review notes, and highlight:
- Repeated issues.
- Strongly expressed concerns.
- Constraints affecting performance.

- Needs tied to outcomes.

Convert these into neutral theme statements, not judgments.

For example:

- Lack of role clarity.
- Time and workload pressure.
- Limited voice in decisions.
- Communication gaps.
- Strong commitment despite constraints.

Step 2: Create a Simple Coding List

Assign each theme a short code. This list becomes your coding framework.

Code	Theme	
T1	Role clarity	
T2	Time pressure	
T3	Voice in decisions	
T4	Communication	
T5	Commitment	

Step 3: Code Each Interview

For each interview, mark whether a theme appears.

Option A – Frequency (recommended):

- Mentioned = 1
- Not mentioned = 0

Option B – Intensity (optional):

1 = Brief mention.

2 = Explained with examples.

3 = Strong emotion or repeated emphasis.

Step 4: Aggregate the Results

Count how often each theme appears across interviews.

Theme	# Times Mentioned	In % of Interviews
		%
		%

Theme	# Times Mentioned	In % of Interviews
		%

Step 5: Interpret with Care

Always pair numbers with brief meaning. For each theme, add:

• One short explanatory sentence.

• (Optional) One representative quote.

Examples:

• *80% of participants reported role clarity challenges, primarily related to decision authority rather than task expectations.*

• *"I am not sure if I can agree to team members' requests or need to ask for permission to do what they ask."*

Regardless of your past experiences or your impressions of the organizations and individuals you are facilitating, the context and time you are working in is unique. The performance factors at play are specific to that context. Your first responsibility is to set aside assumptions, hunches, and opinions. Approach the situation with an open mind and use a systematic inquiry process to identify what is truly contributing to current performance and what might be impeding it.

Performing Initial Gap and Factors Analysis

Two other effective "lenses" for your inquiry are Performance Gap Analysis and Performance Factors Analysis. Use Tool 1.3 *Performance Gap Analysis* to determine your initial data-driven and unvalidated perception of what the current state of performance and results are, and the desired or potential state.

Tool 1.5 Performance Gap and Factors Analysis

Guidelines: Use the questions to define the gap between what exists and what is needed or imagined.

1. What is the performance challenge or innovation opportunity that is being analyzed?
2. What is the current state of the performance challenge or innovation opportunity? Use data and information collected to support what you think you understand now.
3. What is the desired or aspirational state? What information and data informed your current understanding?

Use Tool 1.4 *Performance Factors Analysis* to determine the factors creating or impacting the gap between the current and desired or aspirational state. Remember you are not looking for solutions, but factors or symptoms you can identify through unbiased analysis of performance factors.

Tool 1.6 Performance Factors Analysis

Guidelines: Use the questions to consider the factors in the marketplace, workplace, work, and workers that are impacting, or can impact the performance gap. Do <u>not</u> generate solutions.

1. What factors in the *marketplace* are impacting performance and results? Or creating opportunities? Consider economic, demographic, political, social, policy and regulatory changes, industry trends, innovations, and competitors.

2. What factors in the *workplace* are impacting performance and results? Or creating opportunities? Consider the organizational culture; structure and processes; the work environment including the physical environment, technology, and tools; healthy and safety, collaboration, and communication; policies and management practices; change readiness; clarity of goals and purposes; resource allocation; and other factors inside the organization(s) impacting performance, results, and innovation.

3. What factors in the *work* are impacting performance and results? Or creating opportunities? Consider the design, complexity, and variety of the work involved, as well as the clarity of roles and responsibilities, and distribution of workloads; the skills and competencies required and their alignment to employee's skills and assigned work, and access to training and development; access to tools and resources, including technology support and distribution of the resources to do the work; workflow and processes; performance expectations; team dynamics, support systems, and communication related to the work; physical, cognitive, and emotional demands of the work; alignment of the work with organizational goals and the connections between daily work and outcomes; autonomy and decision making; and feedback and support.

4. What factors in the *workforce* impact performance and results? Or create opportunities? Consider skills and competencies; knowledge and experience, attitudes and mindsets demonstrated; physical and mental well-being; relationships and social capital; work readiness; motivation and willingness; adaptability, creativity, and emotional intelligence; personal barriers to performance; and sense of purpose, fit, and opportunity.

