

Praise for the Revised Edition of *The Art of Facilitation*

"*The Art of Facilitation* picks up where most other books stop. It describes a whole new array of process tools in a totally accessible way. It delves into the underlying ethics of facilitation to clarify complex questions. This book is also beautifully written. After many years in the profession, I was surprised at the subtle way it helped me gain a new understanding of a number of important facilitation dilemmas.

A very insightful contribution to the field!"

—**INGRID BENS**, M.Ed., facilitation tutor, Sarasota, Florida, and author of *Facilitating with Ease*, *Advanced Facilitation Strategies*, and *Facilitating to Lead*

"Few books attempt such a broad scope and enriching view of group facilitation. Hunter provides a 'philosophy' of group facilitation, mixed with 'how to.' This is an impressive book, integrating a sincere concern for the reader's personal development."

—**SANDY SCHUMAN**, editor of *The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation*

"Dale Hunter is a giant among practitioners, one of the pioneers in the field, and *The Art of Facilitation* is a classic. This book distills Dale's years of experience into straightforward, practical advice. Her wisdom comes through in every chapter."

—**SAM KANER**, Ph.D., author of the international bestseller, *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*

"In *The Art of Facilitation*, Dale Hunter treats readers to an exploration of the field of facilitation at the same time she presents her unique approach. Throughout the book, in simple language, Hunter offers a powerful and important message—to facilitate others effectively you must facilitate yourself. Take Hunter's advice and your clients will thank you."

—**ROGER SCHWARZ**, author of *The Skilled Facilitator* and coauthor of *The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook*

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the art of
facilitation

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the art of facilitation

the essentials for leading great
meetings and creating group synergy

Dale Hunter

with Stephen Thorpe • Hamish Brown • Anne Bailey

REVISED EDITION

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But one day Banzo crept up behind him and gave him a terrific blow with a wooden sword. The following day, when Matajuro was cooking rice, Banzo again sprang upon him unexpectedly. After that, day and night, Matajuro had to defend himself from unexpected thrusts. Not a moment passed in any day that he did not have to think of the taste of Banzo's sword. Matajuro learned so rapidly that he brought smiles to the face of his master. He became the greatest swordsman in the land.

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The Art of Facilitation has influenced many aspiring group facilitators and helped to define the profession we call facilitation. Well-thumbed copies inform many facilitators' work. It is now time to bring the new knowledge gained in the last 13 years into the familiar pages, to re-energize the book and, hopefully, all who browse in it.

The first edition of *The Art of Facilitation* was written by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor, and published in 1994. It is a leader in the field of facilitation writing, a consistently favored facilitation text, and a long term Top-10 bestseller on Amazon in the categories of facilitation and facilitation of groups.

This fully revised and updated edition of *The Art of Facilitation* has been written by Dale Hunter, with contributions from Stephen Thorpe, Hamish Brown and Anne Bailey. While retaining the freshness and simplicity that have made the book so popular, it incorporates new thinking and research from the last 13 years and brings the book into the thick of facilitation debate.

The first three chapters of Part 1 are mostly new material, and describe the development of group facilitation as a profession, the role of the facilitator and a conceptual framework for facilitation. The remaining chapters in Part 1, addressing key elements of facilitation, have all been revised.

Only the first chapter of Part 2 was in the earlier book, and this has been revised. The new chapters explore facilitation in organizations, facilitation and ethics, sustainability, therapeutic group work, and online facilitation using the medium of the Internet and computing technology. Chapter 7, "Mapping the field of facilitation," covers some of the wide variety of approaches and methods that have now emerged in the field of facilitation.

facilitating another

Facilitation calls forth people's best intentions.

— Zenergy program participant

One-to-one facilitation

A group is made up of individuals, and much of the time a group facilitator will be interacting with the individuals in the group. In addition, the facilitator may sometimes work on a one-to-one basis as a coach. Like facilitating yourself, facilitating another person (one-to-one facilitation) is an important part of facilitating groups.

It is important to distinguish between different types of one-to-one facilitation, including coaching and therapeutic counselling. Facilitation takes place in a group setting and involves one-to-one interaction. Coaching is one-to-one facilitation (usually in private) where the person being coached (the coachee) is focused on exploring and clarifying an issue or achieving an objective or goal. Therapeutic counselling is a relationship that addresses such deep-seated conditions as trauma or depression. Sometimes there will be a crossover or grey area between coaching and therapy, so it is important to be on the alert for this and to know the level of your own knowledge and expertise.

If you are facilitating or coaching someone and you feel out of your depth, or they are very fearful, confused, withdrawn or acting strangely, don't persevere. Contact a more experienced facilitator or therapist for your own coaching or recommend that the person see a therapist or doctor.

