

NUMBER 13, 2016

# GROUP FACILITATION:

Introduction

## ARTICLES

The Virtuous Cycle of Social Support and Trust  
In Network Facilitation

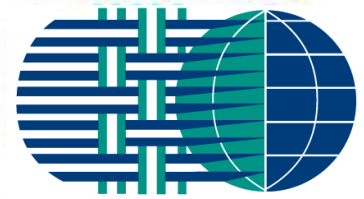
Mindfulness for Group Facilitation: An Example of  
Eastern Philosophy in Western Organizations

Walking the Tightrope: A Case Study of  
Church Leadership Team Facilitation

Facilitator Withdrawal from Organizational Change  
Initiatives: A Review of Strategies and Guidelines

Deliberative Methods for Complex Issues:  
A Typology of Functions That May Need Scaffolding

Online Facilitator Competencies  
for Group Facilitators



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# A RESEARCH & APPLICATIONS JOURNAL

STEPHEN THORPE

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# Introduction

Stephen Thorpe

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal*. This issue contains a broad and fascinating selection of articles. The first article by Toran Hansen, *The Virtuous Cycle of Social Support and Trust in Network Facilitation*, investigated the impact of social support on trust in inter-organizational networks, and provides guidance on facilitator interventions to enhance group effectiveness. The following article, *Mindfulness for Group Facilitation: An Example of Eastern Philosophy in Western Organizations* by Hanne Adriansen and Simon Krohn, brings fresh insights from the use of mindfulness techniques for enhancing the outcome of group performance. Ryan Hartwig's essay, *Walking the Tightrope: A Case Study of Church Leadership Team Facilitation*, reveals several organizational dynamics that promote or resist facilitator interventions. It discusses key leadership challenges that facilitators must address and balance before effective practice can surface. The fourth article, *Facilitator Withdrawal from Organizational Change Initiatives: A Review of Strategies and Guidelines* by Nicole Janich, presents strategies and guidelines for external facilitators withdrawing from planned change projects in organizations. The fifth article, by Thomas Jordan, is *Deliberative Methods for Complex Issues: A Typology of Functions That May Need Scaffolding*. It reveals a typology of 24 functions from a range of methods for scaffolding group deliberation on complex issues. The final article, *Online Facilitator Competencies for Group Facilitators*, presents findings from my research with 60 practicing group facilitators from 13 countries who investigated criteria for effective online facilitation. A framework of seven areas of online facilitator competencies is presented, along with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to demonstrate them.

My heart-felt thanks go to the Journal's Editorial Board, the authors, and the article reviewers—all volunteers—who have contributed to making this issue possible. Each issue of *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal* represents two major activities. The first is developing the content: working with authors and reviewers, providing feedback on manuscripts, and accepting completed papers. The second is changing that content into a presentable form and distributing it online to our members. The first is the responsibility of the Journal's Editorial Board, while the second is that of the Publishing Editor. With this issue, again we extend our heart-felt thanks to Bill Staples, who has been the Journal's Publisher since 2002. In addition, we thank Associate Editors Steven N. Pyser J.D. and Dr. Sascha Rixon, as well as Dr. Andrew Rixon, our Book Review Editor, and Dr. Bill Reid. Thanks also to Wiebke Herding for her support of the Journal, and the many reviewers who have all helped make this edition possible.

While there are many publications, both popular and scientific, that discuss group facilitation, organizational development, and group leadership, *Group Facilitation* is targeted primarily at providing information to the professional group facilitator. It focuses on examining the 'science' side of the 'art and science of facilitation' in a format that is useful to both practicing facilitators and to academics. As facilitators continue to investigate and explore the emerging and contemporary questions facing them, the *Group Facilitation* journal will continue to fulfill its role in the sharing and development of facilitation knowledge.

—Stephen Thorpe, Editor-in-Chief



# The Virtuous Cycle of Social Support and Trust in Network Facilitation

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the practice of facilitation within inter-organizational networks of the non-profit peace movement organizations in Minnesota that opposed the US role in the Iraq War in early 2009. There are insights in this article that could prove beneficial for all types of facilitators and facilitation researchers, however individuals working with inter-organizational networks might find the ideas discussed particularly useful. The findings that are presented here provide statistical evidence to support the principal finding that the level of social support experienced by network members in this study was positively correlated with the level of trust that they had for one another and the network as a whole. This finding leads to the conclusion that there is a virtuous cycle that exists between social support and trust among the members of inter-organizational networks. Furthermore, network facilitators can intervene in this cycle to enhance group effectiveness. They can provide and nurture social support and trust by modeling supportive and trustworthy values and behaviors, fostering a supportive and trustworthy group culture, and/or leading trust, team, and relationship-building interventions. The finding that age and gender were positively correlated with social support (meaning elders and women were more likely to experience social support in the network) also suggests that mixing-up groups demographically by age and gender could produce group learning opportunities. Such a focus on the relational dimension of facilitation can lead to greater empowerment in inter-organizational networks, and potentially in other groups as well. This emphasizes the active role that group members can have in fostering their own trust and effectiveness.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Inter-organizational networks are an interesting area for group facilitation, given the many complexities involved across the various communities of interest, and adding to that, the challenge of working with those in positions of representation – mandated or otherwise on behalf of a wider community. This study attempts to illustrate empirically the symbiotic relationship between social support and trust in network facilitation. Interestingly, it also highlights some of the relationships found between age, gender and social support within the network.

## KEYWORDS

social networks, inter-organizational networks, trust, trust-building, team-building, relationship-building, social support, empowerment, group facilitation.

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores the virtuous cycle of social support and trust within an inter-organizational network. The concepts of social networks and network facilitation are first discussed, as well as how they fit into group

facilitation scholarship. Then the notions of social support and trust are considered, followed by a brief analysis of how they relate to empowerment theory in the field of facilitation. The relationship between social support and

trust is examined statistically, which provides the basis for a discussion of the implications of those findings. Empirical support is provided to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between social support and trust in network facilitation, as well as the statistical relationships that age and gender had with social support (whereby women and elders experienced more social support in the network). Finally, strategies for providing and nurturing social support, trust, and relationships in social groups are reflected on, along with specific suggestions for interventions that can be used by network facilitators and facilitators more generally. Understanding the virtuous cycle between social support and trust is helpful for facilitators interested in the relational dimension of facilitation, and for figuring out ways of empowering groups to be more self-directed and effective by building and supporting the relational capacities of the group members.

The study considered here examines facilitation within an inter-organizational network of peace movement non-profit organizations in Minnesota that were involved in efforts to protest the United States' role in the Iraq War in 2009. The forty-two organizations studied fit within a wider network of American and international peace movement organizations, some of which (like Students for a Democratic Society, *Pax Christie*, and Veterans for Peace) had relationships with affiliate local branches in Minnesota. Others that did not have local offices (like War Resister's League) informed the work of activists through common listservs, newsletters, and activist relationships made at national protests, and maintained these relationships through e-mail and common friends. Minnesota is a hub for such activity, being the location for the headquarters of some prominent American peace movement organizations such as Women Against Military Madness, Anti-War Committee, Nonviolent Peaceforce, and World Citizen, as well as a variety of active peace churches.

This is a particularly interesting research population in which to examine the virtuous cycle between social support and trust for several reasons. First and foremost, it provides a context to examine facilitation in an inter-organizational network, which is a unique setting for facilitation, especially when considering the effects of facilitation on network performance. In addition, the network of organizations studied was extremely active over the course of the study, organizing their annual protest on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, as well as a wide-range of weekly, monthly, and one-time events (such as protests and presentations). The goals of the group - protesting American involvement in the Iraq War - also illustrate a manner in which facilitation and facilitators can engage with critical political, social, sociocultural, and global concerns. This study is also an exemplary case for illustrating the dynamics associated with social support and trust because the vast majority of the study participants

were unpaid volunteers, so network participation was based on relational and ideational incentives, rather than financial ones, and the network was a mature one, having been in existence for over six years at the time of the study. In addition, the focus on inter-organizational networks demonstrates how the benefits of group facilitation can have wide impacts, radiating throughout our "networked society" through ever-increasing webs of global relationships (Castells, 2009).

In social network scholarship, the relationship between social support and trust is suggested in studies that have examined the connections between social support and social capital, in which trust is considered a key element (e.g., Putnam, 2000). This study investigates this relationship more closely and builds on the findings that were authored by Hansen (2012) in an article entitled "Network Facilitation and Social Capital" in *Peace and Conflict Studies*. In that article, Hansen illustrated several important findings concerning the peace movement network in Minnesota. First, it was empirically demonstrated that the network was largely facilitated, with various individuals filling facilitator roles for the entire network or for subgroups due to their interests, availability, and aptitudes for the facilitator role, although these individuals were not formally identified as facilitators. They were internal facilitators, who frequently operated as co-facilitators, with different individuals assisting with different aspects of facilitation (when one facilitator would encourage participatory discussion and another would make logistical arrangements for meetings, for instance). Second, Hansen determined statistically that the subgroups in the network that were facilitated also experienced higher levels of trust and work coordination. As two dimensions of facilitation that were considered in the study were encouraging participatory discussion and decision-making, it also clearly demonstrated that participatory (rather than unilateral) communication processes resulted in improved network performance. The third key finding was that higher levels of social support in the network were positively correlated with higher levels of network trust and work coordination. This article will consider this latter finding in greater depth, specifically exploring the impact of social support on network trust, and illustrating its significance in the context of group facilitation scholarship.

### Inter-Organizational Networks and Facilitation

Social networks are relatively stable social structures of social actors who exchange valued resources (e.g., Putnam, 2000). Examples of social networks include the aggregation of a person's relationships with their friends and family, work colleagues, or professional contacts. Social networks can therefore range from a few members to thousands. Social networks may be enhanced with digital communications media, which can permit a greater flow of



the fundamental resource that is exchanged in all social networks: information (Castells, 2009). Social support is also a key resource that is exchanged in networks of friends, family, and supportive acquaintances (Wellman, 1999). Social support is the care, companionship, and the material and emotional aid that group members provide to one another in order to improve their physical and mental well-being, and to help them cope with crises and day-to-day concerns (Wellman, 1999).

Organizations are a type of social actor that can participate in various types of social networks, although they are represented by people who act as agents on their behalf. Organizational networks differ from personal social networks because they are frequently more intentionally and purposefully created, more directed towards explicit collective goals, and are to some extent manageable (Galaskiewicz 1989; Hall & Tolbert 2005; Kickert et al. 1997). Examples of inter-organizational networks would be a network of social service agencies working together to provide at-risk youth in an inner city with complimentary social services, or a coalition of restaurant owners in a city that advocates for more free parking and lower property taxes downtown. As illustrated by Hansen (2012), such an inter-organizational network can be facilitated by internal facilitators, even when no facilitators are formally designated as such.

Inter-organizational networks are social structures that parallel small groups in some important ways. Both are groups of social actors, who work together towards explicit collective goals, meeting the collective needs of the group as well as those of the individual members (e.g., Justice & Jamieson, 1999). However, there are some significant differences between small groups and inter-organizational networks that lead to differences in the facilitation process. Inter-organizational network members may not have the opportunity to meet as a full group regularly, particularly if the network is very large and distributed in space (like the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, for instance), so much of their activities may be undertaken in subgroups, driven by the aptitudes and interests of those groups, rather than the network as a whole. Network leadership and facilitation tends to be much more diffuse than is the case with small groups (Hansen, 2012; Nan, 2008). Therefore, inter-organizational network facilitation may be considered somewhat analogous in nature to large group facilitation, where much of the work takes place in subgroups and one of the primary concerns is connecting the work of small groups with the large group (Bens, 2005; Hunter, 2009; James et al., 2005). When facilitators are not formally designated in an inter-organizational network, facilitation may appear more like it would in Open Space large group meetings, spontaneously emerging from group members (Owen, 1994). E-facilitation also resembles inter-organizational networks in many respects, as group

members are often distributed, and interactions occur both synchronously and asynchronously (Hogan, 2003; Thorpe, 2009). It is clear that interactions among inter-organizational network members increasingly take place over digital media, which can improve the information flow among members and subgroups.

Facilitators should be interested in inter-organizational network facilitation for two reasons. First, all group members are connected to other members of society through their personal, organizational, and inter-organizational networks, and this is an important means by which the benefits and skills of facilitation can radiate out into society (Hogan, 2003; Hunter, 2009). When looked at in this fashion, small groups can have much larger spheres of influence, far beyond the scope of the group members themselves, as groups are situated, either explicitly or implicitly, in larger constellations of social networks. Second, inter-organizational networks provide an important practice venue for facilitators, and these opportunities are expanding as society becomes increasingly “networked” and our world globalizes (Castells, 2009). Jenkins (2005) illustrates a model for identifying the characteristics of facilitated groups, considering the following elements of group design: pre-structured or self-organizing groups, scripted or emergent groups, groups using serial threads or parallel threads, one-off or long-term groups, groups having a narrow or a wide focus, and groups addressing symptomatic or causal problems. According to this model, inter-organizational networks would often be considered self-organizing, emergent, and long-term. They frequently deal with complex social problems (this is one of the main reasons why these networks form), address a wide scope of concerns and a variety of topics simultaneously, and often seek to understand and remedy the causes of social problems, rather than the symptoms. Therefore, they can have a particularly powerful impact on society, taking social group impacts beyond organizational boundaries (Felkins, 1995) to produce change in multiple, connected organizations, as well as wider societal social systems and structures (Epps, 2005).

### Social Support, Trust, and Empowerment

Information is considered one of the most valued resources in both social networks and small groups. In fact, Kaner et al. (2007) indicate that the essence of facilitation is “to support everyone [in the group] to do their best thinking,” which suggests a very cognitive focus on information and analysis (‘to do their best thinking’). But in using the word ‘support,’ Kaner et al. also illustrate that facilitators need to be supportive in their work. Specifically, group members need to feel supported in order to assure a group’s effectiveness. Hogan (2003) also emphasizes this point by insisting that facilitators need to build and maintain empathy, rapport, and connectedness with group members.

Hunter (2009) echoes this sentiment when discussing how the relationship that the facilitator has with group members should be based on both honor and trust. Wilkinson (2004) also illustrates the importance of facilitators supporting group members by stating that two of the key roles that the facilitator can play are that of a ‘motivator’ and ‘praiser’ of the group members. Social support is therefore another key resource in facilitated groups, and should be something that a facilitator offers to group members.

Kaner et al. (2007) consider the importance of social support in facilitated groups even more closely. In their discussion of the seven types of core meeting tasks, they suggest that community building is a central process in group facilitation. Their definition of community building involves encouraging group members to strengthen their bonds with one another, keeping their morale up, and celebrating their successes with one another. This conception of community building therefore suggests that group members must take responsibility for supporting one another as well. Hence, the process of giving support is not just the responsibility of the facilitator, but a more general responsibility shared by all of the group members, who create a sense of community among themselves. This is a particularly helpful way of viewing social support in inter-organizational networks, which often do not have any designated facilitators, or may have subgroups with no identified facilitators. In such cases, it is important that group members take ownership of the process of providing social support themselves and create their own community of support. In fact, this is what Hansen (2012) found in his analysis of the network of peace movement organizations in Minnesota. Group members took control of the process of giving social support to one another, rather than ceding that responsibility to any emergent internal facilitators.

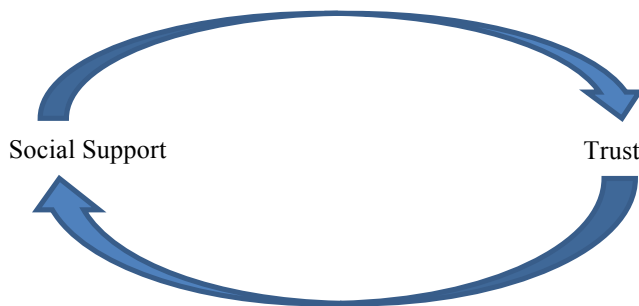
Likewise, Schwarz’s (2002) *Skilled Facilitator* model provides four explicit core values that provide group members with a normative foundation for their interactions with one another and their behavior. The four core values in the model are: valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment, and compassion. The value of compassion, which specifies that group members should empathize with one another and be concerned for one another’s welfare, temporarily suspend judgments about each other and ideas, and appreciate the suffering of all of the group members, is very much in alignment with the idea that group members should provide social support to one another. This is in the interest of creating a more effective group, as well as being in the best interests of each individual group member. Hunter (2009) also outlines a set of values that can be useful for group members to follow, which include: decision-making (which should be done by those most affected by the decisions); all people have equal worth; differences should be valued, honored, and celebrated; and group members should work together as

peers, cooperatively. This latter value clearly implies that group members should provide social support to one another. Hunter goes further to outline a spirit of facilitation that helps groups to reach sustainable solutions, which includes the notion that group members can cultivate their compassion and even love for one another in facilitated groups.