Your role as a facilitator at this point is not to assume what is happening or how to fix it, but to ask the right questions, uncover the facts, and prepare to guide others through the process of discovery. Using data and focusing on facts demonstrates that you are neutral and objective in your approach. This positions you as a credible, trustworthy facilitator, helping others recognize that when you offer your expert opinion later, it is grounded in thorough, unbiased investigation.

As a Collaborative Success Facilitator, you are likely supporting individuals and organizations facing complex, ill-defined problems. These are the kinds of challenges we encounter every day—where key aspects of the situation aren't clearly specified, the goals may seem unclear, and there is often insufficient information to solve them right away. But don't be discouraged! These challenges are exactly where your role becomes critical.

By applying structured inquiries, gathering data, and engaging stakeholders in collaborative problem-solving, you can help clarify the situation, define the goals, and uncover the necessary information. Although the road ahead may feel uncertain at times, your critical thinking and facilitation skills will guide the team toward effective solutions.

This process is not about having all the answers from the start but about creating a space for discovery and progress. Every step you take, whether it's gathering data, engaging stakeholders, or facilitating conversations, brings you closer to turning ambiguity into clarity and uncertainty into actionable solutions. Your work makes it possible to transform unclear, complex problems into opportunities for improvement and innovation. So, embrace the challenge and trust in your ability to guide the process toward meaningful, sustainable results.

Understanding Past Experiences

It may help to prepare to survey your potential collaborators about the types of facilitation they have experienced in the past that have not been successfully implemented. Ask them about their past experiences, looking for these symptoms that may impact their perspectives and engagement. Also ask about what worked well in these efforts in their past experiences. These may have included:

Strategic Planning: Collaborative efforts to develop a strategic plan that, while well-intentioned, lacked clear follow-through, accountability, or alignment with actual day-to-day operations. This may have resulted in the plan gathering dust on a shelf rather than guiding action.

Goal-Setting or Performance Planning: Facilitations focused on setting organizational or team goals that were overly ambitious, unclear, or disconnected from the resources or support needed to achieve them. Often, these efforts result in a lack of sustained engagement or disappointment when outcomes aren't realized.

Process Improvement Initiatives: Facilitations aimed at improving specific processes (e.g., workflow, communication, or customer service) that failed due to lack of stakeholder buy-in, insufficient data, or a failure to address underlying root causes, leaving participants feeling disengaged or frustrated.

Change Management: Facilitations that tried to guide organizations through major changes (e.g., restructuring, new technology implementation, or shifts in culture) but were unsuccessful because they didn't adequately prepare staff, communicate effectively, or provide the necessary training and resources.

Team Building or Collaboration Exercises: Collaborative team-building activities that did not result in lasting relationship-building or increased cooperation, often because they were too superficial, failed to address deeper conflicts or misalignments, or were perceived as one-time events rather than ongoing efforts.

Innovation or Idea Generation Workshops: Facilitations focused on fostering creativity and innovation that didn't produce actionable outcomes due to lack of structure, unclear objectives, or failure to prioritize ideas and resources for implementation.

Visioning or Future-Focused Sessions: Facilitations where participants were encouraged to envision an ideal future or long-term outcomes, but where those visions weren't grounded in reality, lacked clear steps for achieving them, or weren't aligned with the organization's resources or current priorities.

Conflict Resolution: Facilitations aimed at resolving organizational or team conflicts that failed due to insufficient trust, unresolved power dynamics, or an inability to find common ground, leaving participants feeling unheard or unwilling to collaborate.

Training or Development Programs: Facilitated professional development initiatives that didn't lead to meaningful application or improvement because they were disconnected from participants' real-world challenges or lacked proper follow-up support.

These types of facilitation efforts can fail if they lack a clear and sustainable plan for implementation, don't address underlying systemic factors, or fail to maintain engagement and accountability over time. The degree to which those participating in those efforts feel they are seen, heard, and valued are critical. As a Collaborative Success Facilitator, understanding their past experiences can help you guide collaborators toward more effective and results-driven efforts.

