Professional Development Pamphlet Series: No. 1

Defining
Forms of Group Work

By

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Professional Development Pamphlet Series

Raison d'être

Our intention in initiating this effort is to address the following concerns:

- To establish the IAF as a vital resource for professional development.
- To encourage professional development both regionally and eventually globally.
- To create links between practitioners and academic research in the area of facilitation and group work.
- To highlight the extensive experience and skill of many of the facilitators in the region.
- To promote a dialogue among facilitators on the future direction and development of the profession.
- To build recognition in the larger society of the added value facilitation brings to any group work situation.

The Concept

A pamphlet written by IAF members in Europe will be published each quarter (i.e. 4 per year). Members are invited to propose a topic for a pamphlet using the above list of values as a guide. More importantly, it is intended that members will draw upon their knowledge and experience to address issues they feel are crucial to the field of facilitation.

If you are interested in writing a pamphlet contact Jim Campbell at jim.campbell@icab.be and he will send you the submission form and further practical information.

Cost:
IAF Members—no charge
All others—Five Euros

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Introduction

The Purpose

The word *facilitate* is derived from *facile* which comes from the Latin word, *facilis,* meaning *easy to do*[1]. I first started to hear the word facilitation used in reference to group work in the mid-1980s. "The role of facilitator only emerged as a separate set of skills in the 1980s."[2] And while the more academically rigorous research is somewhat ambiguous about the benefits of facilitation,[3] the anecdotal evidence is very strong that facilitation can have a transforming effect on groups and their ability to accomplish their task. What then is facilitation and how is it different from the many other group work approaches that have emerged in the last half century or so? These are the questions this paper is seeking to address.

The Approach

I will approach this challenge by doing three things. First, I will identify and define nine forms of group work. Then I will look at a matrix, with the nine forms across the top and 6 areas down the side, to help us compare and contrast the forms.[4] Finally, I will distinguish the uniqueness of facilitation in relation to the other forms of group work.

> *I believe that facilitation is in its early days of formation. It is a growing and expanding profession; it is premature to put facilitation in a box and seal it up*

An Incomplete Journey

It is important to be clear at the outset that this paper is a snap shot of the current situation. I believe that facilitation is in its early days of formation. It is a growing and expanding profession; it is premature to put facilitation in a box and seal it up. In a few years I am sure our perception of facilitation will be different and we will need to rewrite this paper. However, I also believe that we have learned and experienced enough to be able, for this exercise to be relevant to us today, to undertake this analysis.

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[1] facile. (n.d.). *Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition (v 0.9.6).* Retrieved October 27, 2006, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/facile

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facilitation_%28business%29

[3] Schwarz, Roger. *The Skilled Facilitator*, Jossey-Bass Inc., 1994. (page 6)

[4] Adapted from a matrix developed by John Epps, et.al., LENS International.

The Nine Forms

Facilitation

The following are a few of the many definitions it is possible to find for facilitation.

1. Group facilitation is a process in which a person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral, and has no decision-making authority, intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to increase the group's effectiveness.[5]

2. Facilitation is the design and management of structures and processes that help a group do its work and minimize the common problems people have working together.[6]

3. Facilitation is a way of providing leadership without taking the reins. As a facilitator, your job is to get others to assume responsibility and to take the lead.[7]

I have found Roger Schwarz's definition (number 1 above) to be the most inclusive and the one which is most enabling to group's seeking to understand the nature of facilitation. The following expands upon the definition taken from his book.

> **The facilitator's main task is to help the group increase effectiveness by improving its process and structure.** *Process* refers to how a group works together. It includes how members talk to each other, how they identify and solve problems, how they make decisions, and how they handle conflict. *Structure* refers to stable recurring group process, examples being group membership or group roles. In contrast, *content* refers to what a group is working on. The content of a group discussion might be whether to enter a new market, how to provide high-quality service to customers, or what each group member's responsibilities should be. Whenever a group meets it is possible to observe both content and process. For example, in a discussion of how to provide high-quality service, suggestions about installing a customer hotline or giving more authority to those with customer contact reflect content. However, members responding to only certain colleagues' ideas or failing to identify their assumptions are facets of the group's process.