In emphasizing the relational dimension of facilitated groups, it is also important to examine the concept of trust. Justice and Jamieson (1999) refer to trust as an important “psychosocial issue,” suggesting that it is essential for group members to trust each other’s motivation and honesty, while also trusting that their own sense of safety and confidentiality will be respected by the other group members. Hogan (2003) also indicates that the relationships that group members have for one another are built upon a foundation of trust, which develops over time along with empathy, rapport, and connectedness. These discussions regarding trust refer to the trust that group members have for one another and their group. However, it is also important for group members to trust the facilitation process and their facilitators. Hogan (2003) emphasizes this point by illustrating the importance of trust-building in the initial phases of group facilitation. In an ongoing group, like an inter-organizational network, nurturing trust over the long-term as part of the group process might be just as important as building it in the early phases of group development (Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005). A facilitator’s effectiveness is largely tied to the trust that they are able to develop with the groups that they facilitate (Hunter & Thorpe, 2005; Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005). Internal and external facilitators face different challenges in gaining the trust of their group members (Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005; Schwarz, 2002). Internal facilitators may need to earn credibility as a facilitator or even legitimize the facilitation process itself in early stages of group development, but then may be more likely to cultivate deeper levels of group trust in later stages (when compared to an external facilitator), for instance (Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005). Hunter (2009) also suggests that trust must go two ways, and a facilitator must trust group members as well.

Two of the most crucial elements for facilitators to contemplate when considering the relational dimension of facilitated groups are therefore social support and trust. As stated above, social support is the care, companionship, and material and emotional aid that the facilitator provides to the group members and the group members provide to one another. Trust is the faith that group members have in the facilitator, the group process, the other group members, and the group as a whole. A tentative proposition emerging from this theorizing is that a facilitated group that is characterized by high levels of social support (care, companionship, and aid) will also be a group that

experiences high levels of trust (faith in the facilitator, facilitation process, group members, and the group as a whole). According to this proposition, the more that group members feel that they receive social support in a facilitated group, the more trust they would experience for the group and vice versa (lower levels of perceived social support would lead to lower levels of group trust). However, it would be presumptuous to assume that social support causes trust, as it is also plausible a high degree of trust could foster a more supportive group climate. Therefore, it would be better to characterize the presumed relationship between social support and trust as a virtuous cycle, with each in turn affecting the other (see Figure 1 below).



**Figure 1. The virtuous cycle of social support and trust in social groups**

This virtuous cycle of trust and social support can be considered a manifestation of group empowerment. There are many different ways that empowerment can be seen in group facilitation. Empowerment has been characterized as the extent to which group members have control over the decision-making process (Bens, 2005) or the extent to which the group is empowered to carry out their decisions within an organization (Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005).

Hunter (2009) focuses more on how the facilitator can empower themselves and make empowering interventions. However, in this case, a more appropriate way of viewing empowerment is the extent to which group members have the capacity to be self-directed. This understanding of empowerment is prevalent in treatment group scholarship (as opposed to task group scholarship) (e.g., Mullender & Ward, 1991; Toseland & Rivas, 2005). This perspective on empowerment also fits well with the notion in group facilitation (task group) scholarship that group capacity building is an important objective (Kaner et al., 2007). In fact, Schwarz's (2002) developmental facilitation model is designed to help groups achieve their independence from an external facilitator by assisting the group to build their capacity to be self-directed. A group cannot fully achieve self-direction solely by gaining proficiency with the virtuous cycle of social support and trust; however it represents a critical capacity on that path.

## STUDY METHODS

### The Context and Study Participants

The participants in this study were representatives of peace movement organizations in Minnesota who organized protest activities against the American role in the Iraq War in 2009. The representatives were identified by the primary investigator at protest activities, where participants were asked who the "organizers" or "leaders" of the protest were and then those identified individuals were asked to participate in the study. Of the forty-five individuals who were approached to participate in the study, thirty-six agreed (representing a total of forty-two organizations, as some individuals represented more than one organization) for a participation rate of eighty percent. This case study utilized survey methods for data collection, so a participation rate of eighty percent is considered quite high. The implication that the sample size had for this study, which used a regression analysis with five dimensions for the predictor variable, was that the statistical tests had .80 statistical power to detect a moderately small correlation of .30, and .95 statistical power to detect a moderate correlation of .40. Care and attention were given by the primary investigator to ensure that the study participants represented as wide a variety of organizations as possible (including student groups, veterans and their families, women's groups, religious groups, and so on).

The network of peace movement organizations consisted of a variety of organizations that were quite active in ongoing anti-war protest activities, and the individual representatives of those organizations had frequently been quite active in peace activities for some time. Many of the study participants had been involved in protest activities in Minnesota since the Vietnam War, and contributed to activities that received a good deal of national attention, such as protesting the Honeywell Corporation in the 1970s (for their production of landmine timers) (Rogne & Harper, 1990) and organizing protests in response to the Republican National Convention in Minnesota from August 31 to September 4, 2008 (Coleman, 2008). Most of the network members were involved in ongoing weekly subgroup events, such as smaller protests, going to peace presentations, having discussions about peace, and so on, in addition to participating in larger monthly or annual protests, as well as strategizing and planning the events themselves. This study focused on their involvement in the latter activity, the facilitation of strategizing and planning meetings.

At the time of the study, the inter-organizational network had been in existence since prior to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (i.e., for more than six years) and was in a period of contraction. An indicator of this was levels of participation at the large annual protest in the Twin Cities of Minnesota

that took place on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. When the Iraq War first broke out, an anti-war protest brought out approximately ten thousand activists, while only about 350 people participated in the annual protest in 2009 (Hansen, 2010). Among the study participants, thirty-one (eighty-six percent) indicated that they had been part of the network for more than five years, three (eight percent) indicated that they had been part of the network for two to five years, and only two (six percent) indicated that they had been part of the network for less than two years. In Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) developmental model for social groups, this would be considered the performing or perhaps the adjourning stage, although the group members themselves did not view their work as entering the adjourning stage. For this reason, the model of group development proposed by Justice and Jamieson (1999) might be more suitable, when the group works their way sequentially through the stages of: polite, goal, power, work, and esprit. The inter-organizational network studied would then reflect the esprit stage, where the work and the group is rewarding, participants are celebratory, and their spirits are high, although the study participants did indicate that they were disappointed with the low turn-out at major protests.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected for this case study by using an eighty-three question survey, which was self-administered in the presence of the principle investigator, who was available to answer any questions that respondents may have had. The survey questions were designed by reviewing existing inter-organizational network evaluation surveys (e.g., Galaskiewicz, 1979; Morrissey et al., 1982), selecting appropriate questions, and modifying them to suit the research context. Next, the survey was sent to several social network researchers, who critiqued it and provided helpful feedback. Then the survey was field-tested by two potential research participants, who went through all of the research questions with the principle investigator before it was used in the study. The survey asked each of the research participants about their perceptions of the facilitation occurring in the strategizing and planning meetings that took place over the previous three months. The participants completed the survey over a ten day period (April 20 to April 30, 2009) in a location of their choosing. As stated above, the reliability and validity of the measures were maximized by building on questions from previous inter-organizational network evaluation studies, selecting measures that captured a range of dimensions of facilitation (including social support and trust), adapting them to the study context, getting input from experts on the survey, and field-testing the survey. Following initial data analysis, the study participants were given a preliminary report of the findings, and several participants came to a focus group

meeting to discuss their impressions of the findings, which provided additional data for the final data analysis.

The network facilitation variable was divided into five dimensions of group facilitation: logistical arrangements for group meetings (how much participants were involved in organizing meetings and disseminating information about them), social support (how often participants were motivated by others, given assistance coping with stress or completing their work, and given opportunities to celebrate successes), participatory discussion (how frequently participants felt that they could openly state their point of view, express and overcome problems, and that there were no obstacles to expressing themselves), participatory decision-making (how frequently participants felt involved in decision-making, decisions were made by consensus or voting rather than by unilateral means, and compromises were distributed evenly), and conflict management (how frequently participants experienced interpersonal conflicts, felt that others took actions against them, and were able to discuss and overcome their differences). The study participants completed four Likert-style questions considering each dimension of facilitation (logistical arrangements, social support, participatory discussion, participatory decision-making, and conflict management). This provided a total of twenty questions for the network facilitation variable for each study participant. The questions asked them the frequency that they experienced each dimension of facilitation in their planning and strategizing meetings. Each of the answers was assessed a numerical value by adding the scores of ordinal measures ranging in value from one to five, giving each individual a total score from four to twenty for each dimension of facilitation, and twenty to one hundred for the facilitation variable as a whole. The network facilitation variable was considered the independent variable in the study.

The dependent variable considered in this study was inter-organizational network trust. The study participants were asked eight Likert-style questions (with answers also scored from one to five) concerning the frequency that they experienced network trust. In this case, trust examined the extent to which the network members trusted one another and the network as a whole, rather than the process of facilitation or the network facilitators. The trust questions examined the extent to which network members allowed other members to make decisions on their behalf, believed that members put network interests ahead of their personal interests, accessed shared resources, followed through on their commitments and network tasks, were honest with one another, and did not blame one another for failures. Each study participant thus received a total score of eight to forty for the trust variable. As each individual participated in a unique set of subgroups and experienced a set of activities and interactions in the network particular to them, their experiences of network facilitation and trust were also

specific to them. The levels of network facilitation that participants experienced were compared with their levels of trust in a regression analysis, testing the following hypothesis: *in this inter-organizational network, facilitation (including the dimensions of logistical arrangements, social support, participatory discussion, participatory decision-making, and conflict management) will be found to be statistically related to trust.* After conducting the regression analysis, network facilitation was found to be statistically related to trust ( $p = .027$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ). The effect size of the relationship was moderately small (the positive correlation discovered was .33). This meant that the network facilitation variable accounted for thirty-three percent of the variation in the trust variable.

In a post-hoc analysis of the trust variable, all of the dimensions of facilitation (logistical arrangements, social support, participatory discussion, participatory decision-making, and conflict management) were separately tested using linear regression models to see if any had any independent relationships with the trust variable. The only dimension that was found to be statistically related to the trust variable was social support ( $p = .014$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ). The effect size of the relationship was found to be moderately small, with a positive correlation of .23. However, given that the positive correlation for the facilitation variable as a whole was .33, the social support variable accounted for a good deal of the relationship between network facilitation and trust (more than two-thirds of the variation). This finding supports the notion that there was a virtuous cycle between social support and trust in this inter-organizational network and potentially in other facilitated groups, especially inter-organizational networks.

Several control variables were considered in this study as well. In addition to the duration of involvement in the network variable mentioned above, data was collected on the participants' position in the organizations that they represented, their age, their race, their gender, and their level of education. Linear regression analyses were used to uncover whether there were any relationships between any of these control variables and any of the dimensions of facilitation, or the dependent variable - network trust. With respect to social support and trust, several interesting findings emerged.

Two control variables were found to be statistically related to social support: age ( $p = .001$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ) and gender ( $p = .008$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ). Age had a large effect on the social support variable, with a positive correlation of .52. That means that the age variable explained fifty-two percent of the variation of the social support variable. Older participants tended to experience greater social support in the network than younger participants (the social support variable measured the level of social support received rather than the social support that was given). Gender had a moderately large

effect on the social support variable, with a positive correlation of .44. This means that the gender variable explained forty-four percent of the variation of the social support variable. Women tended to experience more social support in the network than men. Both of these findings were robust, indicating that in this inter-organizational network, the demographic variables of age and gender had substantial impacts on the social support variable.

One control variable was found to be statistically related to trust: the duration of network involvement ( $p = .029$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ). The duration of network involvement had a moderately small effect on the trust variable, with a positive correlation of .36. This means that the duration of network involvement variable explained thirty-six percent of the variation of the trust variable. The longer a participant was involved in the network, the more likely it was that they experienced trust from the other network members or the network as a whole. Although this effect was not large, it was larger than the effect of the independent variable, network facilitation (with a positive correlation of .33). In addition, given the fact that eighty-six percent of the participants had been participating in the network for more than five years, the statistical test had a limited ability to capture a robust effect size due to the limited participant response range.

The research participants were also asked the following formative evaluation questions: *“What could be done to improve the support that members offer one another?”* and *“What could be done to improve the trust among the members?”* In response to the first question regarding improving social support, there were six responses given by more than one network member (the responses are presented here in descending order from the most to the least common): 1) more informal, social activities and team-building; 2) better introductions and support for new network members; 3) articulating personal needs better to other network members; 4) being honest; 5) accepting people have other responsibilities; and 6) asking each other if any help is needed. In response to the second question regarding improving network trust, there were six responses that were given by more than one member of the network (the responses are again presented here in descending order from the most to the least common): 1) to have more parties and social interactions; 2) to listen better, improve communication skills, and have more open group discussions; 3) to continue ongoing working relationships, share projects, and mix-up work teams more; 4) to delegate work more; 5) to do more post-event evaluations; and 6) to ensure personal responsibility and follow-through. Together, these responses provide some important insights as to how facilitators would be able to improve the levels of social support and trust in this inter-organizational network.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's findings and provides a context within which to interpret them, then it connects these findings to facilitation scholarship to illustrate the implications for practice. There are several key findings that stand out in an analysis of this data. First and foremost, there was a statistically significant relationship discovered between social support and the trust variable. This provides empirical evidence to support the proposition presented above that a virtuous cycle exists between social support and trust in facilitated groups, in this case an inter-organizational network of non-profit organizations. Overall, this means that for facilitators focusing on the relational elements of facilitation in a group, encouraging social support and trust are valuable endeavors and, as they are illustrated here to be mutually reinforcing, any steps to improve one will naturally work to improve the other.

The ability of facilitators to influence the trust that network members had for one another and the network as a whole was important but limited, with network facilitation explaining thirty-three percent of the variation in the trust variable. Social support was the only dimension of facilitation examined to have an independent statistical relationship with trust, and it was the cause of the preponderance of the relationship, explaining twenty-three percent of the variation in the trust variable. In this particular network, the size of the relationships that facilitation and social support had with trust may have been lower than might otherwise be expected because the group members had reached the esprit stage, so group levels of social support and trust were already high, and the impact of facilitation and social support on the trust variable would have been less than what one could expect in newly forming groups.

The network facilitators had very little ability to influence the only control variable with a statistically significant relationship with trust, the duration of involvement in the network. In large part, trust simply built over time among the group members through their interactions with one another and by working together. Hogan (2003) also states that socio/demographic similarity and expected future association can form a foundation of trust, but as facilitators have little control over these factors as well, particularly in an inter-organizational network where they have no control over who participates in various subgroups, they might have more impact on group dynamics by providing and nurturing social support in the group. In fact, cooperative behavior has already been noted to bring about trust in small groups (e.g., Hogan, 2003).

There were also robust statistically significant relationships between the social support variable and the control variables of age (older network members tended to

experience more social support) and gender (female network members tended to experience more social support). This leads to the tentative conclusion that in inter-organizational networks and perhaps other facilitated groups, perceptions of social support may be influenced by age and gender. For a facilitator, this means that if there are a lot of younger people in a group or the group is largely male, then they should be particularly vigilant about providing and nurturing social support among the group members. Alternatively, in groups with elders or women, their aptitude for social support could be used to encourage higher perceptions of social support in the group as a whole, perhaps as mentors or leaders-by-example. Mixing-up work teams demographically by age or gender might be a means to generate mentorship or learning opportunities specifically relating to social support. In fact, the research participants suggested the possibility that mixing-up work teams could be a valuable way to enhance the relational dimension of their network.

When considering other research participants' suggestions for improving levels of social support and trust in their network, several findings stand out. 'More social activities and team-building' was the most common suggestion and was identified as a means of enhancing both social support and trust. A variety of facilitation scholars suggest team-building as a means of improving the relational quality of group interactions, with activities such as visioning and having group members identify the qualities of an effective team (e.g., Hunter, 2009). Hogan (2003) goes further to suggest the use of outdoor venues or ropes courses for team-building activities. Among the research participants, 'inter-personal and communication skill-building' was another common suggestion for building social support and trust, including skills such as expressing oneself, asking questions, listening, making introductions and including newer members, and delegating work effectively. Hunter (2009) includes such skill-building efforts as part of an overall team-building workshop.

