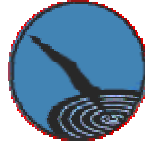




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World of Personal Spirit

THE PERSONAL DISCIPLINES OF A FACILITATOR

Jon C. Jenkins / Maureen Jenkins,
Imaginal Training
Coehoornsingel 49
9711 BN Groningen, The Netherlands
tel +3150 318 3032
fax +3150 311 7370
jon@imaginal.nl and maureen@imaginal.nl

Abstract

The profession of facilitation has developed to the point that there are not only technique and process, diagnosis and intervention, but also personal disciplines for the facilitator. These have a major effect of the group process. Encompassing detachment, engagement, focus, awareness, action, presence, interior dialogue and a sense of wonder, the nine disciplines are described and illustrated using, among other sources, comments from the Group Facilitator's List Serve. Comments or questions are welcome at our e-mail addresses above.

Introduction

In the process of developing a theory of facilitation, a number of approaches have been discussed. These range from Roger Schwartz' sixteen Ground Rules for Effective Groups to the focus by Chris Argyris and colleagues on effective dialogue and the "technology of participation" described in Laura Spencer's Winning through Participation. An area that seems



to need more attention than it has been given so far is that of the interior disciplines of the facilitator.

Joe Jaworski and his colleagues at the Centre for Generative Leadership, while not dealing with facilitation as such, are concerned with this area. Jaworski's description of preparation for meetings with executives is in this direction. Schwartz stresses the need to reduce the distance between one's internal dialogue and one's public interventions, also a personal discipline. David Bohm's work on dialogue seems to be likewise aimed at personal discipline.

In the 1960s, the Ecumenical Institute, forerunner of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, built a model it named the New Religious Mode that seems to provide a framework for an ongoing dialogue about the nature of human consciousness. What we have done is to transpose some of the language of this model to make it, hopefully, more accessible to today's facilitator.

There are nine disciplines in the model, and they are as follows: detachment, engagement, focus, awareness, action, presence, interior dialogue, intentionality and a sense of wonder.

Structure

We would like to begin a dialogue about these disciplines and the practices that people use to maintain these disciplines. Each discipline will be described in the following terms:

Issue in Facilitation - We will begin by describing each of the disciplines in the context of facilitation.

State of Consciousness - Here we describe the common experience or consciousness that this discipline is built upon.

Discipline – to borrow from Peter Senge:

"By 'discipline', I don't mean 'enforced order', or 'means of punishment' but a body of theory and technique that must be studied and mastered to be put into practice. A discipline is a developmental path for acquiring certain skills or competencies. As with any discipline, from playing the piano to electrical engineering, some people have an innate 'gift', but anyone can develop proficiency through practice."

(The Fifth Discipline, Peter Senge, p. 10)

Practice - For each discipline we have noted that there are practices that seem to support the discipline.

The Nine Disciplines

Detachment

The Issue in Facilitation

Facilitators are hired as neutral parties, to enable group processes, whether that is to arrive at a decision, to create a plan, to build a model, or perhaps to improve the group dynamics or communication skills of the group members. The substance behind the image of neutrality is the discipline of detachment.

The State of Consciousness

A great deal of discussion among facilitators is about the need to be in some wise detached from content. This is quite often made in the distinction between responsibility for process and for content, when the facilitator wants to stress that they are responsible for the quality of the process, while the group (or certain members of it) is responsible for the quality of the content. Detachment is also described as being neutral. While this is critical, detachment has also a wider role to play for the facilitator.



In addition to the content, the direction the group's decision can be an issue. Facilitators quite often find themselves leading meetings wherein they disagree with the decision they have enabled a group to reach. The fact that the group has made a decision is more important than the content of the decision. Group decision-making processes are often part of the journey the group is making. Learning to come to better decisions is part of that journey. The facilitator who needs to "correct" the group's decisions may not be able to discern the appropriate developmental help the group needs at the time.

Another dimension of detachment as a discipline is being detached from your own needs, your status, your plans, the need to get credit for the quality of the decision. Lao Tsu suggests that when the leader is effective the group says they did it themselves.