> *Underlying the facilitator's main task is the fundamental assumption that ineffective group process and structure reduce a group's ability to solve problems and make decisions.*

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[5] Schwarz, Roger. ibid (page 4)

[6] Justice, Thomas & Jamieson, David W., *The Facilitator's Field book,* AMA Publications 1999. (page 5)

[7] Bens, Ingrid, *Facilitating With Ease,* Jossey-Bass, Inc. 2000. (page 7)

Underlying the facilitator's main task is the fundamental assumption that ineffective group process and structure reduces a group's ability to solve problems and make decisions. Although research findings on the relationship between process and group effectiveness are mixed (Kaplan, 1979), the premise of this book is that by increasing the effectiveness of the group's process and structure the facilitator helps the group improve its performance and overall effectiveness. The facilitator does not intervene directly in the content of the group's discussion; to do so would require the facilitator to abandon neutrality and reduce the group's responsibility for solving its problems.

To ensure that the facilitator is trusted by all group members and that the group's autonomy is maintained, the facilitator should be acceptable to all members of the group; this person needs to be substantively neutral—that is, display no preference for any of the solutions the group considers—and not have substantive decision-making authority. In practice, the facilitator can meet these three criteria only if he or she is not a group member. A group member may be acceptable to other members and may not have substantive decision-making authority yet have a substantive interest in the group's issues. By definition, a group member cannot *formally* fill the role of facilitator. Still, **a group leader or member can use the principles and techniques I describe in this book to help a group.** Effective leaders regularly facilitate their groups as part of their leadership role.

To *intervene* means "to enter into an ongoing system" for the purpose of helping those in the system (Argyris, 1970, p.15). The definition implies that the system, or group, functions autonomously—that is, the group is complete without a facilitator. Yet the group depends on a facilitator for help. Consequently, **to maintain the group's autonomy and to develop its long-term effectiveness, the facilitator's interventions should decrease the group's dependence on the facilitator.** Ideally, the facilitator accomplishes this by intervening in a way that teaches group members the skills of facilitation.[8]

Training

The generally accepted meaning of training in relation to working with groups is to educate or instruct. It assumes that the trainer/instructor has some knowledge, skill or attitude to impart to the students or participants in the training event. The second assumption is that the participants have a need for the skill, knowledge or attitude that is the focus of the training. The role of the participants in a training event is to understand and acquire the focus of the training and to use it in their future activities.

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[8] Schwarz, Roger. ibid. (Pages 4-6).

The trainer should understand the content focus of the training and have an appreciation of learning processes and the skills to implement effective training techniques.

Usually the results or effectiveness of training is measured by identifying the change in behaviour that the training has occasioned.

Recently some authors, referring to, "The modern revolution in learning",[9] use the term facilitation and talk about a facilitator as "a person who has the role of empowering participants to learn in an experiential group."[10] The following explanation helps us to understand the use of the term facilitation in this context.

> **Facilitation of learning.** Teaching is no longer seen as imparting and doing things to the student, but is redefined as facilitation of self-directed learning. How people learn, and how to bring about this process, become the focus of concern rather than the old-style pre-occupation with how to teach things to people; and with this goes a significant shift in the onus of responsibility. In the old model, the teacher is principally responsible for student learning. In the new model, the primary responsibility rests with the self-directing learner; and only secondarily with the facilitator.[11]

Content Consultation (Consultant as technical expert)
The following is a summary of what is generally meant by the term consultation.

> Consultation is a two-way interaction—a process of seeking, giving and receiving help. Consulting is aimed at aiding a person, group organization, or larger system in mobilizing internal and external resources to deal with problem confrontation and change efforts.

> *Consultation is a two-way interaction—a process of seeking, giving and receiving help.*

> The values, intentions, and behaviors of consultative interaction differ from those of leadership, supervision, evaluation, therapy, and friendship. However, many people function in a consultative way when carrying out some of the tasks involved in their primary roles as administrators, supervisors, counselors, therapists, friends, or parents.