Facilitation is not giving advice

Facilitating another person tends to come more easily than facilitating yourself. It is easier to see other people's patterns and blocks than to see your own. Often you want to tell others what to do — this is called giving advice.

Advice is telling someone what you think they ought to or should do. It comes from "I know better." Advice is not facilitative, especially if it is not requested. Even if it is requested, it is often not helpful because it fails to take into account that everyone is different and unique and will choose different experiences and ways of learning.

Facilitation recognizes that each person is perfect just the way they are — they are already whole and complete (which includes having problems and difficulties like all other human beings).

The values of respect and honoring underlie facilitation. I respect and honor you. It is a privilege for me to be with you and you with me. We matter: our time together matters.

This attitude of respect and honor is necessary before you can facilitate someone. "Attitude" means where you as facilitator are coming from, or where you are "standing." You will come from not assessing or judging people or taking account of society's view of them. You will accept them as whole people with their own values, behaviors and world-view.

If your attitude is that there is something wrong with the person you are to facilitate, then you are going to want to fix them up, or will expect the person to fix him- or herself up (with your help). This is more of "I know better." and it implies that you know what that person 'being fixed up' looks like. This is not a powerful place for a facilitator to come from.

Another way of saying this is that you need first to accept people the way they are if you are going to work with them as their facilitator. This does not mean that you need to like them or agree with them. But if you are unable to honor, respect and be with them, you cannot facilitate them.

If you are asked to give advice ("What do you think I should do?") to another person or within a group, you may like to use one of the following responses. All redirect the question to the advice-seeker.

"What alternatives can you generate for yourself?"

"I suggest you answer that question for yourself!"

"I notice a 'should' in there. Have you got some judgements or assessments about what is the right thing to do?"

"Would you like the group to generate some suggestions?"

"Are you asking for my opinion?"

"Is it illegal, immoral or unhealthy?"

If illegal: "What is the law?"

If immoral: "What is the principle or belief?"

If unhealthy: "What is the risk?"

Being with another

The first step in facilitating another person is to be able to be with them. This involves, firstly, being with yourself, in your own body, your own space, with your own thoughts and feelings, and being comfortable and at home with who you are. Secondly, it involves being with another, being comfortable and at home with them. Ask yourself the following questions:

Am I comfortable being with (name)?

Am I comfortable with their body?

Am I comfortable with their appearance?

Am I comfortable with their voice?

Am I comfortable with their expression of feelings?

Am I comfortable with them expressing their thoughts?

Am I comfortable with their gender or sexual orientation?

Am I comfortable with their ethnic group or culture?

Are they okay?

If you can be with another person with respect and honor – not wanting to make them different or better, or to fix them up – you are ready to learn about facilitating others. (See Being with another, Process 20, page 256.)

Living in different worlds

Everyone has a view of the world. Every view of the world is different. Everyone lives in different worlds.

I have a view of the world.

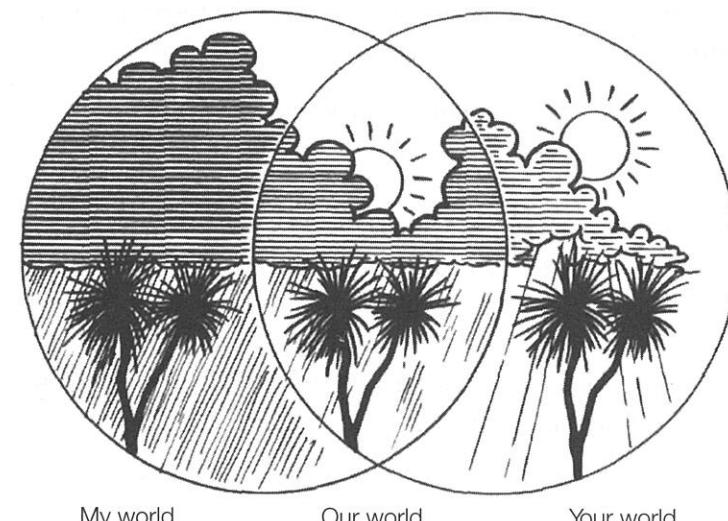


Fig 1.5.1 My world, your world

My world-view is unique.

This world-view is all-encompassing.

This is the way the world is.

You have a world-view.

Your world-view is unique.

Your world-view is all-encompassing.

This is the way the world is.

It is easy to assume that someone else's world is the same or similar to your own. Your way of experiencing the world is the way the world is. You assume others perceive (see/feel/think) things in the same way that you do. Otherwise how can you understand them?