Network members also suggested personal qualities that could promote more social support and trust in their network. These included network members being more honest, being accepting of the limitations of others, and ensuring one's own follow-through with responsibilities. Facilitation scholars such as Schwarz (2002) and Hunter (2009) acknowledge the critical importance of group members adhering to foundational values as an essential part of their group participation, which infers personal qualities such the ones mentioned above. It is interesting to consider that personal qualities such as these are often seen as important facilitator qualities as well. For instance, Justice and Jamieson (1999) suggest that some important facilitator qualities are steadiness, confidence, assertiveness, openness, flexibility, authenticity, humility, optimism, and a results-oriented disposition. Clearly, these

qualities are also beneficial for group members to cultivate. Personal qualities such as these may have been particularly important for the members of the inter-organizational network that was studied here because they are volunteers and are particularly passionate about their work and the way that it is conducted.

The final suggestion that was made by the network members for improving social support and trust in their network was to have more post-event evaluations. This is actually a best practice in facilitation more generally (Bens, 2005). Rohrbaugh (2005) indicates that measuring facilitation effectiveness aligns well with the goal that facilitators and organizations have to constantly improve their process. He proposes a four category model for measuring the decision-making process in small groups, including the dimensions of consensual (pattern maintenance), political (adaptation), goal attainment (rational), and integration (empirical). The type of measurement instrument proposed by the network members in this study aligns most closely with the consensual dimension, which focuses on the internal relationships of the group members to the greatest degree, by considering the participatory nature of the process and the supportability of any group decisions. Interestingly, Rohrbaugh (2005) suggests that this type of evaluation is very compatible with the objective of team-building.

Fostering trust is one of the fundamental values stated in the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Facilitators developed by the International Association of Facilitators (Hunter & Thorpe, 2005). Facilitation practitioners and scholars have recommended various processes for increasing the trust that group members have for one another and the group as a whole. For instance, Rodas-Meeker and Meeker (2005) suggest some trust-building strategies that a facilitator can use: eliciting stories from group members; using appreciative inquiry; and engaging the group in various experiential approaches to learning, including adventure training and ropes courses. Hogan (2003) describes some alternatives like the trust walk and mirror walk activities, where blindfolded group members are led around by other group members to engage in various activities, which can be helpful trust-building exercises. Interestingly, she notes how challenging trust-building can be in the e-facilitation of on-line groups. Her suggestions for building trust with such groups revolve around developing ground rules and having respectful group norms.

Other facilitation scholars recommend more general relationship-building activities for small groups. Kaner et al. (2007), for instance, suggest the following activities for relationship-building: anecdotes and mementos, two truths and a lie, the support seat, and “how do I come across?” In anecdotes and mementos, each group member shares

important stories or artifacts from their lives with other members of the group. In two truths and a lie, group members state two truthful things about themselves and a lie and the group members have to guess the lie. In the support seat, the group can ask a group member (who sits in ‘the support seat’) about their personal life away from the group. In “how do I come across?” group members ask for feedback from other group members to determine how they are being perceived, which might include being likened to a person that the group member reminds them of. All of these activities can spark deeper inquiry and discussion that can provide a basis for an even more profound exploration and expansion of group trust.

Perhaps the most common way that facilitation scholars suggest to increase the level of trust in a facilitated group is for the facilitator to be trustworthy and a role-model, as well as trusting of the group. A facilitator can demonstrate their trustworthiness by being present and mindful, creating conditions for open, inclusive, and respectful dialogue and decision-making, helping to establish and following ground rules, intervening appropriately, caring for, listening to and understanding the group members, using communication skills effectively, being open to feedback, following through on commitments, having congruent values and behaviors, acting in an ethical manner, providing the group with personal information, and helping the group achieve positive outcomes (Hogan, 2003; Hunter, 2009; Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005). A facilitator can give trust by having faith in the group members’ good intentions and their ability to fulfill their responsibilities to the group, as well as the group’s ability to solve their own problems and make high-quality decisions (Hunter, 2009; Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005). Ultimately, trust can be seen as an aspect of overall group synergy (Hunter, 2009).

All of these strategies for building trust and relationships could potentially be useful when striving to build a culture of trust and social support in a facilitated inter-organizational network. Many of these activities would need to be modified to suit the context by conducting them within subgroups, making the most of scant resources (including time, money, and other important resources), and other such considerations, but they could all prove to be helpful in the overall pursuit of greater inter-organizational network social support and trust. They can therefore lead to the empowerment of the group. Empowerment in this context means the ability for the group to be more successfully self-directed. These approaches to encouraging social support, team-building, trust-building, and relationship-building should all help the group members to trust and support one another, building their capacity to more effectively direct their own activities and accomplish their goals.

There were some unique elements of this research population, as an inter-organizational network, that could have had an impact on the relationships found among the variables examined. The network had limited resources as the organizations involved were all non-profit organizations that were frequently quite small and had very limited budgets. The network was facilitated exclusively by internal facilitators who operated largely as co-facilitators, each taking responsibility for various responsibilities in different subgroups and planning meetings. As this group was an inter-organizational network, the entire group did not have the ability to meet as a full group regularly; group interactions were distributed in space and time, frequently taking place in smaller subgroups, and a good deal of information was exchanged over digital media. Therefore, facilitation tended to be more diffuse and, in some respects, the group was relatively loosely coupled. However, as the vast majority of the research participants were volunteers, in a network with a purpose that they were passionate about and willing to spend their spare time working on, the network members tended to have a great affinity for one another and their collective work. Because the preponderance of the network members had been working together for a long time, and less committed members had dropped out, incidents of conflict were rare. Overall, this meant that there were strong relationships among the group members and high levels of social support and trust in the network.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the virtuous cycle of social support and trust within a network of peace movement organizations. The proposition that social support and trust are mutually reinforcing elements within facilitated groups was supported. Although the magnitude of this relationship might be considered smaller than expected (with a positive correlation of .23), this can be attributed to the group's mature stage of development, which reduced the need for facilitators to build group trust, as the group members had already been working effectively together for a long time. The virtuous cycle of social support and trust draws attention to the importance of relational aspects of inter-organizational networks and other types of facilitated groups. The approaches considered here to enhance the provision and nurturing of social support, trust, relationships, and work teams all provide mechanisms for facilitators to accelerate and intensify the virtuous cycle of social support and trust in facilitated groups. There were three general strategies discussed here: 1) modeling supportive and trustworthy values and behaviors, 2) fostering a supportive and trustworthy group culture, and 3) leading trust, team, and relationship-building interventions. Also, as the demographic variables of age and gender were found to have robust statistical relationships with social support, mixing-up network subgroups with respect to age

and gender is potentially valuable, in order to maximize learning opportunities and mentorship among the network members. Ultimately, boosting the virtuous cycle of social support and trust has the impact of increasing the capacity of the group to become more self-directed and more effective. This is a key way that group members can play an active role in promoting effective group processes and outcomes for themselves. This form of empowerment is a critical outcome in many inter-organizational networks.

This study therefore brings up some interesting research questions for scholars interested in studying inter-organizational network facilitation; questions such as: To what extent does enhancing group social support and trust lead to the empowerment and effectiveness of other kinds of facilitated groups? Just how effective can different team, trust, and relationship-building interventions be at enhancing the virtuous cycle of trust and social support? What are some other ways that facilitators and facilitation researchers can work to empower facilitators and group members in other inter-organizational networks? Considering such questions in other research settings could help to augment knowledge of the relational dimension of facilitation, as well as expanding scholarship on inter-organizational network facilitation, as there is a global increase in inter-organizational networks and their capacity to bring about important social change.

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# Mindfulness for Group Facilitation: An Example of Eastern Philosophy in Western Organizations

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that mindfulness techniques can be used for enhancing the outcome of group performance. The word *mindfulness* has different connotations in the academic literature. Broadly speaking there is ‘mindfulness without meditation’ or ‘Western’ mindfulness which involves active thinking and ‘Eastern’ mindfulness which refers to an open, accepting state of mind, as intended with Buddhist-inspired techniques such as meditation. In this paper, we are interested in the latter type of mindfulness and demonstrate how Eastern mindfulness techniques can be used as a tool for facilitation. A brief introduction to the physiology and philosophy of Eastern mindfulness constitutes the basis for the arguments of the effect of mindfulness techniques. The use of mindfulness techniques for group facilitation is novel as it changes the focus from individuals’ mindfulness practice to that of the collective group, and has a subsequent effect on participant’s attention, levels of energy, and experience of the group atmosphere. We discuss some of the problems encountered when mindfulness techniques are used in organizations and provide recommendations for facilitators wanting to employ mindfulness techniques.

## KEYWORDS

mindfulness, presence, attention, energy level, atmosphere, technique, group work, team work, group facilitation.

## INTRODUCTION

*It is 8 am. We are in a conference room overlooking the harbor of Copenhagen in Denmark. An organization has decided to develop a comprehensive environmental initiative, and this is the first time that all the experts have gotten together to coordinate the different sub-projects. I have been hired as the meeting facilitator, but the project manager has chosen to begin the meeting with a presentation of the project in its entirety before introducing me. Thus, the meeting starts out with some important words, which are intended to focus the conversations for the rest of the morning. While the project manager speaks, I take a look around the conference room. At least one third of the participants seem focused on something other than the project manager. Several people are looking over the notes for their own presentations, a few are looking for coffee, and a young guy is flirting with the woman across the table. The presenter senses the lack of enthusiasm and*

*presence in the room and responds by speaking faster. This means that his points are not delivered properly, and the final ten minutes of his presentation might as well have been skipped.*

*When he is done with his presentation, he introduces me. I explain to the participants that I am going to guide them through a six minute mini-meditation, a so-called ‘guided landing’, as a way to increase their capacity for shared focus and openness. I ask everyone to sit up straight and place both feet on the floor. Then I ask them to either close their eyes or focus their gaze on a spot in front of them. A few respond with crossed arms but everyone follows my directions. I then invite the participants to feel their feet on the floor and the seat of their chair underneath them. I invite them to breathe deeply for about a minute and to feel the effect throughout their body. Following that, I ask the*

*participants to pay attention to sounds around them, both inside the room and from the harbor outside. I ask them to sense the dimensions of the room and the other people in the meeting. Finally, I invite them to explore whether they sense any difference after sitting for six minutes.*

*When they open their eyes, the atmosphere in the room has changed. Everyone seems more present and the atmosphere feels warmer and safer. When the next presentation begins, the participants are focused and the meeting is back on track.*

This is one of the author's examples of how Eastern mindfulness techniques can be incorporated in group facilitation in a Western organizational context. We (a researcher with facilitation experience, and a mindfulness instructor with a M.A. in philosophy and facilitation experience) have collaborated for a number of years to use mindfulness as a tool for facilitation of group processes both in organizations and management education. In this article, we discuss how, when and why this can be done.

Until the 1960s, the use of techniques to induce mindfulness was perceived predominantly as an existential practice rooted in Buddhist traditions and philosophy. However, since the 1970's, mindfulness techniques have also won recognition as a form of therapy within parts of Western psychology and medicine (Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), and over the past decade, mindfulness techniques have expanded further to be considered a practical tool in organizations (Hunter & McCormick, 2008). We focus here on the latter employment of mindfulness techniques, and discuss ways in which facilitators can employ mindfulness techniques for enhancement of group performance and how they can be used in work situations, e.g., in meetings<sup>1</sup> and conferences, where a group of people come together to learn or to collaborate.

What is new about the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation is that it shifts the focus from the individual to the group. As an existential practice and as therapy, mindfulness techniques are usually employed by individuals. Similarly the focus on mindfulness in the workplace tends to be on the individual, such as the manager meditating in her office, or employees meditating in the same room. In contrast, facilitation is fundamentally directed at a group and its collective goals<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we use the term *meetings* as a collective term for meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences. The central point here is not the specific type of meeting, but its facilitation.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that a facilitator also can employ mindfulness techniques to enhance her practice and performance as a facilitator. This, however, is similar to other individual applications of techniques to induce mindfulness and is beyond

While the use of facilitators to steer group processes is more common in the US than in Europe, it is increasing and spreading to various sectors - from community meetings to the workplace. Today, facilitation of processes is used for a number of different purposes and different types of meetings, for instance, as a means to enhance peer learning in study groups in higher education (Adriansen & Madsen, 2013), and as a leadership style intended to increase employee engagement in meetings (Bens, 2006). Hence, an increasing number of people are likely to meet facilitators during their work life. Groups do not normally encounter mindfulness techniques – at least not in a European context – therefore it is important to bear in mind how these techniques are introduced and applied.

In this article, we analyze ways in which a facilitator may employ techniques to induce mindfulness to create a shared focus, calm, and openness – desired qualities in most meeting situations. We, the authors, describe a relatively simple mindfulness technique which we use in our own facilitation work and which can be easily picked up by facilitators, and adapted by managers, instructors, and others working to help a group of people learn or accomplish something together. As we have based our arguments about the effects of mindfulness techniques on physiology and philosophy, these are outlined in the following section. Following that, we provide a short introduction to facilitation in order to point to relevant aspects of literature in relation to the use of mindfulness techniques. Our focus then shifts to three areas where mindfulness techniques can be employed to enhance facilitation in groups: attention, energy level, and enhancing group atmosphere. We discuss the specific use of mindfulness techniques in each of these areas, and address potential difficulties of combining facilitation and mindfulness techniques. Before the concluding remarks, we provide recommendations for facilitators using mindfulness techniques.

### Mindfulness – physiological and philosophical aspects

In colloquial English, the expression *mindfulness* has been used for more than three centuries to describe the act of being conscious and/or attentive. Thus, the expression was used long before British researcher Thomas William Rhys Davids first translated the Pali<sup>3</sup> word *sati* as mindfulness in English, thereby linking mindfulness and Buddhism [see Dryden and Still (2006) for an historical analysis of mindfulness in a Western context].

the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, it seems likely that a facilitator who employs regular mindfulness practice will prove a more adept guide for a mindfulness-based activity than a facilitator who does not – as we argue later.

<sup>3</sup> Pali is a Middle Indo-Aryan language of the Indian subcontinent and the language of the earliest Buddhist texts.

Today, the term mindfulness is often used in two different ways – to denote a state of mind (this can be done through a number of techniques deriving from Buddhism and yoga <sup>4</sup>) or to denote the cognitive process “of drawing novel distinctions” (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 1). The latter use of the term mindfulness is seen within the field of psychology where a number of researchers have done work on mindfulness without meditation. Social psychologist Ellen Langer in particular has written extensively about the use of mindfulness and learning based on a non-Buddhist understanding of the term (e.g. Langer, 1989; 1992). This line of inquiry distinguishes between *mindfulness* and *mindlessness*. According to Carson and Langer (2006), being mindful means to be actively engaged in the present, perceptive of both context and perspective. Mindlessness refers to automated processes that we engage in without giving them our full attention. This use of mindfulness to designate a focus on attention in learning processes can also be found in Holland’s (2006) study on contemplative learning. A similar understanding of mindfulness without meditation can be seen in Salamon and Globerson (1987) in their use of mindfulness to understand learning and transfer. Only two articles in *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal* to date mention mindfulness, and both concern the non-Buddhist (i.e. mindfulness without meditation) understanding (see Burson, 2002; Shaw et al., 2010)<sup>5</sup>.

In the present article, we employ the term mindfulness to designate meditation-based techniques to induce engagement in the present; what has been referred to as an “Eastern conception of mindfulness as opposed to the Western conception without meditation” (Weick & Putnam, 2006). Inspired by Kabat-Zinn (1990, 1994), we have developed the following conception of mindfulness: *Mindfulness is to be present in the moment and to cultivate a state of non-judgmental openness in order to relinquish our control of the world, including our own cognitive processes* (Adriansen & Krohn, 2011, p. 69, translated from Danish). Mindfulness techniques often incorporate a great number of yoga poses, as well as breathing (pranayama)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Yoga refers to a system of physical and mental prescriptions and originates from India. In the form described here, yoga consists of only three elements: meditation, breathing technique (pranayama) and poses. Singleton (2010) discusses the historical development of yoga. Transnational yoga (Singleton’s concept), which has become increasingly popular in the West (and in India) over the past two decades, focuses primarily on poses. When we mention yoga, it is as transnational yoga.

<sup>5</sup> Yet, the issue of being present (i.e., actively engaged in the present) is important and is mentioned in different ways, ranging from ‘sense of presence’ to ‘transcendent self-presence’ and presence as a contemplative practice (e.g. Thomas, 2008, 2006; Watts. Miller & Kloefer, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> The Sanskrit term pranayama means ‘extension of the life force (prana)’ and refers to breathing techniques (conscious, controlled,

and meditation techniques (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Different mindfulness techniques are listed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Mindfulness Techniques**

Mindfulness Techniques	
<b>Focus meditation</b>	Meditation in a sitting (or lying down) position, where attention is directed toward the breath (without altering it), a particular part of the body or other physical sensations.
<b>Body scan</b>	Conscious attention to different body parts. It may begin with the toes, the arch, the heel, the ankle and then allow the attention to gradually move through the entire body.
<b>Landing</b>	A combination of body scan and attention to the world around such as sounds and temperature. Often guided by an instructor.
<b>Walking meditation</b>	Walking slowly, preferably barefoot, observing all sensory impressions under the feet.
<b>Breathing technique (pranayama)</b>	Conscious, controlled, rhythmic breathing intended to affect the body and mind in various ways. The techniques can involve inhalation through the nose, exhalation through the mouth as a sigh, or altering through the right and left nostril.
<b>Yoga</b>	A series of yoga poses performed with continual body awareness, preferably synchronizing the breath with the movements.