> The role of a growing number of people in our society is labeled *consultant* to describe their helping functions. Many of these consultants are designated as *external* because they function as helpers from the outside

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of a system. Others perform as *internal* consultants, operating as part of the systems they are attempting to help.[12]

The same authors also present a very helpful summary of the role characteristics of the consultant as a technical expert.

1. *Problem Verification:* by "expert" evaluation and collection of data.
2. *Problem Solving:* provides ideas and opinions, designs research for data, and develops solution for the client-system.
3. *Feedback:* presents research data with "expert" interpretations.
4. *Utilization of Research:* makes specific and concrete recommendations based on data.
5. *Relationship to Client:* is objective, detached, and task oriented. Connection is short term and problem oriented.
6. *Involvement:* is primarily with the problem to be solved.
7. *Systems Approach:* concern is with implications of the problem for other parts of the organization.[13]
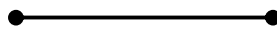
The next three categories, **Negotiation**, **Mediation** and **Conflict Resolution** are all group processes which take place between two or more groups rather than just within a group; however, people often ask about them in relation to group facilitation so I have included them here.

Negotiation

Negotiation is the process where interested parties resolve disputes, agree upon courses of action, bargain for individual or collective advantage, and/or attempt to craft outcomes which serve their mutual interests. Negotiation is usually regarded as a form of alternative dispute resolution. The first step in negotiation is to determine whether the situation is in fact a negotiation. The essential qualities of negotiation are: the existence of two parties who share an important objective but have some significant difference(s). The purpose of the negotiating conference is to seek to compromise the difference(s). The outcome of the negotiating conference may be a compromise satisfactory to both sides, a standoff (failure to reach a satisfactory compromise) or a standoff with an agreement to try again at a later time. Negotiation differs from "influencing" and "group decision making."

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[12] Lippitt, Grodon and Lippitt Ronald, *The Consulting Process in Action* (2nd. Edition), Pfeiffer & Co., 1986. (page 1)

[13] Lippitt, Grodon and Lippitt, Ronald, ibid (page 59).

In the advocacy approach, a skilled negotiator usually serves as advocate for one party to the negotiation and attempts to obtain the most favorable outcomes possible for that party.[14]

Mediation

Mediation comprises an act of bringing two states, sides or parties in a dispute closer together toward agreement through alternative dispute resolution (ADR), a dialogue in which a (generally) neutral third party, the mediator, using appropriate techniques, assists two or more parties to help them negotiate an agreement, with concrete effects, on a matter of common interest. More generally speaking the term "mediation" covers any activity in which an impartial third party (often a professional) facilitates an agreement on any matter in the common interest of the parties involved.

Mediation has sometimes been utilized to good effect when coupled with arbitration, particularly binding arbitration, a process called 'mediation/arbitration'. In this process, if parties are unable to reach resolution through mediation, the mediator becomes an arbitrator, shifting the mediation process into an arbitral one, seeking additional evidence as needed (particularly from witnesses, if any, since witnesses are normally not called upon by a mediator), and finally rendering an arbitral decision.[15]

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution or conflictology is the process of attempting to resolve a dispute or a conflict. Successful conflict resolution occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet each side's needs and adequately address their interests so that they are each satisfied with the outcome. Conflict resolution aims to end conflicts before they start or lead to verbal, physical or legal fighting.

Resolution methods can include conciliation, mediation, arbitration or litigation.

Conflict resolution usually involves two or more groups with opposing views regarding specific issues, and another group or individual who is considered to be neutral in their opinion on the subject. This last bit though is quite often not entirely demanded if the "outside" group is well respected by all opposing parties. Resolution methods can include conciliation, mediation, arbitration or litigation.

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[14] Negotiation, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. http//:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negotiation. 16 October 2006.

[15] Mediation, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. http//:en wikipedia.org/wiki/mediation. 16 October 2006.