Keep the Focus on the Work, Not on You

During the beginning of your process of wrapping your mind around the gap between what is and what can be, successful facilitators have shared that it is critical at this point to be sensitive to how you are perceived and purposefully work to build trust. Never take on the work, envision solutions, or advocate for outcomes. Your role is understanding before engaging others in exploring, analyzing, making decisions, and creating shared goals and solutions.

The guidance in Chapters 2, 6, and 8 will support you in helping others engage and work collaboratively. Participants in our certification frequently tell us they feel reading Chapter 8 before engaging others is key to success for them and those they guide and support!

Chapter Summary

The work of Standard 1, *Analyze and Apply Critical Judgment* is essential throughout the performance improvement cycle. It begins at the start and continues as new data and information is collected, analyzed, and interpreted, shaping decisions and actions that drive improvement. Meeting this standard requires expertise in accessing, collecting, and

analyzing various data types to enhance the complex systems of work, workplace conditions, and the will, skills, and readiness of workers. It requires focusing on people and processes and paying attention to helping those who need to collaborate feel seen, heard, and valued and learn with and from each other for shared success.

Being an effective Collaborative Success Facilitator goes beyond knowledge of practices, principles, and tools. It requires playing multiple roles, which we will explore in later chapters. To become a trusted and credible facilitator, you must demonstrate expertise in key competencies that convince others of the value you bring. This expertise is not just about what you know or can do; it's about being perceived as adding value that others cannot easily replicate. If stakeholders believe they already have the skills, resources, and time to handle the challenges themselves, they won't recognize your contribution.

To establish your value, you must help them recognize the gap between what they can do on their own or have experienced in the past and what you can offer. They need to feel they require your help, trust that you are neutral, and believe you are committed to their success. In later chapters, we will explore strategies for building your credibility and empowering others to succeed.

An Effective Application of Standard 1

Collaborative Success Facilitator was asked to support a multi-partner nonprofit coalition concerned about declining participation and funding. Rather than beginning with solutions or recommendations, the facilitator started with disciplined inquiry to understand the system.

Before engaging the full group, she conducted interviews across roles and organizations, reviewed existing performance data, and examined trends over time. She intentionally looked for patterns rather than isolated issues, noting differences between assumptions held by leadership and the lived experience of staff and volunteers.

Throughout her analysis, the facilitator remained neutral. When leaders shared strong opinions about what was "really wrong," she acknowledged their perspectives without validating them as fact. She treated all input as hypotheses to be tested, not truths to be

confirmed. As patterns emerged, the facilitator documented gaps between the current and desired states of performance and identified potential contributing factors across the work, workplace, workforce, and broader context. She resisted the temptation to label causes prematurely, instead framing her findings as **questions for shared exploration.**

When she was ready to engage others, she did not present conclusions. Instead, she invited participants into the analysis, "Here's what I think I'm seeing, and I want to check this with you. What feels accurate? What doesn't? What might we be missing?"

By approaching analysis as preparation for collaborative learning, not expert diagnosis, the facilitator established credibility, trust, and readiness for shared ownership. Participants were willing to engage because they felt respected, not judged, and because the inquiry focused on understanding before action.

A Less Effective Application

A facilitator was invited to help an organization address declining participation and funding. Based on his prior experience, he quickly formed an opinion about the problem and began preparing recommendations.

He reviewed limited data, focused primarily on financial trends, and relied heavily on his past success with similar organizations. He did not seek input across roles or explore how people experienced the work on a daily basis. When he met with leaders, he framed his analysis as conclusions, "I've seen this before. You need to modernize your offerings and change how you market yourselves."

Because the facilitator treated his perspective as authoritative, leaders became defensive. Some felt blamed for past decisions, while others disengaged, assuming the direction had already been decided. When broader stakeholders were later invited into the process, they reacted with skepticism. They had not been part of the inquiry and did not recognize the analysis as reflecting their reality.

Although the facilitator believed he was being efficient, his lack of disciplined, neutral analysis undermined trust and limited engagement. The effort stalled before meaningful collaboration could begin.

Do and Avoid

Reflect on Chapter 1, your assessment and analysis, and commitments. Capture in the chart provided what you will do and avoid doing as you conduct your preliminary analysis.

Do	Avoid