What the techniques have in common is their capacity to create mental calm and increased presence. Generally, however, mindfulness practice is associated with meditation. Mindful meditation seeks to observe and experience the present moment as it is and is most often practiced in a sitting position on the floor or on a chair (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In order to explain why mindfulness techniques may have a positive effect on the work climate at meetings or conferences, we will point to the relevant physiology.

### Effects on the autonomic nervous system

Meditation is often associated with a mental realm, and this is by no means a misconception, since it is primarily experienced as such when practicing the techniques. However, the act of creating mental calm also includes a

rhythmic breathing) intended to affect the mind and body in different ways. More than 50 different types of pranayama exist (Rosen, 2002).

physiological function, which is controlled by the limbic system in the brain and is stimulated through the autonomic nervous system (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). We will illustrate how mindfulness techniques function, and explain the different aspects of this effect by looking at mindfulness from the perspective of its effect on the autonomic nervous system. This is relevant to an understanding of the ways in which mindfulness techniques may affect the capacity for collaboration and learning among group members.

The name given to the autonomic nervous system refers to the fact that it operates outside the domain of conscious control; it performs vital functions, which we do not need to remember how to perform such as controlling the heart rate, breathing cycles, digestion, sleep and wakening (Baer, Connors & Paradiso, 2006).

### *The sympathetic nervous system*

The autonomic nervous system is divided into two parts: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The sympathetic nervous system is referred to as such because the heightened stimulation of this nervous system affects a number of different bodily functions simultaneously (Baer et al., 2006).

The functions of the sympathetic nervous system are essential to our lives. Without them, it would be difficult to respond in dangerous and difficult situations. These functions are unproblematic until the body for some reason loses its ability to regulate itself. If this happens, a person may find themselves in an unnecessarily heightened state of alertness in relation to one's actual situation. This might weaken one's capacity for participating in specific social contexts (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Thus, an unnecessarily heightened stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system may decrease our ability to gain perspective and prioritize, and may also impair crucial social competencies such as openness, security and empathy (see e.g., Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Collard & Walsh, 2008; Kernochan, McCormick & White, 2007).

### *The parasympathetic nervous system*

The parasympathetic nervous system regulates the same bodily functions as the sympathetic nervous system, but with the opposite suppressive effect. Rather than heightened stimulation, the parasympathetic nervous system actively slows the nervous system down. Thus, stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system will result in a decrease in heart rate, redistribution of normal blood flow, and the sensation of warmth in hands and feet. Digestion is stimulated and one may begin to yawn and even fall asleep (Baer et al., 2006). Similarly, social competencies will be affected contrary to the effects of stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic nervous

system is stimulated when the limbic system does not perceive any immediate danger in a specific situation (Baer et al., 2006). This results in increased trust, openness, and empathy, as opposed to the mistrust, competitiveness and insensitivity characteristic of someone whose fight-or-flight reaction has been mobilized.

Over the course of a typical day, the body will continually regulate the stimulation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. We are roused and settle back down again repeatedly. Sometimes, however, this regulating mechanism does not function seamlessly. We may receive so many stimuli that the sympathetic nervous system receives constant stimulation, which puts us in a constant heightened state of alert. If such excessive stimulation continues over a longer period of time, the autonomic nervous system may lose its ability to regulate itself and leave the body in a perpetual state of over-alertness, a condition we generally refer to as stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Mindfulness techniques have an effect of stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. This causes the body and mind to calm down, and produces an increased sensation of bodily presence (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). These physical responses are important for an understanding of why and how the techniques work. We should mention that research demonstrating the effectiveness of these techniques (e.g., Baer, 2003; Baer, Fischer & Huss, 2005; Kernochan et al., 2007; Collard & Walsh, 2008) is based on studies of individuals using the techniques for longer periods of time and with different purposes than the one we are describing here. We, the authors, presuppose that the physiological effects generated by the techniques are similar when the purpose of using them is different e.g., when used for generating a sense of presence during a meeting.

### The philosophical basis of mindfulness

The earliest evidence of techniques that might be referred to as mindfulness techniques can be traced back with to approximately 500 years BCE. At that time, the historical person to be eventually known as the Buddha, Siddharta Guatama, was living in India, and some of the techniques taught in mindfulness classes today date back to early Buddhism and to much earlier, Hindu practices (on which the Buddhist practices were based). Originally, however, the purpose of mindfulness practices was different (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Traditionally, meditation was part of the path to extraordinary self-knowledge, and thus should lead to the eradication of suffering. Having reached a state of self-knowledge, those meditating may attain existential liberation, or what Buddhists refer to as *Nirvana* or enlightenment (Williams, 2000).

Even in original practices, different schools of thought (e.g. Theravada, Mahayana) prescribed different techniques for the attainment of enlightenment (Harvey, 2000). However, the different schools and instructors apparently agreed on the necessity of calming the mind. The core principle is that all human suffering is a result of erroneous conception in the sufferer's mind. Hence, we all have misconceptions of who we are and of our relation to the world. Thus, according to Buddhists, there is nothing wrong with the world - only with our conception of it (Kernochan et al., 2007; Williams, 2000).

Traditionally, the purpose of meditation in Buddhism was to quiet the mind as a means to end our misconceptions and to cultivate an open, accepting attentiveness for experiencing reality as it is (Williams, 2000). A number of techniques were developed for such purposes, and some of these have now been extracted from their traditional Buddhist context and have been given the name mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

### *A Western approach to mindfulness*

One might question whether it is possible and desirable to simply remove these techniques from their original context and apply them in a contemporary Western context. We believe it is. Traditionally, the techniques were designed to quiet the mind and to cultivate an open and accepting presence. The idea is that a quiet mind and peaceful openness allow the individual to achieve insight into some of life's deeper connections. This insight is considered essential in the process towards achieving enlightenment, which is the 'natural' outcome of following Buddhist practices. Enlightenment is often described as the complete elimination of suffering and represents a mystical, final and existential redemption. Thus, traditionally these techniques were used as a means to achieve an existential ideal.

Today, mindfulness techniques are generally used for purposes of wellbeing and presence of mind. The techniques still quiet the mind and still cultivate open, accepting attentiveness; but more often, the traditional striving for enlightenment no longer accompanies their use. A Buddhist practitioner might find the contemporary Western use of mindfulness techniques superficial because the striving for an existential ideal is lacking. However, the techniques work well without an existential ideal, and nothing prevents their use for the sole purpose of reaping their beneficial and positive effects.

### FACILITATION AS HELP FOR GROUPS

Justice and Jamieson (2006) define facilitation as "*enabling groups to succeed*. More specifically: 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." (p. 4). A facilitator is responsible for designing and guiding the processes that lead the group towards its goal. In short, the facilitator is concerned with what needs to be accomplished, who needs to be involved, the order of tasks, degree of participation, use of resources, group energy<sup>7</sup>, momentum, and capability, as well as the physical and psychological environment (Justice & Jamieson, 2006). Here, we analyze ways in which to use mindfulness techniques to affect group energy and the psychological environment, more specifically to regulate attention, energy levels, and atmosphere.

A facilitator needs to be familiar with a set of techniques for designing and creating processes (see e.g., Doyle & Straus, 1982; Justice & Jamieson, 2006). These techniques are used to create productive processes that allow participants to play an active role, be heard and seen, contribute their knowledge, share it with others, and whatever else is needed in the specific meeting. The most important technique to mention here is silent reflection. A silent reflection is when the group takes a few minutes to quietly reflect on a question. Silent reflection is a simple but effective technique. Mindfulness techniques can be another tool in the facilitator's toolbox. As we will demonstrate below, mindfulness techniques can promote the ability to handle the silence in the context of silent reflection.

Mindfulness techniques can also be employed to improve one's performance as facilitator, no matter if the facilitator is external or internal. In her book *Extreme facilitation: Guiding groups through controversy and complexity* (2005), Suzanne Ghais describes the characteristics of a good facilitator. Among the needed qualities are presence, authenticity, calmness, trustworthiness and self-confidence. The first three of these qualities relate to contemporary interpretations of what a practice of mindfulness techniques may achieve (see e.g., Hunter & McCormick, 2008). We have both used techniques to induce mindfulness for the purpose of preparing for facilitation and can highly recommend doing so. A facilitator's use of mindfulness techniques to optimize his or her role remains an individual practice comparable with a manager's use of mindfulness techniques to become a better manager. As this has been analyzed elsewhere (see Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Carroll,

<sup>7</sup> Please note that Justice and Jamieson (2006), like other handbooks on practical facilitation techniques, use expressions such as 'group energy' and 'goal of the group'. These expressions may be in agreement with our everyday experience of working with groups, yet they are not correct in a pure academic and psychological sense – it is the participants of the group, who have a shared goal; the group in itself does not have energy. When we refer to group energy in the following, it is with this everyday experience in mind, and it does not imply that we think groups have energy levels.

2007), we will not further discuss the individual use of mindfulness techniques, but focus on group situations.

### MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES IN FACILITATION

What follows is a reflection on our experiences with the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation. We are inspired by Kernochan, McCormick and White and their 2007 paper *Spirituality and the management teacher: Reflections of three Buddhists on compassion, mindfulness and selflessness in the classroom*. Instead of presenting traditional empirical data, they reflect on how their Buddhist practices affect the way they approach their work life. They do not, however, mention facilitation. The combination of mindfulness techniques and facilitation represents relatively uncharted territory, and we have not been able to locate any examples in the international literature<sup>8</sup>. A few leadership-training programs combine facilitation and mindfulness techniques; however, these programs still only approach mindfulness techniques on the level of the individual – as a way to strengthen the role of leader/facilitator – and not in the context of group processes in need of facilitation<sup>9</sup>.

There are several mindfulness techniques available to facilitators who want to focus on group energy and the psychological environment (see Figure 1). These could be physical yoga poses and breathing techniques (pranayama). While such techniques can be incorporated into specific facilitation situations, we have a few reservations. First, physical practices such as yoga carry some risk of physical injury if not taught carefully and correctly; this should only be done by a properly trained instructor. Breathing techniques (pranayama) often require a longer period of use in order to generate a noticeable effect, but a facilitator with knowledge of different breathing techniques may use these. However, in our experience, breathing techniques can affect people with anxiety issues negatively. Therefore, we refrain from using pranayama in an organizational context. Consequently, we will focus on a simple meditation technique which we find the most efficient and appropriate for the purpose of facilitation. This is the technique called a *guided landing*: a mini meditation that lasts between two and ten minutes, during which the facilitator verbally draws

<sup>8</sup> In this paper, we focus on techniques to induce mindfulness in the 'Eastern' understanding, as a state of mind. Therefore, we have refrained from looking into other fields which might appear similar, but where the philosophical and physiological underpinnings would be quite different.

<sup>9</sup> Also, a web-search will show various courses in 'mindfulness facilitation'. So far, all the courses we have come across are training courses for mindfulness instructors i.e., courses where the participant learns how to teach mindfulness techniques to others, often to a group of people; the UCLA Certificate in Mindfulness Facilitation is a case in point (UCLA, n.d.). However, these courses have a different understanding of facilitation than the one employed in this paper (and journal).

participants' attention to a range of different experiences which are immediately available to them (as described in the introductory example). These might be physical (individual) experiences, such as the sensation of the touch of clothing on the skin and the sensations of breathing, or shared experiences such as the sounds and temperature in the room. It seems to make a difference whether the facilitator guides participants towards a focus on individual or shared experiences. We will return to this point below in our analysis of the effect of mindfulness techniques on three important meeting parameters: attention, energy level and atmosphere.

### Attention

When people arrive at a meeting, they are likely to be preoccupied with all sorts of thoughts, feelings and moods. A central facilitation goal, therefore, is to help participants feeling present and attentive, and to provide room for openness in the new meeting situation. This is particularly important at the beginning of a meeting, but is also crucial in other situations, e.g., when changing the topic during a meeting.

As explained earlier, guided landing helps participants experience the present moment, which increases their capacity for attentiveness and presence of mind. For this purpose, a guided landing might last anywhere between two and ten minutes. It helps people let go of their thoughts and become more present in the specific situation here and now. Often, participants have the experience of being more present in their bodies and feeling more grounded after a guided landing.

In Buddhism, this effect is described by means of a comparison of the mind and a glass of dirty water. If one keeps shaking the glass, the dirt will continue to swirl around and the water will remain unclear. If, on the other hand, one allows the glass of water to sit on a table without touching it, the movement of the water will gradually begin to slow down and eventually allow the dirt to settle on the bottom of the glass. The water will turn clear. Using mindfulness techniques to 'still the mental noise' achieves more or less the same effect (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). We might say that our thoughts and feelings are fueled by our engagement in them. When we engage in reflection we fuel them, like the shaking of the dirty glass of water. As long as we engage our thoughts, they continue to swirl around and keep our minds busy. Doing a guided landing with a group of people means to intentionally direct their attention towards experiences that can only be perceived through their body. Thus, one guides their attention away from their thoughts, which blocks the flow of fuel. In the same way that the water's movement gradually stops when one stops shaking the glass, the mind's movements will gradually slow down when one no longer engages mentally. And in



the same way that the water becomes increasingly clear as the movement stops, the mind will be experienced as clearer and more open when the mind quiets down. After only a few minutes of guided landing, most people will report a sense of greater mental calm and greater sense of being present.

It is very important that the process is guided – facilitated. What makes the technique effective is, as we mentioned above, the effort not to pay attention to one's thoughts and to focus exclusively on the experiences that the present moment makes available. Doing this alone requires a very strong ability to concentrate, including strong control of one's meta-cognition – that is, the ability to reflect on our own thinking (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Someone not trained in mindfulness techniques trying to employ the techniques on their own will most likely be unable to keep their attention away from their thoughts and feelings, and will often experience frustration instead of increased calm and focus. Additionally, the facilitator's instruction toward shared experiences, such as sounds and the temperature and dimensions of the room, create another dimension of shared experience and focus for the group which is different from an individual, un-guided meditation.

When we speak of *presence*, we mean a state of mind in which one is present with one's senses. Presence, in this sense, stands in contrast to a state of mind marked by reflection and analysis. Both are important competencies, and both often coexist harmoniously. The relationship between them is that the more one thinks, the less one experiences, and the more one experiences, the less one thinks. A meeting situation generally requires thinking and reflection, so it might seem counterintuitive to begin a meeting by turning up the level of experience and turning down the level of reflection. However, it is important that the reflection that takes place at the meeting is relevant to the content of the meeting. A guided landing helps meeting participants quiet the thoughts they already had in their minds before the meeting, thus making room for more relevant reflection. It increases their ability to listen to and focus on the content of the meeting and thus strengthens the collective process.

We consider it suitable to begin with a guided landing in order to establish focus and attention from the very beginning. We successfully did this at a seminar for an action research project: *The participants consisted of 25 educators and 3 project managers who met after work at 5 pm. This was considered a thankless time to meet because everyone was preoccupied with events and experiences from a long day of work. That was why we choose to begin the meeting with a guided landing. The facilitator welcomed the participants and gave a short presentation of the guided landing concept and acknowledged that everyone probably was a bit preoccupied with their*

*experiences from the workday. The landing, including the introduction, lasted less than ten minutes. When it is over, the project leader took over and welcomed participants in a more traditional way; the facilitator moderated the rest of the meeting without further use of mindfulness techniques.*

### Energy level

The energy level of participants in a group (which Justice and Jamieson [2006] label 'group energy') can be regulated in different ways. A number of things should be considered during the planning phase: Are there enough breaks? Is the process monotonous or varied? When do participants eat? However, although good planning is important, some factors cannot be anticipated or controlled. Thus, energy levels may suddenly decrease. If that happens, one might use a so-called energizer. An energizer is a technique designed to quickly raise the energy level of the participants in the group. These are often physical techniques that might incorporate a competitive element. Mindfulness techniques can be used as the opposite of energizers, and as such can be an important tool for the facilitator. But why would anyone want to lower the energy level in a meeting situation? The answer to this question requires us to clarify the term 'energy level', which means that we have to revisit the autonomic nervous system.