Consider the possibility that you can never fully understand another person. Their mix of life experience (including culture, gender, sexual orientation, communities of interest and place, family, schooling, friends, age, work, recreation, values and beliefs) will always differ from your own. They are and will always be something of a mystery. This is both the joy and frustration of being with other people. You can have moments of being "at one," but this will not be ongoing.

What often happens is that people make a mental jump from seeing that

another's perceptions are different to assuming that their own perceptions are better.

"The way I see things is 'right'. The way you see them is 'wrong'."

Or:

"My experience with (childhood, school, marriage, work) was . . . , therefore you must have had similar experiences."

Or:

"I believe . . . about (sex, religion, marriage, politics, and so on). Surely you must have similar beliefs."

Or:

"I feel strongly about (abortion, the environment, child abuse, the role of women, and so on). Surely you must feel strongly about these things too."

If another person's behavior, beliefs and values are unacceptable to you (and some people's will be), don't work with them as a coach. It is important to recognize your own limits and not try to be more accepting than you really are. You may be able to refer the person to someone else who has more experience or a world-view that is more like theirs. (See *My world, your world*, Process 22, page 258.) As a group facilitator, however, you will come across people in groups with whom you have little empathy. Here you will need to practice the discipline of compassion. Try imagining the person as the innocent child they once were.

Projection

Another thing to become more conscious about is how you "project" your world (your past experiences) on to other people and situations. We all do this all the time. This is the way we make sense of and quickly interpret the world. It can be a safety mechanism to help us recognize danger quickly, but it also acts as a filter to experiencing the present directly.

Consider that you are "blinded" by your projections. You mostly see things through a "projection fog," playing your old movie over the top of what is happening now and connecting the moment-by-moment present

with your past. You may often become disappointed or surprised by other people because they do not fit your preconceived picture of how they might behave – based on other people you have known in the past who resemble them in some way. So you are often relating to a projected person rather than the real one who is with you.

We also live out our unresolved past experiences through new scenarios:

"All tall dark men remind me of my father and my unresolved feelings about him. I never date anyone who looks like that as all my unresolved feelings are stirred up immediately. I avoid those guys like the plague."

"When anyone who looks like or behaves like my mother is my boss, the relationship is always difficult. I always end up feeling misunderstood and not appreciated. It is so stupid. Even though I now have some consciousness about this, it still seems as if I go onto automatic pilot."

Such is the power of projections.

The identity check exercises (Processes 43 and 44, pages 285 and 286) are very useful for identifying your own projections about people and situations. This was my experience the first time I did this exercise:

We did the identity check in pairs and then shared in the whole group. There were 30 people there and we were sitting in a large circle. I have never forgotten the shock of looking around the room and "seeing" my mother, sisters, childhood friends, and adults I had known as a child, all present in the circle. I had been projecting my early "world" on to the present and was relating to all these people as though they were my family, early friends and associates. The people I warmed to reminded me of people I liked from the past and the people I was not attracted to reminded me of people who were associated with unpleasant memories.

Often you will be unconscious of the power of projections and the fact that most of your experience of the world is perceived second-hand through your version of reality.

Listening

Communication has been described as 80 percent listening and 20 percent speaking. Listening is a very important part of facilitation. Listening powerfully is a skill and a way of being with people. Listening can be full of assessments and judgements about the person being listened to, or it can be a period of time-out from speaking yourself. During this time you may mentally rehearse your own lines or fantasize about other things triggered by the conversation.

Alternatively, listening can be a powerful energy, which draws forth the authenticity of the other person. The listener can listen actively for the "gold" in the speaking, and create such a positive listening energy that the speaker will begin to speak and share themselves in a totally new way. Perhaps you can recall someone listening to you like this – you would have felt powerful and honored.

As a facilitator you need to be training your listening constantly. Listen to each person with whom you come into contact as though they are the most important person in the world. The irony is that the conversation you are having is indeed the most important one at that moment. Listen as though your life depends on it. Listen for the commitments, the dreams, the love, the vulnerability of the speaker. Listen for what lights the speaker up and makes them enjoy life. Listen for what expands, energizes and enlivens them.

As your listening develops, you will be amazed at how magnificent every person is and how love is present in your conversations.

Listen also for the conversation itself – what is being said and what is not being said; what is spoken from the heart and what is spoken from the head – "I feel" as opposed to "I think." Is the speaking a series of complaints, blaming others, self-criticism and descriptions of events, or is it creating a vision or dream, and opportunities to have this happen through action? What happens at the beginning, middle and end of the conversation (the structure)? Is the conversation left hanging in the air or is it complete and with opportunities for action?