Letting go of a plan that I have invested in, especially if I have already announced it. Getting out of my "planning mind" and just letting things happen or select their own course. My practice is to think of these times as opportunities for sharing the planning mind, getting the group to take on part of the burden and perspective. From (Bernie DeKoven on the Group Facilitator's List Serve).

There is also a dimension of detachment from one's relationships with the people in the group. All facilitators like some people and dislike others. Facilitators find themselves leading groups in which they have friends and enemies (or maybe unfriends). To facilitate a group making effective decisions, the facilitator needs to be able to maintain equity of participation and recognition by all members of the group.

The Discipline

This discipline begins with the awareness that everything is transitory, that whatever plans or decisions are coming into existence will also go out of existence. Secondly, one learns

the capacity to step back from what's going on, to become detached, disengaged from the situation. Then you realize that you need nothing whatsoever from this group. You then find that you have all the capacity you need to do what is needed. This is an ongoing process, which is rediscovered in every new situation you confront.

Practices

Meditation and fasting are among the practices. Some walk in the woods. Another approach is to review what the very worst outcome might be.

Engagement

The Issue in Facilitation

Engagement arises for the facilitator because he or she is modelling what it means to be a good participant. You are responsible for the implementation of the process. When behaviour of an individual is disruptive, the facilitator has to ensure that it is dealt with, whether the group deals with it naturally or not. Equally when the group is doing well, the facilitator is the one to support it.

The State of Consciousness

Engagement is in the first place is service. A facilitator is a servant of the group's processes to make creative and meaningful decisions. Engagement is the discipline of caring about the quality of people's decisions and their capacity to enact them. Caring in this sense is not the emotion but the act.

Engagement is assuming responsibility for the group processes. At the most obvious level it is establishing group norms for behavior. This is done in a variety of ways, such as getting the group to list rules for their discussion or simply providing your own rules up front. This is an external manifestation of an internal discipline that has to do with modeling a set of



values that maintain a certain kind of effective order within the group. At the same time, order without justice is destructive.

Part of this discipline is knowing when to break the rules for the sake of the growth or creativity of the group. For example, there may be a rule that no one speaks more than 5 minutes, and yet someone in a flash of insight may start describing a creative idea. The facilitator knows when not to call time.

A third dimension of this is the balance between the necessary rules of communication and interaction and the creative development and growth of the group. This balance between order and freedom requires the recognition of one's own preference, and the recognition of when the rules of order are stifling the creativity of the group and when freedom to be creative is creating anarchy.

In its simplest sense Engagement is the process of expanding one's capacity to serve the group. Engagement is in tension with Detachment.

The Discipline

In the first instance, Engagement is taking on the job: being the facilitator. Then it is being part of the dynamics of the group with whom you are working. The facilitator is no outsider, but intimately involved in all of the group dynamics, positive and negative. What honest facilitator hasn't been aware of events in the group that would never have occurred without their presence? Like it or not, you find yourself submitting to life inside of the group's culture, working within their paradigms. One takes responsibility for the health of the group dynamics, and so discovers the broad latitude of possible intervention, as long as you maintain your own and the group's integrity.

Practices

Accepting assignments by which the facilitator has the chance to facilitate the same group or the same organization repeatedly deepens one's engagement, just as facilitating a wide diversity of different groups enables one's detachment. Imagining this is the last thing you will ever do, realizing the importance of this assignment helps you to engage.

Focus

The Issue in Facilitation

The issue here is that a facilitator is only called for when there is a dysfunction in a group that blocks the ability to come to constructive agreements. The facilitator must find a way to maintain his or her own focus. Focus at one level requires two dimensions that are in tension with each other. One is being focused on the group. This is about willingly embracing the problems and blocks the group experiences as the only issue, the only agenda, one is dealing with.