As we have already described it, the autonomic nervous system is split into the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system respectively. The sympathetic nervous system is the part of the nervous system that raises the body's energy level and places the body and mind in a heightened state of alertness (fight/flight response) in relation to the world around it. The parasympathetic nervous system works oppositely by calming us down and creating a mood of greater calm, trust and openness. Thus, when a facilitator senses that the participants in a group are tired, he or she may use an energizer to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system in participants and thereby re-energize the participants in the group. However, it would be overly simplistic to simply associate a high energy level with something positive and a low energy level with something negative. Instead, it is a question of understanding that both energizers and mindfulness techniques most often are used at a certain cost. Understanding the changes of energy level in the context of the functioning of the autonomic nervous system mentioned above, we argue that if the energy level is raised, it often results in a less comfortable and sensitive atmosphere, and, by contrast, a comfortable and sensitive atmosphere often creates a lower energy level. Thus, the task of a facilitator is to interpret the energy level and mood in relation to the group's task at hand at the time.

If a facilitator does not properly interpret a meeting situation, the process of adjusting energy levels and moods

can become difficult. We once used a guided landing in the middle of a long talk where the audience was already tired. The result was that the participants lost what little energy they still possessed. In that case, lowering the energy level by means of mindfulness techniques was not appropriate, but in other situations, it can be a good intervention.

Maintaining the energy level is often a challenge in meeting situations, and meeting participants may not have the same level of energy. Thus, only rarely does one want to specifically lower the energy level among participants in a group process. However, sometimes the energy level is artificially high and unfocused. In our experience, breaks often raise energy levels in unconstructive ways. During breaks, participants may generate a good amount of excitement, often while consuming large quantities of caffeine and sugar. Thus, after a break it can be difficult for people to sit still, and the atmosphere may seem restless and unfocused. In this kind of situation, a guided landing has a positive effect and can generate a general sense of calm and synchronicity in energy level among participants.

Other situations will require the cultivation of a warmer and safer atmosphere, which is something a facilitator can help generate, but with the awareness that it will cause the energy level to decrease. In some meeting situations, for instance when working with innovation, it can be particularly important that participants feel safe and open-minded (Darsø, 2012). Presenting new ideas and thoughts often make people feel vulnerable. If participants feel insecure in the social context, they might choose to keep their ideas to themselves and deprive the group of valuable input (Adriansen, 2010; Darsø, 2001). Moreover, the atmosphere is also important for participants' ability to listen to each other in a friendly, kind and attentive way.

Meeting situations vary, and levels of energy and moods constantly change, therefore it is a good idea for a facilitator to have the right tools to adjust the process in the specific situation. Moreover, the scope of the adjustment will vary in different situations. Thus, both energizers and mindfulness techniques can be given in doses. If a facilitator wants a warmer atmosphere, but senses that the energy level is already low, she might want to use a short two-minute guided landing. If, on the other hand, the facilitator wishes for a clear change of atmosphere among participants who are very energetic, she may want to spend ten minutes using the same technique. We have also noticed that ending an energizer with two minutes of techniques to induce mindfulness can have a positive effect. This allows the group to maintain the slightly elevated energy level, but to avoid the unfocused atmosphere that the use of energizers sometimes results in. Finally, it should be noticed that breathing techniques (pranayama) might be another good tool for adjusting energy levels. However, this may need to be balanced against the possible effects for

participants with anxiety issues. There are a number of different techniques which affect the energy level in different ways, from calming the mind down to increasing the oxygen and thereby the collective energy level.

### Atmosphere

We perceive atmosphere as a part of what Justice and Jamieson (2006) refer to as the psychological environment in facilitation. Above, we have mentioned ways in which the atmosphere can be affected by a facilitator's use of mindfulness techniques. Now we will discuss the importance of creating an atmosphere marked by openness and a sense of security and trust. These are important conditions for creative thinking and the exploration of new solutions – a general requirement in knowledge-based work (Darsø, 2012).

When the sympathetic nervous system receives stimulation and activates the fight-or-flight response mode, one's capacity for creative thinking is drastically reduced (Pedersen & Baldursson, 2002). On a basic physiological level, we might say that the body has the experience of being in a life-threatening situation, and therefore chooses familiar solutions, which reduces the capacity for innovation. The body is essentially conditioned for two very non-innovative solutions – fight or flight. In a situation where a group of people is called upon to collaboratively develop new ideas, a facilitator can use mindfulness techniques to improve conditions for the creative process. The fundamental idea behind the use of techniques to induce mindfulness is to promote a condition of non-judgmental openness, and thereby let go of the need for control in relation to the world – including in relating to our own cognitive processes. This openness may improve the capacity for innovation and creativity (Darsø, 2012).

The effect of techniques to induce mindfulness on moods and atmosphere is that participants become more secure and improve their ability to handle silence. The fact that mindfulness techniques improve the capacity for participants to be quiet together is useful for facilitation because a range of facilitation techniques require silence. It makes it easier for participants to actually be silent during a silent reflection. This is an interesting 'side effect' of mindfulness techniques, which we have experienced in practice, e.g., having done a guided landing during a lecture. The students themselves noticed this effect. They sensed that there was less anxiety during wordless pauses, e.g., following a question from the lecturer or when waiting for something to happen.

We have worked with the use of mindfulness techniques to create a sense of community within the group as a way to generate a safe, warm and open atmosphere. When we use a guided landing specifically with a view to cultivating a

positive atmosphere, it is beneficial to direct the participants' attention toward shared circumstances. Instructing the members of the group to listen to the sounds of the room, feel the temperature, and sense the room they are in and each other, cultivates a greater sense of community and reduces self-absorption more effectively than directing the participants' attention toward individual physical experiences such as breathing, body temperature and specific body parts. These are subtle differences, since both approaches generally will regulate the autonomic nervous system and calm body and mind.

Hunter and McCormick (2008) have conducted a study of the use of mindfulness techniques in the work environment. Based on interviews with managers and teachers who have an active practice of mindfulness techniques, they conclude that this can have the following effects in a work environment: fewer conflicts and a greater willingness to compromise, creativity in planning, improved relations, more openness, greater acceptance of others, less need for control, and improved adaptability in relation to others and to circumstances. It should be noted that the individuals interviewed for the study all had a considerable (individual) mindfulness practice, which differs from the short-term group process of our analysis here. Our use of techniques to induce mindfulness is intended to achieve an effect in the specific meeting situation. We do not imagine that the short-term process has the same range of positive effects discussed by Hunter and McCormick. But our experience tells us that it is possible to affect the atmosphere in a meeting to make it more comfortable, open and accommodating, even with a five minute guided landing, and even with a group of people unaccustomed to mindfulness techniques.

Hunter and McCormick (2008) point out that techniques to induce mindfulness can increase the ability to reduce or manage conflicts at work. We believe that the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation can create a warm, open and accommodating atmosphere, and thereby reduce the risk of unproductive conflicts. In this way, techniques to induce mindfulness can be used preventatively. We, the authors, do not have practical experience with using mindfulness for extreme facilitation (Ghais, 2005). We would, however, be reluctant to try to solve conflicts using a guided landing or other facilitating mindfulness techniques. In our experience, the greatest challenge to the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation is the occasional reluctance from participants. We imagine that this reluctance might increase if participants were already frustrated and their autonomic nervous systems were in a state of fight-or-flight.

## IMPLICATIONS OF COMBINING FACILITATION AND MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES

A number of the same terms and concepts are used in literature describing the effects of inducing mindfulness and the literature on facilitation, e.g., calm, presence and authenticity. Therefore, it is tempting to conflate the approaches when discussing the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation. However, we have been careful not to do so because it is important to keep in mind that quite a few of these concepts have been formed by different systems of thought, i.e., an Eastern (mindfulness) and a Western (facilitation) tradition<sup>10</sup>. Hence, when Ghais (2005) and the International Association of Facilitators (IAF, 2003) write that a facilitator must be authentic, they undoubtedly perceive the idea of selfhood and authenticity differently than a Buddhist would. Moreover, we have stressed the importance of differentiating between an Eastern and a Western understanding of the concept of mindfulness. This is because we base our arguments on evidence of how Eastern mindfulness techniques affect the nervous system. While Western mindfulness (without meditation) and Eastern mindfulness entail similar cognitive elements (Weick & Putnam, 2006; Kostanski & Hassed, 2008), there is no evidence to suggest that Western mindfulness (without meditation) affects the nervous system in the same manner meditation-based mindfulness does. This is argued out by Baer (2003) who points to a fundamental difference, because meditation requires resting with one's internal experience whereas the other form of mindfulness addresses external experiences. Hence, we have refrained from transferring research on *mindfulness without meditation* to the meditation-based understanding of mindfulness to which we refer, despite their similarities and joint focus on attention and being present.

The use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation can be subject to various points of criticism. One point of critique is what happens to the unprepared individual. When we use mindfulness techniques in facilitation, we invite people to meditate. These will most often be people in a work situation in which they do not expect to have to meditate. This is not without problems. As Kabat-Zinn (1994) points out, one has to be prepared to meditate, and it has to happen at the right time in one's life – at a time when one is willing to feel oneself and listen to one's inner voice and breathing. It is far from certain that a group of meeting participants all find themselves in that position. Moreover,

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<sup>10</sup> A similar distinction is used by Weick and Putnam (2006) in their paper on 'Eastern wisdom and Western knowledge' and by Dryden and Still (2006) in their account of historical aspects of mindfulness. Yet in other parts of the literature, this distinction does not seem relevant, and mindfulness techniques such as meditation and yoga are seen as a contemplative practice no different from Western contemplative practices (see e.g., Duerr, 2011; Wah, 2004).

meditation should be by choice, and people may not feel there is a choice if their manager is present and compliance is expected. The reason we still suggest that mindfulness techniques can be effective in facilitation despite these concerns is because the mindfulness technique we promote – a guided landing – is a ‘gentle’ one. It is gentle, both because it is so brief and because it is guided, which means that participants are not left with their own inner voice in the same way as in non-guided meditations. Nevertheless, we always make it optional to participate in the mindfulness activity and also suggest that people can keep their eyes open which may be a way to opt out without leaving the room.

Another point of criticism is that using techniques to induce mindfulness can be seen as ‘technologies of the self’ and function as means of disciplining employees within a Foucauldian perspective (Grünenberg, Walker & Knudsen, 2009). In writing about the use of mindfulness meditation in general (and not in a facilitation context), Grünenberg et al. argue that the perception of effects attributed to mindfulness meditation should be viewed in relation to some of the challenges faced by late-modern people - challenges inscribed in discourses of efficiency and authenticity. It would be interesting and highly relevant to analyze the use of mindfulness techniques as a technology of the self. Likewise, mindfulness techniques can be seen as an example of the tendency for people to be required not only to sell their labor but also to be present as ‘whole beings’ and willing to invest themselves personally and privately in the workplace (Duerr, 2004). These issues, however, deserve a more sustained analysis than what is possible here. Bearing these points of criticism and warning in mind, we have the following points of recommendation for facilitators who want to try out techniques to induce mindfulness:

- Choose the meeting carefully and explain to participants why you have chosen to use mindfulness techniques;
- Always give the participants permission not to participate, if they are not comfortable doing so;
- Rehearse the guided landing (or other technique you may choose to apply) so you feel confident taking on the role of mindfulness instructor. Usually one uses a softer voice when guiding a landing;
- The instructions from the opening vignette can be used for guiding: Ask everyone to sit up straight and place both feet on the floor; ask them to either close their eyes or focus their gaze on a spot in front of them. Then invite the participants to feel their feet on the floor and the seat of their chair underneath them. Invite them to breathe deeply for about a minute and to feel the effect throughout their body. Following that, ask the participants to pay attention to sounds around them and feel the temperature in the room. Invite them to sense the dimensions of the room and the other people in the

meeting. Finally, invite them to explore whether they sense any difference; and

- Having a mindfulness practice yourself may enhance your performance as mindfulness facilitator.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have discussed ways in which mindfulness techniques can be used in facilitation, and we have argued why it may be a good idea. Techniques to induce mindfulness can have an effect on three important elements in a meeting, namely attention, energy level and atmosphere<sup>11</sup>. From the perspective of a physiological understanding of mindfulness techniques, we have analyzed how a facilitator can regulate these three elements by using a guided landing of varying duration and at different times during a meeting. While we find it beneficial to use techniques to induce mindfulness, some reservations should be mentioned.

In order for mindfulness techniques to function in a facilitation situation, several things have to be in place. First, the specific type of meeting makes a difference – an internal weekly hour-long meeting is often more routine than the annual employee seminar where everyone is prepared to socialize and try something new. Thus, it makes sense to choose the type of meeting carefully when considering using mindfulness techniques as a facilitation tool. Second, the facilitator has to justify and explain the use of a tool as relatively untraditional as techniques to induce mindfulness. While facilitators often do not have to explain their choice of certain tools and techniques, the participants need to know why the facilitator has decided to employ a tool this personal and physical. In some Western organizations, mindfulness techniques derived from Buddhist practice may seem somewhat inappropriate. Denmark, for instance, is a very secular society and religion a very private matter; therefore we have had to introduce mindfulness techniques in a ‘scientific’ manner without an air of spirituality. This varies from one cultural context to another, and the facilitator should therefore take the cultural specificities into consideration. Third, the facilitator must feel confident in his or her use of techniques to induce mindfulness. If not, the facilitator may jeopardize his or her legitimacy and convey insecurity. This point has also been made in relation to mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013). Some might even argue that it is necessary for the facilitator to have a regular mindfulness practice herself. In regard to the use of mindfulness for therapeutic purposes, Dryden and Still

<sup>11</sup> Many of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) Core Competencies for Certification match the potential outcomes we have described above e.g., ‘provide effective atmosphere’, ‘create a climate of safety and trust’, and ‘stimulate and tap group energy’ (IAF, 2003). Participants’ attention was the only aspect we could not find directly in the guidelines.

(2006) found that the clients were more successful when the therapists had a mindfulness practice themselves. However, they also noted: “Few would dispute this need for personal practice, but it has not been scientifically demonstrated. There was nothing like the exemplary randomized control usual in the work of these researchers, and it is possible that the use of the word mindfulness already had a resonance for many people (clients and therapists) that gave the practice a power lacking in ‘attentional control training’. Whatever the reason, this [personal practice] was an important change, and personal mindfulness practice is now a routine requirement for trainers in mindfulness” (Dryden & Still 2006, p. 7). Our experience is that practicing techniques to induce mindfulness on a regular basis makes using the techniques in facilitation more natural.

This article has argued that mindfulness techniques can be beneficial, albeit not without difficulties, in organizations. However, we are often met with the sentiment that it can seem like a waste of time, or it is entirely irrelevant to incorporate a guided landing into the beginning of the meeting instead of proceeding directly with the tasks of the meeting agenda. This sentiment is understandable, and if a facilitator decides to use mindfulness techniques in a meeting situation, she should be prepared to explain its purpose, in some depth if required. It is difficult to measure meeting participants’ capacity for attention and focus, but the main point is that it pays to invest five or ten minutes in order to achieve a more focused meeting with a more open atmosphere. There is still much work to do in lifting the consciousness of people and the importance of the non-task activities that create individual, team and group success.

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# Walking the Tightrope: A Case Study of Church Leadership Team Facilitation

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## ABSTRACT

This case study reports on a 4-month, multimodal facilitation program conducted with the leadership team of a large, suburban, evangelical church in the United States of America. Detailing eight steps in the facilitation program that utilized modified versions of techniques that include the Delphi method, force field analysis, process mapping, consensus decision making, and agenda setting, this essay explains the facilitation of a strategic planning process with the church's leadership team. The program is discussed in terms of several facilitation techniques and practices that helped and/or hindered the team's goal accomplishment. The essay explores the applicability of various facilitative techniques in natural teams; discusses organizational dynamics that promote or resist intervention; and considers multiple expectations, roles, and challenges that facilitators must address and balance for effective practice. The essay concludes by revealing how facilitators and scholar-practitioners with an interest in group facilitation can benefit from this case study's findings.