Speaking — interventions

Out of powerful listening comes facilitative speaking. This is speaking that empowers the listener. Facilitation involves the use of questions and

suggestions (interventions) that encourage the other person to clarify and explore their own thoughts and feelings, and move themselves forward in line with the insights and connections they make.

Facilitating a person is about empowering them to:

- ⇒ Fulfil their dreams.
- ⇒ Create something new.
- ⇒ Have something happen that wasn't going to which will make a difference in their own lives and in their world.
- ⇒ Catch their own patterns and blocks.
- ⇒ Identify what they want to happen next.

Facilitation is not about interpreting someone else's world. Interpretations are only valid or useful if there is agreement by the client. And it is not about giving advice or your opinion.

Facilitative speaking can be reflective

You can reflect back the content of what has been said:

- "What you have said is . . ."
- "What I heard you say is . . ."

Or you can reflect back the spirit of what has been said in an empowering way:

- "I can hear that you are concerned about . . ."
- ". . . are committed to . . ."
- ". . . are making a contribution towards . . . project through . . ."
- ". . . have a vision about . . ."
- ". . . want to do something about . . ."
- ". . . are accomplished at . . ."

For more about this see Mining the gold, Process 26, on page 263.

Interrupting disempowering conversations

Our first response to upset is usually to blame or discount ourselves or others. Facilitative speaking will interrupt the conversations that disempower the speaker.

"I notice you said you are 'hopeless' at that. Can you say that some other way that is more empowering?" (For example, "This is an area I am in training with.")

"I notice you said you 'should' do that – it sounds like you don't have a choice. Is that so?"

"I notice you said you can never remember names. Could you say that in a way that doesn't reinforce your forgetfulness?" (For example, "In the past I have found it difficult to remember names, but I am now remembering names more and more easily")

See also Empowering Interpretations, Process 27, page 265.

Facilitative speaking will also interrupt conversations where the speaker disempowers others – blaming. The facilitator is not there as a "blame policeperson," but rather as someone who notices the blaming and encourages the client to move through and see it as a preliminary to understanding the underlying issue. Blaming is often the way we find out how we feel about something, so the facilitator will encourage the client to explore this – maybe by exaggerating the blaming until it becomes ridiculous.

"Blame . . . blame . . . blame . . . blame . . . oops!"

"What is my role or responsibility in this?"

Remember, blaming is always disempowering, at least for the speaker, and is always about avoiding responsibility. Caution: people are so attached to blaming that this may not be popular news.

Encouraging lightness

Humour is another way to interrupt disempowering conversations – if you can see the lighter side to a "problem," your perception of it often shifts. Gently encourage the person to see the humour in the situation. If handled sensitively, the person will be able to laugh gently at themselves.

"I suppose my shouting at the boss, stomping out and tripping over as I went was quite reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin. I missed the opportunity to throw a pie at him though."

Coaching

Sometimes it is appropriate for the facilitator to offer coaching in the group. A request or an offer can be accepted or declined freely, and this needs to be made very clear. To decline coaching does not mean anything about you or the other person; it is merely an ongoing choice.

One-to-one coaching (in private) can be more directive than interactions with one person in a group. To train yourself to coach others one to one, it is important to have lots of experience in being coached yourself. There is plenty of written material and training available for one-to-one work. Useful books include Landsberg's *The Tao of Coaching* and *The CCL Handbook of Coaching* edited by Ting and Scisco.

Coaching is a contractual arrangement – without agreement it is potentially abusive. So let's say that someone has requested coaching or a facilitated session with you, that you understand they are well, and you have agreed to facilitate them. You now have a contract.

Coaching for action

If your friend or client has decided to take some action, they may like support by way of ongoing coaching. This will take the form of encouraging the person to invent and carry out the actions necessary to accomplish their plans and projects. Coaching is particularly helpful when the going gets tough and lots of reasons come up (disempowering conversations) as to why in retrospect a project may not be such a great idea.

Some coaching interventions are:

"What is something you can do to have . . . happen?"

"What resources do you have or need to do that?"

"Is there anything stopping you from having that happen?"

"Is there a small step you can take now towards that larger project?"

"Can you draw up a plan which will get you from A to B?"

"What support will you need to implement your plan?"

For example, the friend who yelled at the boss may have decided to make another appointment to clear up the issue, but he or she may need encouragement to actually make the appointment.

"When are you going to make the appointment by?"

"I request that you phone me at 5 pm and confirm that you have made the appointment."

"What is it that you want to say to him? Will that be complete for you then?"

"How can you ensure that you do say that? Do you need to write it down?"

"Phone me after the meeting, say by 3 pm."