These methods all require third party interventions. A resolution method which is direct between the parties with opposing views is negotiation. Negotiation can be the "traditional" model of hard bargaining where the interests of the group far outweigh the working relationships concerned. The 'principled' negotiation model is where both the interests and the working relationships concerned are viewed as important.[16]

Moderation

Josef W. Seifert states the following in answer to the question, "What is moderation?"

> ...As a rule, nowadays, the leader is expected not to view himself as the one who dictates what is proper and what is to be done without asking those concerned. Rather he must let the group itself make its own decisions, or at least he must include its members' knowledge, their conceptions, and ideas in his decisions.

> One method that helps leaders live up to this expectation has become very popular (and rightly so) in recent years: the **moderation method.**

> Moderation means a lessening of intensity or extremeness. In the case of the moderation method it stands for:

> - A specific basic attitude of the leader (moderator)
> - Work in accordance with a certain methodology
> - Use of special aids and materials[17]

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Finally the last two types of group work, **Support Groups** and **Group Therapy,** are related more to the field of psychology. It is helpful to understand the distinction between these forms of group work and facilitation since facilitators do occasionally find themselves, in the course of their usual facilitation work, in situations which are beyond the competency of the typical facilitator and are really the domain of the professional in one or another area of mental health therapy.

Support Groups

Support groups do not usually have a facilitator as such. Usually there is a fairly simple process that is used every time the group gathers. This process is understood by all the participants and is one they all agree to and have found to accomplish their intention for the meeting. However there is usually someone, or

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[16] Conflict resolution, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
http//:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict resolution. 16 October 2006.
[17] *Visualization Presentation Moderation,* Seifert, Josef W., Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH, 2nd. Edition, 2002.

a small group, providing the sustaining force for the group's continuation and who is prepared to deal with any issues or problems that arise. If the group moves into larger activities (such as the advocacy mentioned below) this person or group often do fulfill the facilitator dynamic.

> In a **support group**, members provide each other with various types of nonprofessional, nonmaterial help for a particular shared burdensome characteristic. The help may take the form of providing relevant information, relating personal experiences, listening to others' experiences, providing sympathetic understanding and establishing social networks. A support group may also provide ancillary support, such as serving as a public relations voice or engaging in advocacy.[18]

Group Therapy

In group therapy the therapists play a significant role in both the content of the discussion and in guiding the interaction between the participants in the group. They are there not just to enable the process but to achieve definite goals relative to the issues being addressed by the group.

> **Group therapy** is a form of psychotherapy during which one or several therapists treat a small group of clients together as a group. This may be more cost effective than individual therapy, and possibly even more productive...In group therapy the interactions between the members of the group and the therapists become the material with which the therapy is conducted, alongside past experiences and experiences outside the therapeutic group. These interactions are not necessarily as positive as reported as above, as the problems which the client experiences in daily life will also show up in his or her interactions in the group, allowing them to be worked through in a therapeutic setting, generating experiences which may be translated to "real life". Group therapy may also include other therapeutic forms than "talk" therapy, such as creative therapy and psychodrama. Group therapy is not based on a single psychotherapeutic theory, but takes from many what works.[19]

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[18] Support Group – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Support_group. 11 January 2006.
[19] Group Therapy – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_therapy. 11 January 2006.

The Matrix

The following matrix is a way to compare and contrast these nine forms of group work. It is constructed from the perspective of the intervener, i.e. it is the intervener's expertise, it is the intervener's assumptions, etc. The following is a word of explanation on each of the six categories down the side of the matrix.[20]

- **Expertise**—Refers to the expertise needed by the person(s) doing the intervention. It is usually a combination of knowledge and skills acquired both through training and experience.

- **Assumes**—Refers to the presuppositions that the person(s) doing the intervention makes about the group (s)he is working with. This is often one of the most challenging areas for the intervener since clarity about one's assumptions is not always easy to achieve.

- **Relies on from group**—Refers to the presupposition(s) that the intervener makes about the group. While there may be many of these and they may vary from group to group, these are the fundamental presuppositions that help to define the intervention itself.