## KEYWORDS

group facilitation, facilitation, leadership team, strategic planning, church leadership, team communication.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past several years, churches, like their for-profit business counterparts, have adopted leadership teams because, in large measure, "the demands of top roles outdistance the capacities of any single person" (Wageman, Nunes, Burrell, & Hackman, 2008, p. 7). Indeed, Surratt and Smith (2011) pointed out that in many churches, "the structure is changing from a single leader calling all the shots to flattened-hierarchy leadership teams that share crucial strategic and directional responsibilities" (p. 1). However, very little is known about the actual collaborative interactions of Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs, also known as top management teams, or TMTs), much less their facilitation (Zorn & Tompson, 2002). Because SLTs, like many other work groups, often have members who do not

exercise the discipline to become a behaviorally integrated, high-performing team (see, e.g., Hambrick, 1994; Katzenbach, 1998), they are prime candidates not only for descriptive communication studies but also for facilitation. In fact, Zorn and Tompson (2002) suggested that "facilitation methods may well help TMTs to manage status differences and process complex information and, thereby, to engage in decision-making processes that are more thorough and consensus-based" (p. 263). Though certain aspects of senior leadership teams have been studied extensively, such as CEO characteristics, team composition, and task properties (see, e.g., Carmeli, Tishler, & Edmondson, 2012; Edmondson, Roberto, Watkins, 2003;

Menz, 2012), a significant void in the literature remains regarding the facilitation of SLT communication.

This case study begins to fill that gap by reporting on a nearly 4-month-long facilitation of the SLT of a large, suburban, evangelical church in the western United States. The facilitation was executed as part of a 2.5-year study using *ethnographic facilitation*, a unique methodology in which engaged scholars employ ethnographic practices to observe and develop a rich understanding of communicative practices, intervene in those practices to promote change using facilitation procedures, and report findings to scholars and practitioner communities (Hartwig, 2014). After introducing the church leadership team and the facilitator's history with the church and team, an eight-step facilitation program is detailed. Finally, the relative success of the facilitation is discussed, highlighting several techniques and practices that either promoted or hindered the team's goal accomplishment, and drawing out applications of these techniques for other facilitators and scholars.

### The Senior Leadership Team

At the time of the study, *Freedom* (a pseudonym) was an 11-year-old, large (more than 2,500 regular weekly attendees) and growing church in the western United States, established under the vision and direction of its founding pastor Steve<sup>1</sup>. Just before the facilitator's engagement with the church staff, the church had significantly increased the size of its congregation and staff and started two additional campus churches in other locations, making it a part of a national movement of multisite megachurches (Surratt, Ligon, & Bird, 2006; Thumma & Bird, 2008). Furthermore, the size of the congregation and staff, and the multiple locations, spurred the design of more complex organizational structures and systems (Hall, 2007).

To deal with the increased organizational complexity, to take pressure off the senior pastor in providing leadership and direction to all the staff and congregation, and to benefit from collaboration, Steve established a SLT in 2008, comprised of himself, three campus pastors (one for each campus), and pastors of finance/business administration, graphic arts, and media, as well as all of these pastors' wives<sup>2</sup>. All SLT members reported directly to

Steve. All of the other staff members reported to SLT members.

The researcher investigated *Freedom* from October 2007 through February 2010, though he was a member of the church for several years prior. In 2007, through participant-observation, interviews, and some textual analysis of organizational documents, the researcher studied the church's entire pastoral staff, which, at that time, constituted the church's SLT and consisted of all full-time pastors and their wives (about 10 couples). In that investigation, the researcher identified three primary dialectical tensions that the staff constituted and managed through their interaction: (a) submission to authority and responsible empowerment; (b) spiritual community and corporate organization; and (c) informal and formal structures of communication. At Steve's request, the researcher offered several suggestions for how the leadership team could manage those tensions and increase the effectiveness of the organization. Then, in the first half of 2008, the researcher worked as a hired consultant to assist in aligning the church's organizational structure, clarifying staff job responsibilities, and developing job descriptions and tools to measure performance, though the consulting project was stopped prior to completion because Steve thought that the project was distracting the team from more pressing matters. Finally, in March 2009, the researcher reengaged with the newly instituted SLT for a long-term research project, which lasted through February 2010. That final study progressed through three stages, first describing the communicative practices of the SLT and identifying challenges that facilitation of the team might encounter, then employing a program to facilitate the team's communication around the development of a strategic ministry plan (similar to a strategic plan, but focused particularly on the church's ministries rather than facilities, budgets, and operational matters), and finally assessing the results of that facilitation. This essay reports in detail on the second and third stages of that project: the execution and evaluation of the facilitation program.

### The Strategic Planning Facilitation Program

During the first stage of the investigation, three challenges emerged as particularly salient to the team's ability to provide effective strategic and spiritual leadership to the church: (a) addressing broad, strategic issues rather than operational minutiae; (b) establishing clear goals, roles, and responsibilities of team members that engendered greater personal and team accountability; and (c) understanding and responding to the team's (sometimes/often harmful) interactional norms that acted against planned change efforts (see Table 1. Team Communication Challenges and Proposed Solutions).

<sup>1</sup> All names of persons and organizations in this report are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Each pastoral position was filled by a married couple, with the husband formally employed, earning a salary, and working a typical 40-hour-plus work week, and the wife partnering with her husband on some aspects of ministry, but not earning a salary or being formally employed. Some of the wives were formally employed, however, in different, non-leadership team roles, such as an administrative assistant or campus children's pastor.



**Table 1. Team Communication Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

Communication Challenges	Proposed Solutions
Communication norms and structures that focus on operational minutiae while ignoring pressing, strategic, leadership-oriented issues.	<p>Reclaim or create space in meetings to discuss spiritual and strategic direction for the church (Wageman et al., 2008).</p> <p>Recast <i>communication</i> as a process of meaning construction rather than the simple transfer of information from one person to another, thereby seeing meetings as places to create reality and collaborate rather than simply transfer information (Schrage, 1995).</p>
Unclear team purpose, individual roles, and performance standards.	<p>Establish a clear and unifying team purpose (Katzenbach &amp; Smith, 1999).</p> <p>Clarify the team’s specific performance goals and objectives, individual roles, and framework for team and individual performance evaluation (Wheelan, 2005).</p> <p>Focus on changing team structures, culture, and communication patterns rather than addressing individual personality/attitude problems (Wageman et al., 2008).</p>
Interactional norms that fight against planned change efforts and collaboration.	<p>Proactively set direction for the church to preempt situations that force hasty decision making (Frisch, 2012).</p> <p>Understand how the senior pastor’s (God-given and team-ascribed) pastoral authority prevents collaboration (Brenton, 1993).</p> <p>Recognize the church’s culture that values spontaneity and being led by the Holy Spirit, and therefore revolts against planning (Mittroff &amp; Denton, 1999).</p>

To help the SLT grow in each of those areas, an intervention was designed that sought to walk the team through a process of decision making, process mapping, and integration that served to (a) define desired characteristics of spiritual maturity for parishioners; (b) identify and map processes by which people grow into spiritual maturity through all programs and services; (c) determine and integrate future strategies to advance spiritual maturity among parishioners; and (d) advance collaborative work skills and potential among SLT members. The results of all of these processes were captured through the development of a strategic ministry plan for the coming year. As such, the intervention engaged the team’s actual performance challenges rather than a series of “team-building” exercises, grounded in

Katzenbach and Smith’s (1999) conviction that “a common set of demanding performance goals that a group considers important to achieve will lead, most of the time, to both performance and a team” (p. 12). The facilitation program proceeded for 4 months through 8 steps, each of which is explained in detail below:

1. Researcher preparation;
2. Data gathering and staff preparation for in-depth reflection on spiritual maturity;
3. Presentation of research findings and basic teamwork training;
4. Establishing spiritual maturity qualities;
5. Identifying and mapping processes of spiritual growth through Freedom’s ministry programs;
6. Determining future ministry directions and strategies for the coming year;
7. Identifying and understanding forces that drive and restrict the SLT from enacting change within and outside the team; and
8. Documenting and disseminating the ministry plan.

**Step 1: Researcher Preparation**

The facilitation program was designed by taking into account the findings from nearly two years of engagement with the SLT, reflecting on several books offering advice on church leadership practices that promote spiritual growth (e.g., Hawkins & Parkinson, 2007; 2008; Rainer & Geiger, 2006), and consulting with Freedom’s senior pastor. When the program was presented to the team, members confirmed that it responded to the challenges facing the team, and agreed that the procedure would be useful.

During this time, the researcher offered his expertise to the team, hoping to build his credibility and trust with the team so that he might be offered “greater access to complex or interesting areas of [the group’s] shared life” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 147). In particular, the researcher began facilitating the two weekly meetings of the SLT to accustom the team to his presence and activity in church leadership functions. In that role, he collected agenda items, created weekly agendas to orient team members to the most important tasks at hand (agendas had not been used previously), walked the staff through the agendas, attempted to maintain members’ focus and attention on agenda items, and generally facilitated discussion through the meetings. Furthermore, at the team’s request, he offered insights at times on a range of issues, moving beyond a traditional, neutral facilitative role, as specified by the International Association of Facilitators’ *Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Facilitators* (2004), and volunteered to contribute his communication resources in various ways, such as gathering information through focus groups regarding how congregants experience the campus churches. In so doing, he acted more as a *facilitative leader*, helping the group “become more effective through building

their capacity to reflect on and improve the way they work” (Schwarz, 2002, p. 327).

**Step 2: Data Gathering and Team Preparation**

After designing the intervention, the researcher sought to prepare SLT members for the tasks ahead. First, to spur strategic thinking regarding spiritual growth, team members were asked to review sections of two church leadership books—*Transforming Discipleship* (Ogden, 2003) and *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2007). They were also asked to look over the church’s official strategic statements, and other often-stated proclamations about the church’s purpose. Second, SLT members and other ministry leaders and congregants completed questionnaires regarding how they defined spiritual maturity and how church programs and activities encouraged spiritual growth. The compiled responses to these questionnaires were presented to the SLT for use in the following stages of the intervention. These preparations readied the team for the heart of the facilitation program, which occurred at a two-day retreat, during which the researcher facilitated three sessions over six hours, each addressing one of the following three steps.

**Step 3: Presentation of Research Findings and Teamwork Training**

In the retreat’s first hour-long session, the facilitator sought to help the team understand its communication challenges and how the team could improve its team performance. After Steve introduced and indicated his support for the planning initiative, the researcher shared his findings regarding the primary communication challenges facing the SLT, offered several possible solutions to those challenges (Table 1 links the proposed solutions to those challenges), and explained how the process of developing a robust ministry plan would empower the team to address those communication challenges. The team generally agreed with the researcher’s findings and suggested solutions. On one hand, it appeared the team members found the assessment and interpretation of the team’s communication challenges to be credible. Yet, on the other, the lack of critique of those findings hinted toward the group succumbing to groupthink (Janis, 1982). Finally, the researcher presented Larson and LaFasto’s (1989) eight characteristics of high-performing teams and Wheelan’s (2005) summary of effective team member behaviors, encouraging the team members to employ them throughout the facilitation program. Through all of this work, the facilitator provided justifications and foundations for the project and tried to create a heightened sense of urgency on the part of team members to change (Kotter, 1996).

**Step 4: Establishing Spiritual Maturity Qualities**

The first task in developing the church’s strategic ministry plan was to establish a clear goal and target for all of the church’s work. Because a church’s goal is to make disciples (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2008; Ogden, 2003), the goal of the second retreat session was to define the desired spiritual maturity characteristics for Freedom congregants, or, in Rainer and Geiger’s (2006) words, to establish what type of disciple the church desired to produce. After Steve offered a few brief guiding statements, the facilitator offered examples of how other churches had operationalized spiritual maturity (or disciple characteristics), and explained the data collected from the staff/ministry leader questionnaire, which listed all of the spiritual maturity characteristics that staff and ministry leaders had proposed. The data were grouped in two formats to facilitate understanding and utilization: first by respondent, which showed how individuals framed a complete picture of spiritual maturity; and second by theme (e.g., attitudes, Bible, worship, service, relationship, and prayer), which showed how much various themes in the characteristics identified were shared among respondents. Then, members were assigned to three subgroups of three–four persons each and instructed on the process that they would employ for the next 90 minutes to define desired spiritual maturity characteristics.

**Table 2. Process for Determining Spiritual Maturity Characteristics**

Stage	Task	Time
1	Subgroup Work - Subgroups identify 5 to 9 characteristics of spiritual maturity	25 min
2	Group Presentations and Integration - Subgroups propose their characteristics to the larger group - All characteristics listed by each subgroup are kept; those not shared will be left on board and considered in next round	20 min
3	Subgroup Work - Subgroups reconsider their proposals based on proposals of other groups, and add/change/delete characteristics from their proposal	15 min
4	Group Presentations and Integration - Subgroups propose their characteristics to the larger group - All characteristics listed by each subgroup are kept; those not shared are discussed by the group, with the presenting group arguing for the characteristic, and if applicable, the other groups, arguing against, until consensus is reached. - The large group discusses any missing elements	20 min
5	Group Final Check and Alignment - All characteristics are reviewed by all the members of the group and then the characteristics are aligned with the church’s strategic statements	15 min

This facilitation process, explained in *Table 2. Process for Determining Spiritual Maturity Characteristics*, was based on the general philosophy and practices of the *Delphi method*, which consists of “a group of experts [that] works independently in rounds, where individual ideas are listed, reported to all, and individually ranked, followed by reconsideration of rankings” (Sunwolf & Seibold, 1999, p. 400). The Delphi method provides a structure for members of a group to provide feedback on individual contributions, assess the group judgment or view, revise views, and enjoy some degree of anonymity (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). In this case, the Delphi method was modified in several ways. First, subgroups were used rather than individuals when generating and listing ideas. Also, the subgroups directly presented their ideas verbally to the larger group instead of having the facilitator collect and share the combined lists. Then, any characteristics that were included on all three subgroups’ lists were “kept” on the final list, instead of requiring each subgroup to rank order those ideas in subsequent rounds. Finally, the process proceeded through only two rounds, because idea stability formed after the second round of idea generation and discussion.

Following that session, the 10 characteristics were wordsmithed, ordered, and categorized within the church’s “Connect, Serve, Grow” mantra<sup>3</sup>. At that point, the SLT had established 10 characteristics of spiritual maturity that could provide a standard upon which to base the success of the overall intervention (Wheelan & Furbur, 2006).

### Step 5: Identifying and Mapping the Processes of Spiritual Growth

During the third and final session of the retreat, the team mapped current church programs and activities with regard to how they enhance spiritual maturity, and identified gaps in current programs. To demonstrate the importance of the conversation, the facilitator shared Barna’s (2000) research, which found that although few churches provide congregants with a specific path to follow to foster growth, 90% of respondents would “at least listen to the advice and follow aspects of it, if not all of the recommendations” of a church (p. 41).

To identify and unpack how church programs promoted spiritual growth, the facilitator used the same subgroups employed in the second session to promote more interaction. Supplied with the compiled questionnaire data

<sup>3</sup> The 10 Qualities of Spiritual Maturity are: CONNECT—Love and revere God, Value and attend worship services, and Engage in fellowship and spiritual relationships; GROW—Walk in the freedom and Lordship of Christ, Know and apply God’s word in all areas of life, Cultivate intimacy with God through prayer and spiritual disciplines, Exhibit the fruit of the Spirit; and SERVE—Proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel, Exercise my spiritual gifts, and Practice Spirit-led stewardship.

regarding how staff and congregants viewed the programs and ministries that helped them to grow spiritually, subgroups identified how different groups of Freedom ministries (e.g., adult, orientation, support, hospitality, and population-specific ministries) spur growth in the specific spiritual maturity qualities that had been identified in the previous session. The groups then transferred that information to blue-, green-, and yellow-colored cards (for the Connect, Grow, and Serve categories, respectively, of spiritual maturity qualities), marking one card for each spiritual maturity characteristic that was encouraged by a program. Then, the cards were placed on a wall in a location that corresponded to where the program encouraged growth on a spiritual maturity continuum, from early to intermediate to advanced spiritual maturity. Once the subgroups posted the cards on the wall, the facilitator led a discussion using the following questions he had developed:

- What are the qualities of spiritual growth that are most emphasized, and what are the qualities that are given less attention, both in an overall sense and along the various places on the spiritual maturity continuum?
- Is there a level of spiritual growth—early, intermediate, or advanced—toward which more programs are aimed?
- If so, how could programs be changed or added to help people at various levels of spiritual maturity to grow?

Although some team members briefly questioned whether certain programs truly promoted particular aspects of spiritual maturity, dissenting ideas that caused conflict were quickly stifled, for two primary reasons. First it seemed that the team members adopted an “every-program-encourages-every-aspect-of-spiritual-growth-for-everyone” mentality. Second, the members seemed to feel discomfort challenging the effectiveness of ministries in the presence of others who directed those ministries. Unfortunately, the techniques employed in this session did not facilitate the intended outcomes of the session.