(In this example, the person may have a pattern of stewing over incidents like this for days or weeks rather than going back and clearing them up quickly, something they want to do but don't because it seems scary.)

This kind of ongoing coaching (sometimes called life coaching) is popular in business and some facilitators also offer this service. You can develop your coaching skills through coaching training, and through participation in programs of experiential communication skills training in your region. These skills are very useful to a group facilitator.

facilitating a group

Facilitation is like dancing. If you go unconscious, you miss the rhythm and trip.

— Zenergy program participant

A purposeful group is not just a collection of individuals. A group is an entity in itself. It is a living system with its own physical form, its own personality, its own potential and its own limitations. You are part of a group a bit like an arm or a leg is part of a human body. While you are not joined physically, you are (or can become) joined emotionally, intuitively, intellectually, energetically and spiritually. And you are part of and bonded to a number of groups — family, household, work, recreation and community.

Being in a group can cause anxiety for most of us as it brings up our fear of losing our own identity and autonomy. You might be afraid of losing your free will or being dominated by others. Perhaps you don't know what you have to contribute or where your limits are. You might be swayed by the views of others against your better judgement. These fears are real.

As children and teenagers, we are often subjected to powerful peer pressure to conform to a particular group's values and behavior. Our own families can exert a very controlling form of group pressure: "You must do what we [Mommy and Daddy] say or be punished."

A cooperative group can be particularly threatening in this way because everyone is supposed to reach agreement on major decisions.

Will I feel pressured to agree?

Will I be compromised and give in to peer pressure so people will like me or so I don't stick out?

A facilitator needs to be aware of the individual's need for autonomy, of the collective need for cooperation, and of the group as a whole system/organism with a particular culture and personality. Individuals will have different requirements for privacy and disclosure depending on their personalities and cultural conditioning. Individuals will be at different places on their life journeys towards full autonomy and self-expression.

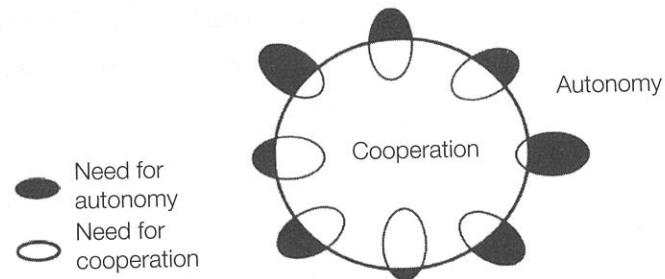


Figure 1.6.1 Autonomy/cooperation in a group

The relationships between group members are also complex and form a web of interaction, with each strand having its own unique character.

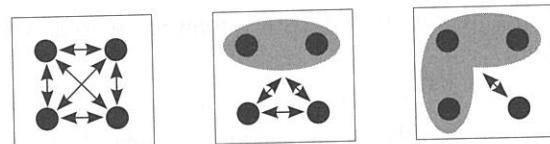


Figure 1.6.2 A web of interaction

Being with a group

Being with a group is a development of being with yourself and being with another. Being with a group is being with yourself and with a number of others. It is being part of a larger self, part of an organism or entity with its own purpose and personality.

As a facilitator, ask yourself the following questions:

Am I comfortable being with myself and others in this group?

Am I comfortable being part of this group entity?

Am I comfortable with the way this group works?

Do I know the values of this group?

Am I comfortable with them?

Am I comfortable with the "culture and personality" of this group?

Is there someone in this group who I find particularly triggering?

Have I done an identity check with them directly or indirectly (that is, not in their presence)? (See Identity Check, Process 43, page 285.)

Also ask yourself these questions:

Do I want to dominate this group?

Do I feel dominated by this group?

Am I afraid of this group?

Do I "know what is best" for this group?

Do I have the "right process" for this group?

Am I an "expert" on the subject this group is addressing?

Do I like/agree with some of the members of this group but not others?

Am I the only person who will work well with this group?

(Check each of these out with yourself or with your coach. "Yes" answers to these questions are all good reasons for not working with a particular group.)

And ask yourself these questions too:

Coming from an attitude of "I don't know," am I committed to empowering this group to achieve its purpose?

Am I committed to taking care of every person in the group and creating a safe environment for them to be fully self-expressed and authentic?

("Yes" answers to these questions are good reasons for working with a group.)

Facilitating a group is putting yourself on the edge of the sword

Facilitating a group takes a certain fearlessness (and this includes feeling scared). It takes sufficient awareness of yourself to realize that you don't know how to do it (even though you have a toolkit of skills), and a willingness to go with the flow of the group – to tap into the group mind and creativity (which includes challenging the group and halting the flow if it is sabotaging the group purpose).