Focus on the other hand has to do with having your own personal vision of who you are and what your life is about, independent of the group. Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), the Japanese master wood-block printmaker responsible for, among many other well-known prints, "The wave", said of his work:

“At seventy-three I have at last caught every aspect of nature – birds, fish, animals, insects, trees, grasses, all. When I am eight I shall have developed still further, and I will really master the secrets of art at ninety. When I reach a hundred my work will



be truly sublime, and my final goal will be attained around the age of one hundred and ten, when every line and dot I draw will be imbued with life.”¹

State of Consciousness

One aspect of Focus has to do with being mindful of and acting at the level of the group's operating images -- who does this group see itself to be, and what are they doing. The facilitator is realistic about the boundaries in which a group has to operate.

It's what we anglers have always known/ been conscious of. Listening, waiting patiently, all senses alert. I have often thought the art of angling stands one in good stead when dealing with people and situations that require a sensitive 'listening' approach. Cliff Grimes from the Group Facilitator's List Serve

The outstanding characteristic of a focused workshop is that the facilitator does nothing that is superfluous to what the group needs. It is in this exquisite alignment of who and what the facilitator is about and the will of the group that is Focus. The facilitator aligns their unconscious and conscious selves. In the first instance, this has to do with the quality of preparation. Preparation has to do with embodying what you intend to do and why, understanding who the group is and what they bring to the discussion, and awareness of who you are and what you are bringing to this group.

Maybe that's [listening] more a part of something else, like "being engaged".

Truly listening and being full engaged, and doing that well, to me is a critical component of facilitation. I also would use the term "focus" to describe what I do (or perhaps rather what I am or my state of being) during a facilitated session. As the facilitator, I am

¹ Weston, Mark, *Giants of Japan* quoting Katsushika Hokusai, Kodansha International, New York, 1999, p 120.

totally focused on everything going on in the session. I am constantly listening, watching, and evaluating whether there is something I, as the facilitator, need to be doing (or need to be doing differently) to address issues, direct or re-direct the discussion, or guide/assist the group. By the end of a session, I am often totally exhausted, due to the level of the "focus" workout I have had. (Jan Huff Soper from the Group Facilitator's List Serve)

Discipline

Focus begins with discovering within yourself a vision of the greatness of the group and how this meeting is connected to a larger purpose. Second, it is an act of will to serve that vision in this context. Third, sometimes while facilitating a group, you find yourself risking what may feel like everything. Focus is taking that creative risk. Last, you may find yourself acting as a transformed being.

Practices

The following might be considered a practice of the discipline of focus.

I would insist on having an advance discussion, face-to-face whenever possible, with the group leader to understand what he/she is desiring as an outcome for the group. I want this to be as specific as possible. Often I have to counsel the individual regarding their outcome expectations versus the time they are prepared to allocate to this meeting. They are usually well off the mark in that their expectations of what can be achieved in the time available far exceeds what is practical. So, I guess calibration of expectations is a part of this prework. (Howard Hale from the Group Facilitator's List Serve).



The practise of preparing beyond what is necessary is one practise of Focus. Another is that of the life timeline, the process of creating an image / plan of your whole life from birth to death.

Awareness

Issue in Facilitation

There is so much going on when a group is meeting, at so many different levels, that it is very difficult to keep track of them all at the same time. The temptation for the facilitator is to choose one thing or another and attempt to block out the rest.

State of Consciousness

Awareness is attentionality. The first aspect of this discipline is the journey of self-awareness. Awareness is not passive. A facilitator is called upon to continuously develop their awareness of how they think, feel and react with regard to issues and interactions that may arise in a group. It's knowing your own biases and prejudices, appreciating them for what they are and having ways to manage them. It is appreciating and developing one's strengths and gifts. It is the continual process of becoming acquainted with one's dark side and learning to work with it.

Awareness is also of the world in which we work. Facilitation is rooted in the ability to "swim" well in the currents of common wisdom in which the group is immersed, whether this be the technical jargon of the topic, or who the group is. The facilitator is one who spends time learning what's going on in this group and in the world in which they participate - its culture, its jargon, its feelings and foibles.

You devote time and energy to maximizing awareness that while not every decision may be appropriate for this group, yet any decision is possible. A session is never a rerun, never an inevitable conclusion. Amazing new insights as well as genuine destruction are possible at any

moment, even in the stalest of encounters. Realizing this responsibility, the facilitator is one who drills him or herself to stand present to the mystery of human interaction, to the way that life can transcend even the most forbidding barriers to create and create again.