- **Relies on from self**—Refers to what fundamental skill, knowledge and/or attitude the intervener must have to be effective in a particular form of group intervention.

- **Seeks**—Refers to what the intervener intends to have happen in the group through his/her intervention.

- **Expected results**—this refers to the impact of the intervener's intention when (s)he accomplishes his/her intention.

FORMS OF GROUP INTERVENTION

CATEGORIES	Facilitation	Training	Content Consulting	Interventions with two groups or more			Moderation	Support Group	Group Therapy
				Negotiation	Mediation	Conflict Resolution			
EXPERTISE	Group literacy	Relevant Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes	Best practice and what has happened in the field.	Inter-group processes	Inter-group processes	Inter-group processes	Group literacy	Personal experience of shared characteristic	Content knowledge and ability to guide group interactions
ASSUMES	Group has wisdom and experience	Group seeking wisdom	Group needs expertise	Parties want a deal	Willingness to negotiate	Parties want to stop conflict	Group has wisdom and experience	Mutually agreed process	Participants seeking behavioral change
RELIES ON FROM GROUP	Content knowledge of group	Trust in the trainer & training process	Group trust and confidence in their expertise	Honesty about interests/needs	Commitment to process	Openness to dialogue	Content knowledge of the group	Openness to appropriate participation	Openness to interactions and input from therapists
RELIES ON FROM SELF	Ability to discern the appropriate process	Research & own training and learning	Own Past experience	Training and past experience	Ability to look inclusively at situation	To be detached and an honest broker	Ability to manage methodology and group processes	Depth of past personal experience	Knowledge and experience to set goals for group
SEEKS	Decisions owned by all	Student internalizes lessons	Compliance to recommendations	A win—win solution	Mutually agreed solution	Step by step confidence building measures	Group work under own responsibility	Sustaining individuals in daily life	Achieve goals relative to issues in group
EXPECTED RESULTS	Commitment and internalization	Changed behavior	Achieving the intended change	Negotiated settlement	Agreement with concrete effects	Cessation of hostilities	Group makes own decisions	Ability to function effectively	Group experience translates to real life

The Uniqueness of Facilitation

Roger Schwarz's definition of facilitation may be utilized as a guide for this section since I believe it holds all the fundamental characteristics that mark the field of facilitation. It is:

> "Group facilitation is a process in which a person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral, and has no decision-making authority, intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to increase the group's effectiveness."[21]

I am going to deconstruct this definition and use each major point to examine facilitation in relation to other forms of group intervention. In some cases there are similarities while in others there is sharp difference. Schwarz's definition has a very definite structure. It is organised into three major categories. These are:

- **What Facilitation is:** *Group facilitation is a process in which a person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral, and has no decision-making authority*
- **What Facilitation does:** *intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions*
- **Why Facilitation does it:** *in order to increase the group's effectiveness*

What Facilitation is

The first five words of Schwarz's definition identify two of the fundamental characteristics of facilitation; it is about a group and it is about process. While all of the nine forms we are looking at use a group setting, not all of them focus on the group to the extent that facilitation does. Indeed some of them use the group setting as a vehicle to bring about individual development and change rather than group development and change. Training is most often about individual learning and behavioural change. Likewise both support groups and group therapy focus on individual wellbeing and see the group setting as a tool to enable that wellbeing to be achieved. Negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution are **inter**-group processes rather than **inner**-group processes. While content consulting is focused on the group, it differs from facilitation in that it assumes that the wellbeing of the group depends upon the content of the consulting. Finally, moderation is most like facilitation in respect of maintaining a focus on the group and its development.

> *The first five words of Schwarz's definition identify two of the fundamental characteristics of facilitation. It is about a group and it is about process.*

In addition to group setting, facilitation is about group **process**. Indeed, when facilitating I usually say to a group that they are the content experts and I am the process expert and that together we are going to achieve their objectives. Of course, every time any group (even a group of two) gathers there is process involved; the

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critical question is, "Does the process enable the group or hinder the group in accomplishing their objectives?" What makes facilitation relatively unique from the other eight forms is its insistence on being un-content-full. Facilitation is about process, not content.