Group facilitation is moment-by-moment awareness, being awake and in action – awake in the way a hunter stalks a tiger or a mother watches over her newborn infant.

A group facilitator needs:

- ⇒ Self-awareness (being with yourself).
- ⇒ Awareness of others (being with others).
- ⇒ Commitment to the group fulfilling its purpose.

The facilitator's relationship to the group

The role of facilitator is granted by the group. It is a different relationship to that of a teacher and a class, a parent and children, a manager and staff, or a conductor and an orchestra. In these situations most of the responsibility and accountability rests with the teacher, parent, manager and conductor, and is to an outside source. The facilitator, however, is responsible and accountable only to the group (and her- or himself).

The role of facilitator is a role of honor and trust given by the group. The group has recognized the importance of the group process and contracts with the facilitator to guide this process towards the fulfilment of the group purpose.

We trust you to guide the process of our group so that the group can wholeheartedly achieve its purpose.

Starting work with a group

When working with a new group, the facilitator will want to check out the group's expectations of the facilitation role. What the group expects from the facilitator will depend on their previous experience. Ask the group:

What are your expectations of a facilitator?

You, as facilitator, will also want to share your own values and ways of working with a group, and your expectations of the group. Sharing these things means you can be quickly known by the group, and it encourages an open atmosphere of sharing in the group.

I will tell you something about myself and my way of working with a group.

This initial checking-out process will establish if there are marked differences between the expectations of the group and the facilitator. If there are, they will need to be addressed straight away and clarified to check if it is appropriate for the group to work with that particular facilitator. This process is usually best carried out in advance by representatives of the group "interviewing" the facilitator before he or she is hired. For more on this see Part 2 Chapter 1, "Facilitation and the client."

Guidelines for a facilitator

Group facilitation is the art of guiding the group process towards the agreed objectives. A facilitator guides the process and does not get involved in content. A facilitator intervenes to protect the group process and keep the group on track to fulfil its task.

There is no recipe for a facilitator to follow, and there is no one right way to facilitate a group. But here are some guidelines, techniques and tips that you may find useful (these guidelines include material from *The Zen of Groups: A Handbook for People Meeting with a Purpose*).

A group is capable of more than any one member thinks

One + one + one + one = 5 or more. This is the equation of synergy. A group is capable of much more than each individual member thinks is possible. You have no idea what you can achieve in a group. Maybe you can achieve almost anything in the world as a group, although it may take some ingenuity to discover how you can achieve it. Effective facilitators know that group members are stopped mainly by baggage from the past, and they can achieve amazing results. A facilitator is out to tap the energy of the group and tap into the group synergy.

Trust the resources of the group

The facilitator trusts that the group will have the resources to achieve its

task and work through any process issues. Trust in this sense is an attitude of confidence that the resources are present and will be discovered. The facilitator enables the group to explore and find these resources. This is the way a group becomes empowered. This does not mean that the task will always be fulfilled. It means you don't give up when the going gets tough and all group members may be wilting.

Honor each group member

Facilitation is about honoring each group member and encouraging full participation while having the group task achieved effectively and efficiently. Always approach group members as capable, aware and fully functioning people who are committed to the group purpose. Even if they are behaving in disruptive ways, always treat them as if they were acting honorably and for the good of the group.

Keep the group space safe

It is important to keep the room or space safe from interruptions and distractions. The facilitator ensures the physical space is safe and guarded from interruptions and intrusion. A group also has an "energetic" space, and the facilitator is aware of this and watches out for it in the same way a mother looks out for a child who may wander unconsciously into danger. On a spiritual level, group space is sacred space.

Stand in the group purpose

Always keep in mind the group purpose. It can be useful to have this on a large sheet at each meeting. "Presencing" the group purpose will keep the group on track and grounded, and provide you with a place to stand when the group gets distracted or bogged down.

Be adaptable

There is no one technique that will always work at a particular time for the group. It is a matter of choosing, in a particular moment, what to do – whether or not to intervene, and how to intervene. You can plan ahead but you always need to be ready to adapt to what is happening in the moment.

Remember that beginnings are crucial

Group meetings and workshops have a beginning, a middle and an end.

Getting started is like setting out on a journey or laying the foundation of a house. The first part of a group meeting or workshop is crucial to the whole process and time needs to be allowed for the process of starting.

Take everything that occurs as relevant

A facilitator takes everything said or done in the group as group interaction, including individual exchanges, side comments, and accidental occurrences. For example, if someone falls off their chair, that becomes part of the group process rather than an interruption. Some facilitators use outside interruptions as well, like someone coming into the room accidentally.