Discipline

In the first instance, this is paying attention to what is going on in an objective, nonjudgmental fashion. Then one is aware of the simultaneous positive and destructive currents that are always present in the group. Again, you are both the creativity and the dark side of the group. You are a hologram of the group dynamics. Therein comes a sense of humility in the face of the danger and greatness present.

Practices

Developing awareness starts with self-awareness. Several practices have helped. One is receiving feedback from others and comparing it with my perceptions. Another is doing practising right column/left column work (what I'm thinking/feeling and what I'm saying---this also helps with cultivating group awareness) both on the fly and after the event. Keeping a journal is another help. Exercise is also useful---sort of mindful meditation. (Joe Brodnicki from the Group Facilitator's List Serve).

Tending to be a little conflict adverse myself, I know now to wait until just a little past my comfort level, before I stop them or step in...I've found that this gives me a better feel for the group, the individuals and the issue and I get to practice deep breathing! (Lori Lewis from the Group Facilitator's List Serve).

One practice of the discipline of awareness is contemplation. When finding yourself using jargon try to state the jargon in fresh terms. Using multiple perspectives is another practice.



Action

Issue in Facilitation

Facilitation is about intervening in the ongoing dynamics of a group. It means doing something. Great facilitation is doing something at the appropriate moment that leverages the group to a new level of awareness or courage or whatever.

State of Consciousness

Serving a group is not only knowledge, of course, it's about doing things as well; it is the continual development of the craft of facilitation. Action in this sense is effectiveness. Action is effective leveraging change in a system.

As Pema Chödrön notes in *The Wisdom of No Escape*, "Our life's work is to use what we have been given to wake up". A facilitator is busy with the work of waking people up. You work to discover ever more effective and practical ways to break a group loose of the prejudices and misconceptions that may block it. You school yourself in doing what is called for in the group. This is not only a matter of studying group techniques. Rather, just as a gymnast builds physical strength, endurance and flexibility, or a singer keeps working on breathing and diction, so a facilitator struggles to wake up. Consider for instance this quartet's way of opening a rehearsal:

Every rehearsal of the Maggiore Quartet begins with a very plain, very slow three-octave scale on all four instruments in unison....We try not to look at each other when we play this scale; no one appears to lead....When I play this I release myself into the spirit of the quartet. I become the music of the scale. I mute my will, I free my self (Vikram Seth, *An Equal Music*).

The facilitator practices courage, whether this means confronting a colleague when someone else might have done it in his place or going the extra mile with a group or having a

conversation in a language not his own. There are issues that never arise, and never will arise in a group unless someone has the nerve to raise the question. This readiness to confront what must be confronted is one way a group discerns whether you care enough for them to bring a genuine issue to the table. This really is going all the way with the problem until a solution gets hammered out.

Discipline

In the first instance, the discipline is choosing to act. Then it is acting with decisiveness and commitment. You understand that your action is what makes the difference; nothing better could be done. You feel sometimes that you acted in such an appropriate way that you were a partner with the forces of creation.

Practices

A facilitator is continually looking for leverage, for ways to use minimal force to achieve maximum results. One facilitator we know takes 3 kinds of risks every month, emotional, physical and intellectual.

Presence

Issue in Facilitation

A Facilitator has to bring enough credibility, skill and care that the process is enabled, but enough selfhood that he or she is not be the center of attention.

State of Consciousness

Remember that ultimately it's not what you know or do that makes the difference, it's rather the fact that you are there. Some speak of "being" as though it were mindless inaction but it is for us the intensification of mindfulness and action.



If no one else does, the facilitator sees, listens and seeks to understand. There is an appreciative witness to whatever the group's struggle might be. There is a critical eye on whether truth is being spoken, whether the process is effective and whether commitment is genuine. The facilitator is the one who is there to galvanize hope and determination that the effort is worth making, especially when it doesn't seem like it.

This requires of the facilitator the aligning of your own vision with each of the issues and aims of your client, until you can find yourself in what is being done, until you can stand in all integrity behind what you are asked to do. When you hear a consultant or facilitator cynically criticizing the struggles of a stupid group, you are hearing someone who has not found a way to tap the well of their own empathy, their own compassion.