Both training and content consulting are about the trainer or consultant sharing their expertise with a group. Indeed most trainers and content consultants are employed precisely for the level of expertise they bring to the situation they are asked to address. Of the three inter-group processes negotiation is most like facilitation in the sense that negotiators are most likely not to become involved in the content of the situation but to focus on providing a process. Mediators and conflict resolution specialists are often called upon to make suggestions or otherwise become involved in the content of the situation. To the degree that any participant in a support group acts as a facilitator they do so as a support group member who is there for exactly the same reason the others in the group are there. In group therapy the therapist has definite objectives for the group, and in order to achieve these objectives (s)he both guides the process and enters into the content of the discussion. Finally, the moderator is most likely to resemble a facilitator in that they focus on process and enable the group to focus on the content.

The next part of Schwarz's definition gives us the three fundamental characteristics of the facilitator. The facilitator is a person;
- who is acceptable to all members of the group
- (who is) substantively neutral
- (who) has no decision-making authority

Being acceptable to all members of the group involves the trust and confidence that a group has to have in the person at the front of the room if they are going to participate and accomplish the objectives of the meeting. While the reasons are different, this characteristic is true for all nine group interventions. In facilitation the facilitator must establish that (s)he is indeed a process expert and capable of guiding the group through a process which will accomplish their objectives. Alternatively, trainers and content consultants are employed precisely because of their content knowledge and skill in the content area.

> *Being acceptable to all members of the group involves the trust and confidence that a group has to have in the person at the front of the room if they are going to participate and accomplish the objectives of the meeting. While the reasons are different this characteristic is true for all nine group interventions.*

In all three **inter**-group interventions the person doing the intervening must come into the situation with the confidence and trust of the participants already established or (s)he must quickly win it. Establishing or winning confidence and trust will be possible based on their process skill and their knowledge of the content of the situation. The moderator, like the facilitator, must establish their competence as a process expert to win acceptance from the group. In the support group situation anyone who assumes the facilitator role must model the appropriate group behaviour in order to secure the group trust. Finally, the therapist wins the acceptance of the group because of both their process expertise and in light of the relevance of their content interventions.

The third characteristic of the facilitator is one that has stimulated a great deal of discussion amongst facilitators. While closely related to the necessity of holding a position of being substantive neutral; to say that the facilitator "has no decision-making authority" immediately raises the question as to whether a person, endeavoring to facilitate their own group or team work, is facilitating. Since the vast majority of group events do tend to be facilitated by members from within their group this is an important question. In my practical experience I have approached this area in two ways. First, I point out that this is a crucial reason why it is preferable to use an external facilitator. Even someone from within the organisation, but not a member of the immediate group, is more likely not to have an agenda or feel that the decisions of the group have serious implications for their future. Second, I stress that while that may be the ideal it is often neither practical nor possible for a group. How then does a member of the group facilitate and honor the intention to forego decision-making authority? I believe the key here is **transparency**. Before starting a session the group needs to talk about the role of the facilitator and how they want to handle content interventions from the person playing the facilitator role. The person in the role of facilitator needs to share his concerns up front and express any reservations (s)he may have before commencing as facilitator. Finally the group needs to decide on some way to signal when the facilitator is digressing from the facilitation role and making a content intervention. This can be done, and with some practice, both individuals and groups can manage this quite effectively.

> *Therefore how does a member of the group facilitate and honor the intention to forego decision-making authority? I believe the key here is* **transparency.**

Again this characteristic is common to all nine group interventions. Both the trainer and the content consultant are employed to bring to the group content expertise that is not available internally. While both the trainer and the consultant can say "this is the way to do it", usually the decision remains with the group. In the **inter**-group interventions the intervener can suggest processes and even make suggestions regarding content but these are just that, suggestions. The participating groups must agree and decide. The only exception to this is in the case of binding arbitration; wherein groups agree to abide by the decision of a mediator or arbitrator after the mediator has had time to study and explore the situation. Again, moderation is most like facilitation in that a moderator needs to be without decision-making authority. In the case of the support group the person facilitating the group is also a member of the group and in a similar position as the facilitator facilitating their own group and therefore required to engage in similar practices as described in the previous paragraph. In group therapy the therapist has substantive power to make decisions about the process and about the type of content interventions (s)he will make. However, evaluations concerning relevance of the session are ultimately in the hands of the individual members.