Following the team’s review of the wall of colored cards and the brief facilitated discussion, the facilitator presented results from a study that demonstrated spiritual growth is catalyzed for people in different stages of spiritual maturity by different types of activities and relationships (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2008), summarized some potential insights for Freedom, and then facilitated a discussion among the SLT about how those findings might apply to Freedom’s unique context. However, because the session had run 30 minutes over the allotted time, the team was tired and that discussion was cut short. At that point, the researcher reviewed what the team had accomplished that day, presented the next steps in the facilitation program, and concluded the meeting. Although the team did not engage in deep discussion about Freedom’s process of encouraging spiritual maturity, the session did open conversation about

the relative value and contributions of Freedom's many ministry programs.

### Step 6: Determining Future Ministry Directions and Strategies

Armed with a set of spiritual maturity qualities and a general understanding of how people grew spiritually through Freedom's programs, the SLT was poised to develop, collaboratively with the rest of the church staff, a strategic ministry plan for the coming year. The process was designed to proceed in both a bottom-up and a top-down fashion. The bottom-up process involved the leaders of each ministry area, such as youth, children's, or men's ministries, to develop a ministry plan for the next year, including strategies, priorities, goals, and program and event dates. To ease that process, the facilitator explained the planning process to the entire staff, developed and distributed a ministry-planning Excel worksheet with detailed instructions on how to proceed in developing ministry plans, and made himself available as a resource to staff and ministry leaders as they completed the project over the next 3 weeks.

As ministry leaders and staff pastors proceeded with their bottom-up planning work, the facilitator used the next two SLT meetings as a venue to open some top-down conversation among SLT members regarding strategic priorities for the coming year. In the first meeting, he offered some examples of such initiatives that had come up in previous team meetings (e.g., developing a leadership development program) and then prompted members to identify some strategic initiatives for program expansion, development and change. After just a few minutes, however, the team ran out of time. Just as during the wall-mapping exercise at the retreat, in-depth discussion was prevented. In the second meeting, seeking to again pursue the planning work in the following meeting but with a different strategy, the facilitator asked SLT members to individually and privately propose program, activity, or ministry additions, adaptations, changes, and tweaks in Freedom's primary ministry areas. The hope was that anonymity would engender more openness among team members to offer their perspectives on what ministries could be improved and further developed. After team members completed the worksheets, their anonymous suggestions were written on a white board, and team members were asked if they had any objections to any of the suggestions. A few of the ideas were questioned, but, by and large, the group agreed that all of the issues held merit for further consideration. Because time was again cut short, after the meeting, the facilitator transcribed, grouped and synthesized the strategies, and transferred them to the working ministry plan document. Additionally, as the individual area ministry plans were submitted to the facilitator, he compiled them into the ministry plan

document draft, which was subsequently sent to all SLT members for their review five days prior to the SLT's next half-day meeting, which was devoted to reviewing and affirming the plan.

At that half-day strategic ministry-planning meeting, the facilitator intended to pursue three goals: (a) to adjust and approve the overall church-wide strategies, the individual ministry area plans, and the associated church ministry calendar; (b) to discuss various forces that would drive and restrict change related to the ministry plan through a force-field analysis (Lewin, 1951); and (c) to discuss initiatives that the SLT could enact to use the ministry plan to guide its forthcoming organizational practice. However, for several reasons, those objectives were not accomplished. After the meeting started a half-hour late (because of an impromptu staff meeting that involved two of the pastors, including Steve), the meeting unfolded as follows.

To start, the facilitator briefly situated the day's meeting within the overall ministry-planning process, and offered an example of another church (one of Freedom's aspirant churches) that recently had strategically planned for spiritual growth, similar to what the SLT was doing. Understanding that this process probably was the most drawn-out, extensive, and intensive planning process that the SLT had ever undertaken, he encouraged members' continued commitment to the project by showing them a picture of a successful church (in line with facilitation procedures used by Parrish-Sprowl, 2006), and by discussing how the SLT was making great progress in developing a plan that would lead Freedom into the future. Because of the challenges in encouraging the team to engage in critical thought and conflictual interaction in past meetings (see Janis, 1982; Janis & Mann, 1977; Sunwolf & Seibold, 1999), he challenged the team to think critically, candidly offer feedback to one another, and make some key decisions as a team to make the meeting most productive.

Then, the team walked through the three major sections of the plan—strategic statements, overall strategic goals and initiatives, and individual area ministry plans—while offering feedback and discussing each element. Though some good discussion ensued regarding most of the ministry areas, the ministry plans generally received very quick approval. Much of the discussion regarding the action plans occurred without Steve, as he had left the meeting to attend to the firing of an administrative staff member. His absence impacted, at some level, the group's interaction, and he did not participate in the review of the various ministry action plans. When he returned, however, the group was discussing the least coordinated ministry areas, broaching some significant organizational issues that steered the conversation for nearly the next hour. Steve

stated that he was considering a reorganization of the staff<sup>4</sup>, and as might be expected, extensive conversation ensued regarding those ministry areas and staff persons that required adjustment. At several points during that conversation, the facilitator sought to connect the reorganizational efforts to the overall planning process the team had been engaging in, and offered thoughts on pacing the reorganization and planning processes. Most importantly, once the group began discussing a possible reorganization, the facilitator recognized that trying to shift gears to conduct a force-field analysis or to talk about detail-oriented calendar planning would be unproductive. Consequently, he attempted to contribute to the group's conversation about organizational structure in roles as both a group facilitator and as an organizational consultant, until the meeting came to a hard stop at the previously agreed-on end time.

At that point, the facilitator solicited input on and finalized the ministry plan via e-mail with the members of the SLT and in face-to-face meetings with Steve, for four primary reasons: (a) it seemed that interest in further developing the plan was waning among SLT members without better understanding of the benefits and outcomes associated with it, (b) the church's decision-making model centers around Steve's influence, and his absence during the recent planning meeting was felt significantly, (c) the organizational structure and personnel fit issues that surfaced during the half-day meeting dominated the meeting and needed to be addressed by Steve, and (d) the end of the year was approaching and time was running short to finalize the ministry plan. During those meetings with Steve, the researcher talked him through several plan elements about which he needed to make decisions, such as approving ministry area purpose statements, establishing strategic initiatives, and establishing the church's vision statement, which Steve had just indicated he wanted to alter. In addition, the researcher shared with him several suggestions to address larger organizational structure and personnel issues, implored him to clearly establish a vision and sense of urgency for overall organizational change, and apprised him of general organizational change literature (e.g., Kotter, 1996). In these conversations, the researcher attempted to balance two distinct but overlapping roles that he had played with the team. First, he facilitated<sup>5</sup> decision

making and innovation among SLT members, and with Steve individually, by structuring their talk and providing a process by which they could address important issues, and, in so doing, advance their leadership of the church. In this way, he provided a type of "process consultation" (Schein, 1969). At the same time, however, the researcher offered insights into organizational structure, church personnel, and effective operations as an organizational consultant, similar to what Schein (1969) identified as a "doctor-patient" relationship. Thus, as the ministry plan finalized, the researcher walked a tightrope between two approaches with very different undergirding beliefs and philosophies about who possesses the "right" answers to organizational problems and how a team arrives at those answers. The implications of doing so are discussed later in the essay.

### Step 7: Identifying and Understanding Driving and Restraining Forces

To assist the team with implementing the ministry plan and realizing the changes identified and recommended through the intervention program, the seventh step of the program was to identify forces that could propel or resist change efforts. Believing that force-field analysis could help the group to understand the headwinds acting against and tailwinds pushing for lasting organizational change, 25 minutes was designated during one of the final SLT meetings to walk through an abbreviated force-field analysis. Force-field analysis draws from Lewin's (1951, 1958) field theory, which suggests that stability in social systems is the result of opposing and countervailing forces, and that change occurs when those forces shift, and thereby disrupt a system's equilibrium. Therefore, force-field analysis entails practitioners' systematic identification of opposing forces, which Lewin (1958) referred to as *driving forces*—those that support planned change—and *restraining forces*—those that reinforce commitment to the status quo and resist change efforts. Once those forces are identified, practitioners identify, assess, choose, and implement interventions that might increase driving forces and/or decrease restraining forces. Because there was only 25 minutes available to devote to the force-field analysis, the analysis proceeded as follows. After the team was briefed on the purposes and basic procedures of force-field analysis, the SLT was divided into two subgroups: one focused on driving forces and the other on restraining forces. Then, after explaining the problem statement on which the force-field analysis would be based—"To implement the Freedom Strategic Ministry Plan to increase the clarity of ministry goals and the effectiveness and alignment of ministries"—respective subgroups identified either driving or restraining forces for that problem. Third, after about 10 minutes of identifying driving or restraining forces, members of each subgroup identified the top three forces that were most important at that time and which they thought they might be able to affect constructively. Fourth,

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the engagement several suggestions to Pastor Steve regarding organizational structure and personnel fit had been offered by the facilitator. His comments to the group were in direct reference to several of these suggestions, but they were noticeably initiated and owned by him as his own observations and directions.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the intervention, the author had worked primarily from a 'facilitation' perspective (see Wheelan & Furbur [2006]), but as the project progressed, it seemed that continuing solely in that frame would not accomplish the goals that grounded this facilitation.

subgroups listed some possible action steps for each of the top-three driving and restraining forces that they could plan and carry out to enhance the effect of the force (in the case of driving forces) or to reduce or eliminate the effect of the force (in the case of restraining forces). Through this process, the team identified seven primary driving forces, three as the most important, and seven restraining forces, also with three as the most important. To deal effectively with these forces, they offered several suggestions, including (a) Steve should better define and promote the vision of the church both to the staff and to the church as a whole; and that the SLT could (b) clarify the leadership structure and individual and team responsibilities, (c) develop “franchising guidelines” to better articulate expectations and responsibilities of the main and satellite campuses, (d) pursue intentional planning, and (e) continually improve meetings.

#### Step 8: Documenting and Disseminating the Ministry Plan

The final step in the facilitation process was to bring together into the Strategic Ministry Plan all of the various inputs, decisions, and plans that had emerged through the entire facilitation process. Continuing to balance the two roles of facilitator and consultant, the researcher compiled the final ministry plan, integrating the SLT’s developed goals, initiatives, and action plans with his suggestions for organizational alignment and development. Therefore, the final plan contained the following sections:

1. An overview and rationale that explained the aims that the development of the ministry plan attempted to facilitate;
2. A list of Freedom’s strategic statements, some of which were not finalized by Steve at the time of the completion of the plan;
3. Freedom’s three primary goals and strategic initiatives that were identified to accomplish those goals;
4. A description of Freedom’s ministry leadership structure and personnel, which clarified authority and responsibility for ministry programs and activities in the church;
5. Individual ministry area action plans that detailed the purpose, leadership teams, and specific initiatives or programs to encourage spiritual growth; and
6. Appendices that listed church growth and discipleship resources, explicated main and other campus responsibilities, and listed suggested implementation strategies and organizational structural changes.

The majority of the plan, including the strategic statements, the overall goals and corresponding strategic initiatives, and the ministry action plans were developed by the SLT via facilitation, though other aspects of the plan, including the suggested implementation strategies and changes to Freedom’s overall organizational structure and personnel,

as well as some of the initiatives included in the plan for improving operational efficiency, were provided by the researcher in the capacity of a consultant.

After presenting the overall plan to Steve in a one-on-one meeting at his request, the researcher presented it to the rest of the SLT at one of its regular meetings (which was not attended by Steve and three other pastors), and sent digital copies of the plan to all members of the SLT. In all of the presentations of the plan, staff members expressed that the plan was clear and helped to put on paper the church’s challenges and a possible framework to move forward. However, the team did not express a full commitment to actually implementing the plan, stating that it was too extensive for the current staff and, therefore, potentially too expensive.

#### EVALUATION OF THE FACILITATION AND DISCUSSION

At the end of the facilitation, the researcher took off the ‘facilitator hat’ and stepped back into an observing and interviewing role to evaluate the facilitation program. In that evaluation period, he employed a facilitation evaluation questionnaire, which asked team members to rate and comment on the effectiveness of each aspect of the facilitation program, and conducted interviews with each of the SLT members.

After the final ministry plan was presented and delivered, any discussion regarding the plan completely stopped, leaving team members to wonder what happened. As a pastor stated, “We are not really sure what action is taking place directly as a result of this plan.” Another pastor explained how he “enjoyed [the process] and thought it was beneficial, but time will tell how and if it remains.” Because Steve was not at that final meeting and did not subsequently address the ministry plan with the team in the next meeting, some pastors assumed that the plan would not be implemented, and they simply shifted their attention to other, apparently more pressing matters, and, largely, they resumed old patterns of interaction. This section (a) discusses the progress made regarding the four goals of the facilitation program, (b) identifies elements and features of the facilitation process that worked, and those that did not work, and (c) highlights lessons for group facilitators to consider in their future work.

#### Facilitation Goals

The facilitation program goals were: (a) define spiritual maturity outcomes, (b) identify and map spiritual growth programs in the church, (c) determine future strategies for promoting spiritual maturity, (d) integrate those strategies into programs, services, and practices; and (e) advance collaborative work skills and potential among SLT

members. The first goal of the facilitation program, largely, was accomplished through the program. All but one respondent who completed the facilitation evaluation questionnaire noted that they believed that this goal was very much accomplished through the program, and several staff members noted that team members' discussions regarding church programs and activities, both in and out of meetings, now were grounded in how the program or activity promotes growth in the 10 spiritual maturity outcomes. As a pastor stated, "By far, the most productive thing we did was developing the 10 characteristics of spiritual maturity" (see Footnote 3). Another pastor remarked that "some people are more energized by [the spiritual maturity qualities] and feel more like, 'Wow, everything I do can be measured by these, everything I do.'"

The second goal of the facilitation program—to identify and map spiritual growth processes at Freedom—was only partially accomplished. The retreat session that evaluated ways in which each Freedom program or activity encouraged particular aspects of spiritual maturity for people at various stages of the spiritual journey did not cultivate meaningful discussion.

The third goal of the facilitation program—to determine and integrate future programmatic and relational strategies to advance spiritual maturity—was also not fully realized. Some ministry leaders used the ministry-planning process to develop robust strategies for their ministry areas, but many did not. In fact, many ministry leaders reported to me that being forced to plan in advance had reaped significant benefits for the effectiveness of their ministries and in bringing their ministry teams together. However, at the SLT level, developing church-wide strategies to improve the church's impact was more difficult. Although the staff identified many areas on which to work during the coming year, the ministry plan was not implemented. One pastor explained what was considered the most unproductive aspect of the facilitation:

Implementing a plan. By the end of the facilitation, everyone was doing their own thing again, unfortunately, and, for some reason that I cannot put my finger on, seemed to lose the desire or/belief in the process we had nearly completed. Maybe it was busyness; however, I don't think it was limited to that. It was more probably the many unanswered questions on "Will this actually be effective?" or "Is this even possible?" When these weren't answered (especially with the senior pastor), it put a full stop to the process.

The fourth goal of the facilitation program—to advance collaborative work skills and potential among SLT members—was also not fully realized. Although the team progressed in dealing with some of its communication challenges, effective communication still remained a major

obstacle to the team's ability to provide effective leadership for Freedom. In large part, meeting interaction digressed back to its earlier patterns after the facilitation. The group did not meet if Steve was not present, agendas were not used, calendars of the month's events were not circulated or discussed, and a "bring-whatever-up-when-ever-you-want-to" approach quickly became the norm. After the facilitation, team members mentioned that there was an even greater lack of clarity regarding mission and goals after the intervention than before it. Despite engaging in the most concentrated planning process that the Freedom staff had ever undertaken, a staff member stated after the entire process: "Overall, I don't think we have a ton of goals or plans for [the coming year] yet." Additionally, confusion proliferated among the SLT about who was responsible for what. As such, the SLT, in the words of one of its members, continued to "[fly] by the seat of [its] pants."

However, some team members noticed a change in the team's communication. One team member stated, "Our meetings [are] more on purpose; there is a goal." In addition, some team members have used the 10 spiritual maturity outcomes as a measuring stick to evaluate existing and proposed programs. Furthermore, the process opened up some conversation about staff roles and organizational structure, and some significant changes in SLT membership have been enacted following the intervention. Finally, Steve put more emphasis on setting specific performance standards and holding staff accountable to them in regard to managing finances, promoting spiritual growth through ministry activities, and prompt meeting attendance.

Although SLT members, after the facilitation, still largely regarded communication as the transfer of information from one place to another, many team members developed a broader understanding of the constitutive power of communication. After the facilitation, team members expected more from their meetings, knowing that their meetings could serve as a place to make decisions affecting Freedom's congregants and their spiritual development, establish their identity as a church through discussions of Freedom's stable and changing values, and discover better ways to work together. As a pastor explained, "We're coming to a meeting [now] and we're going to get something done. Before, it was like we're just going to hang out for a while and beat a dead horse."