Discipline

Something happens in the group process, and you realize that something clicked, an “aha” happened, beyond anything you or even the group had done. You decide to go with it; it’s flowing, and you decide to ride with it. Despite misgivings, you decide to go ahead, to keep on going. The authentic creativity of the group is released.

Practices

The following is a submission to the Group Facilitator's List Serve by Ned Ruete:

The Use of Self as Instrument

The process of using one's presence (vs. knowledge, facts, or even opinions, which frequently emerge thinly veiled as the former) to have impact can be thought of as the following discrete steps:

1. Paying attention to what is going on in the room
2. Noticing what one notices: realising what one is aware of

3. Selectively and intentionally sharing one's awareness

An example of this process might be something like:

1. Scanning the faces of the people in the room
2. Getting interested in a theme that emerges (boredom, resistance,

preoccupation, etc.)

Making an observation about that: "Right now, I'm aware that people seem to be [describe what one sees] and I'm wondering what that means."

Interior Dialogue

Issue in Facilitation

The issue here is when you find yourself having to go beyond your accumulated technique, and have only your intuitions to guide you in a given situation. This means on the one hand, building and refining your intuitions in a self-conscious way, so that they are ready to serve you when the need arises. On the other hand, there is the struggle to learn to trust your intuitions to be accurate when you need them.

State of Consciousness

The work of facilitating owes much to the richness of one's interior dialogue. You check continually with ideas, saying, image, heroines and heroes for ways of better understanding and responding to ongoing events. Heroes and heroines may be colleagues (remember how Harry did this), authors (what Peter Senge or Karl Marx wrote), historic figures (from Martin Luther to Sitting Bull). Further, you may use mantras to focus your awareness, recall images, photos and paintings, raise standard questions on which to reflect, recall poetry or song lyrics or puzzle over koans.



Whether a magpie chaotic collection spree or a soberly structured routine, this dialogue serves as the way the facilitator digests experience to locate its inspiration and nourishment. Understanding your own way of internal dialogue gives you a safe place to return to in the face of whatever experience comes along.

Discipline

Some subconscious thought comes into consciousness that challenges what you are then doing or thinking. You begin to dialogue with that challenging perspective. Should I, for example, be intervening here or not? You develop a profound appreciation for those dialogues.

Practices

Some forms of mediation are ways of practicing this discipline. Finding people to identify with, whether through history or fiction, plays this role. Reflection with a colleague after a workshop helps to develop the intuitions.

Intentionality

Issue in Facilitation

It is easy to underestimate the power a facilitator has in a group. This power has little to do with knowing more about the topic than the rest of the crowd, or necessarily having the process in mind more clearly than others. This power is the focused energy that you bring to the endeavor. Focusing your energy is what intentionality is about, and that requires a great deal of practice.

State of Consciousness

Focusing energy is acknowledging your own weaknesses. It is being humble. Your own blocks are taken into account and set aside or used to deliver the needed event.

Usually as soon as I focus on my intentions, I know if I'm trying to be learningful or be a loudmouth. (Ned Ruete from the Group Facilitator's List Serve).

Intentionality is also being grateful for the opportunity to work with this group of people. It is easy to forget that it is a bit of a miracle that you have the chance, that you don't control existence.

Intentionality is developing a state of empathy for all of the people who are in the group. It is intending to care. The discipline is developing your capacity to care for others.

Next you seek to align the event - everything said, done and embodied - with the best possible outcome. You strip off the distractions and superfluous diversions; you add the finesse elements that can turn a good experience into a terrific one. You may visualize the day unfolding before your eyes, to attune yourself to its rhythm.

Discipline

The first step is acknowledging the situation – the group, you, the problem – for what they really are. The next step is to take it on board as it – I'm going to deal with this. Then really commitment emerges, to seeing through all the way to the end. Finally, you do whatever it takes to deal with the situation.

Practices

Intentionality in caring is caring for details. The room, the materials, the seating, the temperature, everything is arrange to maximize the capacity for the group to decide.