What Facilitation does

Schwarz's definition continues; *[Group facilitation...] intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions.* Here we return to the centrality of the group in facilitation. Facilitation is about helping the group to work together. Almost all group work involves identifying and solving problems and making decisions; even extended planning can be seen to be an elaborate problem solving and decision-making process. Facilitation is about

intervention using the appropriate process which helps a group improve the way it does this work. The presupposition here is that, since the focus is on the group and their corporate work, the intervention requires a corporate process. Any corporate process will be one which builds the participation of all members in the group, respects the group's wisdom, and enables all the group's concerns and issues to be brought to the surface. These, along with others, are important characteristics of corporate processes used by facilitators in their group work. To compare with the other eight forms of intervention, with the exception of moderation, these characteristics are unique to facilitation

While a trainer also intervenes in a group (s)he does so for the sake of the individuals in the group. Trainers share knowledge, skills and accompanying attitudes with their focus on the individual and enabling the individual to internalize the material being presented and to allow it to guide their behaviour in the future.

The content consultant intervenes in the group in order to analyse the situation and develop a set of recommendations based on (her)his expertise. The consultant intervenes in order to be able to impart to a group what they believe they should do in the future. The group may or may not accept this advice and may or may not act upon it. Occasionally a consultant may be asked to implement (his)her recommendations; but in such cases they are no longer functioning as a consultant but have actually joined the group.

In the **inter**-group interventions, the negotiator, the mediator and the conflict resolution specialist are all concerned with the dynamics operating between the groups and not primarily with the dynamics within each group. While they may be compelled to become involved in **inner**-group dynamics for the sake of moving toward a resolution of the **inter**-group situation, this is a means to an end and not the primary focus of their work.

It is moderation which shares this characteristic in common with facilitation. The moderator uses processes to enable a group to work together, focusing on using appropriate group processes that will improve the way they work together.

In a support group the interventions that occur are designed to support and contribute to the wellbeing of the participants in the group. It is completely focused on the individuals and on ensuring that they receive the necessary support to deal with their individual issues.

In group therapy the therapist intervenes with definite objectives with respect to the individuals in the group. The group is utilized as a therapeutic tool for the care of the individual and the therapist uses both process interventions and content interventions to enable individual development rather than group development.

Given its focus on the group and given that corporate process interventions are designed to empower the group to accomplish its corporate work, facilitation occupies a relatively unique position in this matrix of group interventions.

Why Facilitation does it

Finally, Schwarz's definition says that all this is *in order to increase the group's effectiveness.* Here again the group is the focal point. Facilitation is about enabling a group to more effectively accomplish their objectives. The facilitator's process interventions are designed to move a group toward their objectives. However, the key here is identifying those objectives. While many groups have a good understanding of their objectives, it can often be the case that a facilitator's first task is to facilitate the group toward clarification of the group's objectives. Without clear objectives that are accepted by the group the facilitator faces a difficult task in determining the appropriate process to use to enable the group.

> *Without clear objectives that are accepted by the group the facilitator faces a difficult task in determining the appropriate process to use to enable the group.*

Again, this is about "group" facilitation, which is to say it is about the facilitator's interventions using corporate processes to develop the corporate effectiveness of the group. Though individuals may be empowered in many ways during these interventions, this is not the focus of these interventions; the focus is the corporate effectiveness of the group and the accomplishment of their objectives.

A trainer could also be concerned with increasing a group's effectiveness; however (s)he does so by equipping individuals in the group with the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to do the task. (His)Her focus is developing individual capacity and thus, hopefully, contributing to the overall capacity of the group.