Work with conflict

A facilitator is comfortable with conflict and always encourages it to be expressed openly. Disagreement is the natural result of different personalities, different views and opinions. If a group is to develop to maturity, it will need to work with conflict, rather than avoid it. Creative conflict resolution can be synergistic, leading to major breakthroughs and forward movement in a group. Remember: don't get tripped up by conflict or get involved in the content.

Be awake

Your most important asset as a facilitator is your awareness. Be "awake" and "present" to each moment, moment by moment – listening, looking, sensing – 100 percent present. Personal development work, meditation, consciousness-raising, discussion, training and development in experiential learning techniques are all useful ways to develop awareness. Experiment to find ways that work for you.

Be yourself

As a facilitator, you will be most effective when you are being your natural self and allowing your own personality to be expressed. People get permission to be themselves from the way a facilitator behaves – through modelling. If you are stiff and formal, the group tends to be like that. If you are relaxed and self-expressed, the group tends to be like that too. Keep checking to see in what way the group is reflecting you.

Develop discernment

Make sure your eyes and ears are open all the time. Listen and see without

judgement, but with discernment. When is someone tripped up? When is someone "asleep," upset, caught in a pattern or triggered? When are people tripping one another up or sabotaging the group? Are they aware of it? Do they want to stop? Who has given up and why? Who is raring to go and frustrated by the non-action of others? Discern when these behaviors are present and if an intervention is necessary.

Stay clear

This is similar to being awake and present moment by moment. As a facilitator, notice when you get tripped up by your own or others' baggage. When you do get tripped up, note the "trigger" word or phrase (for you to work through later), recover yourself quickly and carry on. Don't take personally, or get drawn into any comment on, ideas or beliefs expressed in the group, nor any criticism, no matter how personal. If you get triggered and are unable to recover quickly, use the process "Clearing yourself when facilitating," Process 50 (page 291).

Get the job done

Always remember you are there to get the job done. Make sure you know the purpose of the group and the desired outcome for the particular meeting you are facilitating. Check how much time the group is prepared to spend on group process issues.

Don't be attached to your own interventions

You may come up with what you think is a brilliant intervention, but if it doesn't work, drop it. The only reason to use an intervention is to keep the group focused, not because you think it is brilliant. Your job is not to show how clever you are.

Use questions and suggestions

Questions and suggestions are the usual way a facilitator intervenes. Avoid giving advice. Use "I suggest . . ." rather than "What you should do is . . ." Also avoid giving the answer to an issue. Your job as facilitator is to guide the process, not be involved in the content, even if you've got the answer.

Negotiate and contract

A facilitator is an effective negotiator within groups. The structure and framework of meetings and processes are developed through negotiation.

Proposals and counter-proposals are encouraged until agreement is reached. Agreement = the contract. Most group decisions – including ground rules, time limits, personal responsibilities, roles, commitment, membership, values, purpose, aims, objectives and evaluation methods – are negotiated.

Be sensitive to cultural differences

Sensitivity to cultural differences is essential for a facilitator. When you are working with people from cultures other than your own, some knowledge of the customs, rituals and sensitivities of those cultures is most important. If you do not have this knowledge, you need to say so and seek advice from people in the group to ensure cultural difference is respected. Community sensitivities also need to be addressed in a similar way. Don't assume – ask.

Create space

An important part of facilitation is creating space for everyone in the group and for all that is happening in the group. Be inclusive. Keep enlarging the psychic or energetic space for the group to be together. This holding role is just as important as saying anything. If you have the opportunity practice holding the space of the group as a participant as well. When participants and the facilitator hold the space together there is room for emergence – unexpected new possibilities will begin to arise.

Improvise

Facilitation is an improvisatory art within an agreed and negotiated structure. In this way, it is like jazz rather than classical music. Don't get stuck doing things a certain way. Remember, there is no one way or technique. Be flexible and stay awake.

Acknowledge and affirm

A facilitator gives frequent acknowledgement and affirmation to a group. Encourage your group to keep going during long or difficult processes by affirming progress and acknowledging completion of tasks. Model the giving of acknowledgement and affirmation, and encourage group members to affirm and acknowledge one another.

Use humor

A sense of humor is a great asset to a facilitator. The use of humor can

usefully defuse some tense moments. There is nothing better than a light touch at the appropriate time.

Keep intervention to a minimum

Intervene in group discussion only when it is necessary to interrupt behavior that is:

- ⇒ impeding progress towards fulfilling the task without the agreement of the group;
- ⇒ off track in the discussion and the result of someone having tripped over baggage from the past;
- ⇒ undermining the possibility of group synergy occurring;
- ⇒ physically dangerous.