Room set-up, room set-up, room set-up... if the room set-up had been different, I might not have been able to be as effective. (Lori Lewis from the Group Facilitator's List Serve).



This building up your energy resources for a group is not for the sake of pushing your agenda in one way or another, but rather to ensure that there is a rich wealth of intention available when the going gets rough. Your intention will always be rewarded, even if it is rewarded with a different outcome than you intended.

The second is cultivating intent. This is sort of applied mindful mediation. The questions are "what am I doing and why?" and "What is the group doing?" and then, when appropriate, posing the what and why questions to them. (Joe Brodnicki from the Group Facilitator's List Serve).

Another practice is the visualization that many facilitators do - walking through the whole process from start to finish beforehand in one's imagination, watching how it unfolds and thus "imprinting" upon one's consciousness the objectives that need to take place.

A Sense of Wonder

Issue in Facilitation

To serve a group as a facilitator you must have a profound but realistic appreciation for the group and what it is about, a feel for the unique greatness of the endeavor they are engaged in.

State of Consciousness

Rudolf Otto in "The Idea of the Holy" talks about a sense of wonder or sense of awe as a precognitive awareness that produces the simultaneous emotions of fear and fascination. The two interesting aspects of this definition are "precognitive" and "fear and fascination".

Precognitive is before you can think, before the category comes to mind that puts the experience into a box. It is that moment between the experience and the thought about the experience. The discipline is to pay attention to those instants and savour them.

The simultaneous experience of fear and fascination is also part of the discipline. If fear overwhelms us we flee or fight. If fascination overwhelms us we indulge in the delight of the experience. The discipline is to broaden our capacity to experience both at the same time. While you cannot create this sense of wonder, you can certainly be open to it. The one thing you can always expect is to be surprised.

Facilitation is maintaining a sense of wonder about those we work with; it is dread and delight about the group that is currently in front of you. This discipline is appreciating the group and the individuals that make it up. It is also being conscious of their dis-relationships and being in a state of wonder about them.

If you keep your senses sharp, you yourself are simply amazing. Your good points, strengths, vices are not amazing and neither are your bad points, weaknesses and virtues. It is the combination that is amazing, wonder filling.

Discipline

In the first instance, wonder is experienced as an intrusion. You had an image of the group or its task or whatever, and that image is challenged. You find yourself caught up in the excitement and fearsomeness of the challenge this group presents to you. Then you find yourself with a profound sense of respect for who they are, what they're about. Finally, there is the sense that this is as good as it gets.

Practices

Expanding the context of the situation can enable you to see the relationship between what is happening and the world and times in which we live. It can be useful to ask yourself how the mystery, the depth and the greatness of the group with whom you work is manifested.



Jon C. Jenkins and Maureen Jenkins

Mr Jon Jenkins has developed and delivered participative and interactive training programs to a wide variety of organisations and groups. Most recently he has focused mostly on Training of Trainers programs and has taught methods of social and organisational change, team building, motivation, short and long term planning and theology. He has worked with the Paris and London sales offices of KNP – Leykam (now part of SAPPI) to improve sales performance. He is a regular consultant to KPN Telecom, the Dutch telephone company's training department. He has lived in Latin America, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, North America and Europe. In addition short-term programmes have taken him to Africa and Central Europe. . He has also written or edited a number of articles and books on facilitation and training including the International Facilitator's Companion.

Mrs. Maureen R. Jenkins has designed and led international training programs since 1970. She led or helped lead participative consultations in 8 projects in 5 countries. She was project director or assistant project director involving 1 to 2 year on-site residences in 3 communities. She has designed curriculum for PTT (Post, Telephone and Telegraph) Telecom, Netherlands and The Institute of Cultural Affairs in India, the USA and Europe. She has designed and delivered for the PTT numerous management courses for international participants, Training of Trainers courses, Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies (a medium term planning process), a Human Resource Management diagnostic module and coaching programs for individuals. She is part of the Action Learning Team at Shell Labs where she facilitates Away Days and Training of Facilitators Courses. She has also written or edited a number of articles and books on social problems.