

Do we need an outside facilitator?

A decision guide for important meetings, conversations, and group choices.

Consider the questions below. The more often you answer “yes,” the more likely an external facilitator will materially improve the outcome.

Stakes & Consequences - *If the stakes are high, process quality matters as much as content.*

- Is this a high-impact decision where getting it wrong -- or only partially right -- would be costly to the business, the relationships, or the culture?

Complexity of the Issue - *Complex problems benefit from skilled process design and facilitation.*

- Is this a complex issue with multiple perspectives, real trade-offs, and no obvious right answer — where the conversation itself is as challenging as the content?

History & Baggage - *When history is present, neutrality and trust become critical.*

- Does this issue carry history — previous failed attempts, unspoken tensions, or sensitive topics — that could make it hard for the group to engage openly?

Power & Role Dynamics - *A facilitator can create space for honesty without political cost.*

- Will power differences or dual roles (leading and participating) make it difficult for people to speak candidly or for leaders to both engage and manage the process?

Quality of Conversation - *Good facilitation turns conversation into shared thinking, not just airtime.*

- Do your conversations reliably lead to shared understanding and progress—or do they tend to stall, favor certain voices, or avoid real disagreement?

Decision Clarity - *Process clarity is often the difference between true alignment and tacit agreement.*

- Is there a risk that the group is unclear about how decisions are made, leading to weak buy-in, second-guessing, or decisions being revisited later?

Time & Focus - *Skilled facilitation accelerates progress without rushing judgment.*

- Is time limited and focus essential—such that you need to make the most of being together and reach meaningful outcomes efficiently?

Desired Outcomes - *Sometimes the how is as important as the what.*

- Is the goal not just a decision, but stronger trust, shared ownership, and a group that leaves aligned, committed, and energized?

RULE OF THUMB: If you answered “yes” to three or more questions, an outside facilitator will likely help both the quality of the conversation and the outcome.