Monitor the energy level

Monitor the energy level of the group at all times. This is your barometer. Energy is indicated by tone of voice, body posture, eye contact, level of participation and level of activity directed towards the task. Are people awake or asleep? Engaged or disengaged?

The energy of a group will alter all the time. At the beginning of a day people often have lots of energy. After lunch they are very often low in energy. Short breaks or active exercises can help keep energy up for longer sessions. For most people, concentration is hard to maintain for longer than 30 to 40 minutes. Keep some active exercises in your repertoire to use when energy is low and the meeting is long (see Games and energizers, Processes 32–34, page 270–271).

Seek agreement and alignment

A facilitator seeks agreement from everyone and uses collective decision-making processes (consensus) unless there is agreement by everyone to do otherwise. Voting, majority or otherwise, is not a recommended way of reaching a decision in a facilitated group. A more potent version of agreement is alignment. This involves identifying a clear direction/purpose and alignment on both this and how to proceed towards it.

When in doubt, check it out

"When in doubt, check it out" is a useful guideline for a facilitator. If you

are not clear that everyone is in agreement with a decision or task, ask if everyone agrees. If necessary request a response from everyone – a yes or a no. Silence does not necessarily mean assent.

If you don't know, say so

If you don't know what to suggest or do when an intervention seems to be needed in a group, say so and ask for suggestions. Someone else may have a good idea, or their suggestion may spark off an idea in you. Don't pretend you know everything – nobody does. Trust the group.

Invite feedback

A facilitator invites feedback during and at the end of group meetings. All feedback is useful. Specific comments are more useful than general ones. One feedback technique is the use of rounds of negative and positive comments.

Synergy

Synergy is about tapping into group energy so that the group members are able to accomplish more than they thought possible. Tapping into group energy dramatically increases the speed at which a group takes action. Synergy is about flowing and working together harmoniously. It is about coordinated action and being inspired by one another.

How can you tap into this group energy in a conscious way rather than by accident? In everyday life, people usually feel separate from one another. We are all individuals and different from everyone else. We like it this way. It is a function of the different "baggage" we carry, and it keeps us separate from others.

The ability to let go of your "baggage," even momentarily, will allow you to identify with and feel for others in a more direct way. In a group, this can be experienced as trust, closeness, peacefulness, understanding, happiness, joy and exhilaration (all aspects of love in its broadest sense). This is what people crave when in groups – unity, acceptance and trust (love).

Increasing group and facilitation skills will open up the pathway to experiencing synergy in your group. Group skills increase the level of cooperation in a group – members begin to listen to one another in a new way, and start to recognize when they are in tune with others. Differences are quickly voiced and worked through. Group members take responsibility

for their own baggage and strive to stay "clear" with one another.

But synergy is not the result of following rules. It is more subtle than that. It is something to value and generate. Force will produce the opposite to synergy – separateness, and the rigid taking and defending of positions.

A facilitator trains to listen for the subtleties of group energy – what will enhance it and what will detract from it. This is the art of facilitation. Developing and using the techniques in a skillful way is the craft.

Some signposts to synergy

At Zenergy we have identified a number of signposts or milestones which may assist your group in finding a pathway to synergy. These are:

- ⇒ **Purpose** – the group has a clear purpose and group members are committed to it.
- ⇒ **Vision** – a powerful vision is developed by the group. Building the vision, and recording it in some way – in words, art or music – serves as an ongoing inspiration to group members, particularly when the going gets tough.
- ⇒ **Values** – implied in the group purpose and vision will be a number of values. These are teased out by the group and referred to particularly when making tough decisions.
- ⇒ **Clarity** – the group clarifies roles and commitments such as membership, ground rules, expectations and limits.
- ⇒ **Projects** – the group invents projects to achieve its purpose with clear accountabilities and action plans.
- ⇒ **Identity** – group members develop a strong group identity. Trust is developed through group members sharing themselves honestly with one another. Members honor one another and make allowances for each other's baggage.
- ⇒ **Communication** – the group finds agreed ways to work through conflict rather than avoid it. Conflict is seen as normal. Feelings are seen as normal. People agree to communicate even when it's hard.
- ⇒ **Learning** – group members increase effectiveness by identifying what they have learned as they go along through group process and project monitoring and evaluation.

⇒ **Acknowledgement** – group members acknowledge their contributions and the contributions of others to the group.

⇒ **Celebration** – group members celebrate together the accomplishments of the group.

See also Part 2 Chapter 2, "Cooperative processes in organizations," especially the figure showing the FACTS model for maintaining sustainable cooperative processes in organizations (page 141).