The process consultant is also concerned with increasing a group's effectiveness but he does this by seeking to prescribe a definite future course for the group. It may be focused or it may be very broad but it is based on her(his) analysis of the group's situation and the application of his(her) best wisdom and experience.

The concern of the negotiator, the mediator and the conflict resolution specialist is not group effectiveness; it is the state of relations between the groups and how the tensions in those relationships can be resolved. The effectiveness of the groups involved may be increased as a result of their intervention work but it is not the primary objective of the work.

Again, moderation is very much like facilitation in that a moderator will be working to enable a group to make its own decisions and to use processes that accomplish this task effectively.

The effectiveness of a support group is measured not in terms of group effectiveness but in terms of the effectiveness of the group to support the individuals in the group. So the final measure of a support group is how helpful individuals find the group. Likewise in group therapy work, the effectiveness of the group is measured in terms of individual's behavioural changes and how closely these match the objectives of the therapist guiding the group.

Summary
From the analysis above the following conclusions can be drawn about facilitation and its relative uniqueness in the matrix of group interventions.

- One of the strongest distinguishing characteristics of facilitation is its focus on the group, rather than on the individual or the dynamic between groups. It shares this characteristic with moderation.
- Another strong characteristic is its focus on process rather than content. I would go further and say that it is not just process but specifically participatory processes that are fundamental to facilitation work.
- Rather than being diagnostic and prescriptive, facilitation seeks to enable a group to effectively discern a way forward for themselves.
- By emphasizing that a facilitator should have no decision-making authority and be substantively neutral, facilitation seeks to ensure that the group can accept the facilitator as a person who is truly neutral relative to the content and the decisions they are making under his(her) procedural guidance.
- Facilitation is about **inner**-group rather than **inter**-group processes and dynamics. This separates and distinguishes facilitation from negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution.

Conclusion

There are over 25 million meetings every day in the United States and over 85 million worldwide...Thus, what I call "group literacy" – an awareness of and strong skills in group dynamics, meeting facilitation and consensus building tools -...is essential to increasing the effectiveness of group meetings. Michael Doyle in the Foreword to Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making[22]

As I have written elsewhere,[23] the issue in many communities and organisations is the absence of effective processes to enable dialogue and authentic communication. We live in a world which is seemingly becoming more and more polarized. Increasingly we find it difficult to not only communicate but to reach agreements and to build plans for our common future. It is not that the issues are more difficult than they were in the past, it is rather we and our society that have changed. Today people are not ready to simply trust leaders (whether they are political, business, community or church). Old style public consultation—the experts telling the public what they are going to do—is no longer acceptable. We expect and are demanding to be involved in the decision-making processes of our communities and organisations. What is lacking are the processes that can effectively enable people holding widely diverse positions and representing very different interests and concerns to come together. Facilitation, by focusing on the group and upon participation in the process, has a fundamental and significant contribution to make to the future development of our communities and organisations in all sectors of society.

Facilitation is in its early days as an evolving profession and I hope this paper may contribute to clarifying our current understanding of the unique place facilitation holds in the spectrum of group work. Facilitation has a vital role to play in our communities, our work places and in the many organisations that seek to serve and meet the needs of our troubled world. While I try not to be naive about what it will take for people to appreciate the difference good facilitation can bring to a group, I have witnessed the energy, commitment, and motivation that good facilitation can release in a group, and have seen seemingly impossible differences of opinion succumb to processes which enable effective dialogue and true interchange. When asked what I do, most of the time I have to follow up my statement that "I am a facilitator" with an explanation of what that means. Yes, we have a long way to go. It is early days yet. The IAF was founded in 1994 making it one of the youngest professional associations in the world, however the promise is evident and the larger society's awareness and appreciation of it is growing.

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[22] Kaner, Sam. *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making,* New Society Publishers/Canada, 1996. (page viii)

[23] Schuman, Sandy (editor), *Creating a Culture of Collaboration,* Jossey-Bass, 2006. (James M. Campbell. Chapter Two, Renewing Social Capital: The Role of Civil Dialogue)

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