Finally, in regard to planning, significant interactional norms continued to prevent extensive planning processes. However, several SLT members realized that more structure and planning were necessary to support a larger and more influential church body. A pastor expressed the pain that the Freedom staff is starting to feel without a stronger planning approach: "There's going to have to be a change. Something is going to have to happen. We're all feeling the pain right now." The facilitation process

clarified and, in some ways, exacerbated that tension and a need to operate in different ways. Even so, the team did learn new ways to plan and make decisions, evidenced by a pastor's statement that "the way our team thinks has been sharpened to make decisions based on expected outcomes and their relationships to stated (and shared) goals. This is a huge improvement." Moreover, the team experimented with brainstorming and other decision-making techniques.

Overall, many SLT members stated that their team interaction had significantly improved over time. A pastor suggested that he is more likely to contribute his thoughts to the team and to Steve than he was previously:

I definitely feel more confident in being able to share my opinion and being more vocal about positive and negative, hopefully both [contribute] constructive feedback to decisions to be made. This is a huge win for me (professionally) and, hopefully, for our organization.

Other pastors noted that they now experienced better working relationships with other members of the SLT; especially with those they had experienced problematic or competitive relationships with in the past. In short, the team members now were, as one pastor expressed, "collaborating well; there is a real energy," such that "there is a greater confidence with the team ability now."

### Facilitation Techniques and Practices

In addition to facilitating change for Freedom's leadership team, this investigation sought to: (a) test the applicability in natural teams of various facilitative techniques that have been developed and tested, largely, in laboratory situations; (b) explore interactional realities in natural organizational life that promote or resist intervention; and, in so doing, (c) extend communication facilitation scholarship, which has notoriously provided shaky grounds for the application of communication facilitation in real-world groups (see, e.g., Frey, 2006; Pavitt, 1993; Wheelan & Furbur, 2006). The mixed success of this facilitation, as discussed below, illuminates some techniques and practices that successfully facilitated the team's goal accomplishment, and others that hindered the team from accomplishing the facilitation goals.

*Effective facilitation techniques.* The modified Delphi method facilitation technique used to identify spiritual maturity qualities worked well. Using that procedure, subgroups identified facets of spiritual maturity, which were then voted on by the whole group and continuously revised through various rounds. During that session, group members actively participated, with many of them getting up and referencing the flipchart papers as they talked, and conversing with each other on the spiritual maturity characteristics. Thus, the modified Delphi method structured the group's communication in an enjoyable

manner that enabled members to pursue their team goals. As such, group facilitators who seek to generate agreement on a list of desired characteristics, such as during decision-making processes, can use this technique effectively. For example, this technique could be useful with a group employing the functional decision-making model, which identifies five communication functions that promote decision-making effectiveness<sup>6</sup>, to help the group identify essential criteria on which to base decisions (see Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999).

Second, gathering individual responses from team members through the questionnaires about characteristics of spiritual maturity, as well as the worksheet that identified strategic ministry initiatives for the coming year, proved to be effective. By not starting from ground zero in the session devoted to identifying new initiatives, the SLT was able to analyze, rank, and synthesize various ideas rather than just generate them. Third, the force-field analysis put words to the organizational dynamics that acted against change within Freedom. Furthermore, team members identified actions necessary to excite and sustain change efforts. The use of force-field analysis in this project, thus, constituted a test of that group facilitation procedure to support analysis of significant issues (Sunwolf & Frey, 2005).

*Ineffective facilitation techniques.* The spiritual growth mapping process was rated by the participants as the least effective facilitation technique used during the program. Specifically, the technique failed to generate meaningful discussion about deficiencies (and, therefore, opportunities) in how the church encouraged spiritual growth in relation to the 10 spiritual maturity outcomes. Because the subgroups adopted and operated from an approach that suggested every program promotes every type of spiritual maturity for people at every stage of their spiritual journeys, they did not think more critically about what, specifically, each ministry does to encourage various qualities of spiritual growth for people at various stages of spiritual development. Perhaps stemming from Freedom's culture that lacked goal clarity and assessment, team members did not reasonably assess how programs catalyzed spiritual growth. In addition, group members seemed to feel discomfort expressing dissent or challenge regarding particular ministries in a setting with other members who directed those ministries. The facilitator should have recognized and planned for these realities, and structured the interaction differently to be able to better map spiritual growth.

<sup>6</sup> The five functions of the functional group decision making perspective are: (a) analyze the problem, (b) establish evaluation criteria, (c) generate alternative solutions, (d) evaluate positive and negative consequences of solutions, and (e) select course of action judged to most likely satisfy goals.



## Reflection on Overall Facilitation Practice

The facilitation program was not as successful as it could have been, for several reasons, each of which holds important lessons to learn for facilitators and practitioners. This section reflects on the overall facilitation, and shares suggestions for facilitators who engage with similar groups and contexts.

First, as revealed through the case study, the team did not truly possess a sense of necessity and urgency for change (Kotter, 1996). Because the senior pastor did not drive the process, team members believed that they were performing very well as a church and that the communication challenges were not critical enough to require change. A pastor stated that there was a sense that “we’re more or less fine.” Despite Steve’s stated desire to create a more collaborative leadership approach via the implementation of a SLT, his ultimate influence on, authority in, and responsibility for Freedom cannot be overstated, as a pastor explained:

In an organization that is very intuitively led by [Steve], we’ve all learned to know when he’s into something and when he’s not, flat out. Rule number one of working here is you learn to read Steve’s body language; to read his signals, so to speak.

SLT members closely watched their leader, and noticed that he had not fully bought into the project, evidenced by his lack of attendance at meetings and pushing the project forward. A pastor summarized how he came to believe that the plan would not be implemented: “[It was] probably wrong of me, but as we [went] through this process, as I’m watching Steve not attend meetings and glaze over while we’re talking through stuff, I’m going, ‘None of this will be applied.’” His lack of clear support for and championing of the facilitation program, thus, significantly hampered its success, consistent with Looney, Shaw, and Crabtree’s (2011) finding that “the leader’s endorsement was necessary” for the success of interventions (p. 19). Thus, facilitators should be specific in developing a contract or agreement with key organizational stakeholders that identifies the responsibilities of each party and expectations regarding ownership of and participation within the engagement. Such a contract would offer a basis point for conversations outside of formal meetings when key stakeholders are not fulfilling the terms of the contract.

Second, and as a result of a lack of urgency, team members did not make the planning process a priority. On many occasions, team members did not complete requested documents on time, attend meetings, or offer their best efforts to the program. The structured approach to developing the ministry plan did not fit with Freedom’s DNA, which greatly values spontaneity, flexibility, reacting, hearing from God, and being Spirit-led more than

it values planning, structure, being proactive, and anticipating problems and opportunities. In short, as a pastor put it, Freedom is more comfortable “fighting fires than building safe houses.” Coupled with these cultural realities, the facilitator tried to accomplish too much in too short a time. On several occasions, the team ran out of time to discuss the most important issues. Here, the team’s tendency to ignore strategic leadership issues and, instead, to focus on detail-oriented operational items crowded out strategic discussion. Thus, trying to do such a large planning process in such a short time in that organizational context was too much. Consequently, a facilitation of this scale could be spread out over at least six months to a year or more, such that team members can digest each step along the way and assimilate what they are doing without having to move immediately to the next stage of the project. Alternatively, the scope of the project could be trimmed. In addition, the facilitator must take great care to appropriately plan each activity to fit within existing time constraints and be able to flex according to spontaneous interruptions and changes, especially in organizational contexts that privilege such flexibility. Paying more attention to time constraints, keeping the group on task and on time, cutting down the desired outcomes for the facilitation, and/or spreading out the facilitation program over a sufficient time period would have helped this intervention to be more successful.

Third, for the aforementioned reasons, by the end of the project, the researcher greatly owned the ministry planning process, but the team did not. As such, the facilitator/consultant’s high level of ownership and the team’s low level of ownership hindered the team from accomplishing its goals. Because the team was not putting in the time, effort, and critical evaluation required to build an exemplary, or even average, plan, and the researcher wanted the group to take away something tangible and actionable from its members’ efforts, he adopted a more consultative role as opposed to a facilitative role about halfway through the intervention. A pastor explained the futility of that effort: “When we were given the final plan, I understood how we got there mostly, but I couldn’t see my fingerprints on it.” As such, the researcher could have stuck to a purely facilitative role, though the project likely would have stalled more quickly than it did.

Of course, facilitator-researchers are stakeholders in facilitation engagements, whether those stakes are related to finances, reputation, scholarship, mission, or relationship, for instance. As such, it is not always easy to simply walk away when group dynamics or power imbalances make change making difficult. Another alternative was for the researcher to simply consult with the group. Yet, for groups who are not seeking outside ideas as much as a pathway to unlock the potential within them, as this SLT did, doing so preempts any intervention. Finding both of those discrete roles unsatisfactory in this case, the researcher transitioned

into a blended facilitative-consultative role in an attempt to remain involved with the group and to help it move forward on its stated objectives. However, the power imbalances present within the team and the team's unrelenting capitulation to the senior pastor, even when he did not overtly demand it, restricted the team from growing and developing. Perhaps addressing these issues directly, for instance by posing the problem statement for the field analysis as, "To address the fear and power imbalances in the SLT that are undermining church growth," might have been proven more provocative and uncovered the underlying dynamics. Doing so, however, is risky. In this case, the facilitation program would likely have been immediately terminated. Of course, it was eventually, as the senior pastor realized that pursuing the strategic ministry plan and the associated organizational changes would break apart his vise-grip hold on the church. In an ironic way, the church leadership team, individually and collectively, resisted growing and developing even as it was trying to create pathways of growth for members of their church.

In any case, determining how to manage challenging group dynamics while negotiating several roles—church member, group communication facilitator, and consultant—is quite difficult, but is the norm in engaged research projects like this one. Balancing those roles well (given that pristine, conflict-free researcher-participant relationships are not possible in ethnographic facilitative scholarship) is extremely important for successful facilitation (see Hartwig, 2014). Specific contracts and agreements, as explained above, might mitigate these tensions for facilitators.

## CONCLUSION

This case study of senior leadership team communication facilitation helped the team to improve its interaction and its capacity to provide leadership to a church congregation. Although the outcomes of the intervention were different than those hoped for at the beginning of the project, change did occur, and, consequently, this project was productive. Additionally, this study delineated some facilitation techniques (e.g., the Delphi method, consensus decision-making rules, force-field analysis, and agenda-setting) and principles (e.g., structuring talk, encouraging collaborative activity, and group decision making) that can be employed and implemented by facilitators. Finally, the study demonstrates a host of important issues that facilitators must grapple with as they conduct long-term, multimodal team facilitation, such as managing often-contradictory roles and expectations of organizational clients, selecting appropriate facilitation techniques that fit the task(s) and group(s), taking into account the organization's and team's complex interactional norms and leadership paradigms, and developing and implementing a facilitation program that assists a team in accomplishing its goals. By considering

how they can manage these complex issues, facilitators can make a meaningful difference for teams, and, simultaneously, facilitate additional scholarship and reflection on the important practice of group facilitation.

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# Facilitator Withdrawal from Organizational Change Initiatives: A Review of Strategies and Guidelines

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is on strategies and guidelines for external facilitators withdrawing from planned change projects in organizations. The article is intended for individuals working as facilitators as well as researchers interested in studying facilitation in planned change projects. Given the limited research that exists on this topic, the themes for facilitators withdrawing from a change project are based on ideas identified in general theories, empirical evidence involving organizational change processes, and sustainability literature related to project termination. The themes are related to a style of facilitation that supports, enables, and encourages individual team members and the team as a whole to work towards improving organizational processes and outcomes. The primary goals for this style of facilitation include increasing motivation and commitment, and individual and team learning. It is clear from this review that more research is needed regarding the facilitator's withdrawal from planned change projects. However, the literature does offer practitioners some guidance for project withdrawal strategies.

## KEYWORDS

organizational change, planned change, facilitation, termination, facilitator withdrawal, sustainability.

## BACKGROUND

Many descriptions of the stages of planned change can be found in the literature (Argyris, 1970; Armenakis, Harris, & Field, 1999; French & Bell, 1999), as well as strategies for external facilitation of planned change projects in organizations, much of it written by facilitators in the form of manuals or guides (see Bens, 2005; Ghais, 2005; Hogan, 2003; Hunter, 2009; Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006; Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk, & Berger, 2007; Schuman, 2005; Schuman, 2006; Schwartz, 2002; Wilkinson, 2012). Although it is often recognized that change projects will come to an end, the research providing guidance for the termination stage of a project, specifically when and how a facilitator should

take leave, is quite sparse (Harrigan, Fauri, & Netting, 1998; Keyton, 1993; Wardale, 2008).

The focus of this paper will be on external facilitators' withdrawal practices in planned change projects within organizational systems, for facilitators who employ a style of facilitation that includes guidance, encouragement, and support to promote client decision making, and conduct of tasks related to the change. This is a style of facilitation concerned with development of the client system rather than doing tasks for a client (Loftus-Hills & Harvey, 1999). The developmental facilitator uses her knowledge and skills

to enable and guide the client in using evidence to inform practice (Stetler, Legro, Rycroft-Malone, Bowman, & Curran, 2006). The themes identified in this paper have been selected based on the assumptions (1) that a facilitator's departure behavior should be consistent with a general strategy that encourages client action, change, participation and autonomy and (2) that the external facilitator is departing at some point, rather than forming a permanent partnership (French & Bell, 1999). Argyris (1970) expressed a similar view that change should not be the interventionist's primary goal. Instead, the goals of a facilitator are comprised of providing information that allows clients to make free and informed decisions based on valid data, and thereby become committed to their decisions (Argyris, 1970).

The intention of this paper is to provide guidance for facilitators withdrawing from change projects and to identify additional research needed on facilitator withdrawal, in order to make facilitator guidelines more evidence-based. The need for this guidance became clear to the author in a recent multi-site project, the Criminal Justice Drug Abuse Treatment Studies II (CJDATS II). The CJDATS II project sought to improve assessment, case management, and services for substance-abusing criminal offenders. Facilitators worked with local change teams that included members from multiple organizations. While the intervention was manualized, it provided more attention to beginning the project than to how to end it. When facilitators got closer to the end of the work with their teams, they began to raise issues concerning when and how they should withdraw from the site.

Based on these facilitators' concerns, a search was conducted for empirical and theoretical literature on techniques facilitators can use towards the completion of a planned change project. This resulted in a small amount of theoretical literature and almost no empirical support that focused solely on facilitator withdrawal. Due to the limited amount of literature on facilitator withdrawal, the search was expanded to include literature on sustaining planned changes, whether or not an external facilitator was involved. The fields covered in the literature search included management, nursing and healthcare, and social work. Search terms included: planned change, organizational change, facilitator, change agent, exit, withdrawal, departure, exit phase, tactics and strategies.

Although only a small amount of research focused specifically on facilitator withdrawal practices, some themes were still identified for facilitator withdrawal in this literature. Additionally, research and theory on sustaining organizational change appeared to have direct implications for facilitator practice, and therefore these themes are included in the review. For the purposes of this paper, sustainability is defined as characteristics or factors in

planning and conducting planned change that promote maintenance or continuance of the organizational changes beyond initial implementation and beyond facilitator involvement. Characteristics of sustainability, such as having the necessary resources and support from leadership, might influence how and when a facilitator addresses the end stage of their involvement in a project. Therefore, themes were identified for sustainability, and the implications of those for facilitator practice are explained.

The review covers the theoretical and empirical literature on sustainability factors first. Themes are identified and categorized into broader categories of *Commitment* and *Learning*. Additional factors that are important to sustainability but could not be placed into either of these categories are included under *Other factors for sustaining changes*. The literature specifically on facilitator departure actions is then reviewed and also separated by themes.

## FACTORS FOR SUSTAINING CHANGES

Sustainability can be easily forgotten in change projects because it can be considered so far in the future that the resources needed for this phase can be overlooked until the end of implementation is near (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). The issue of sustainability is important for organizational improvement because benefits from a change initiative may not be apparent until sometime after implementation, so addressing the factors that lead to sustainable improvements from the beginning is essential if maintaining change is a goal (Pluye, Potvin, & Denis, 2004).

### Commitment

Armenakis, Harris, & Field (1999) suggested that the institutionalization of a change is dependent on the individual's level of commitment. Their model for institutionalizing change proposed that commitment to the change project stems from the change message. In order to build commitment, the message needs to demonstrate why the change is necessary, its appropriateness to the organization's needs, the possibility of success, commitment of leaders, and the benefits to organizational members (Armenakis et al., 1999).

A facilitator's credibility and ability to persuade people of the need for change are crucial for increasing motivation and commitment to the change project (Burtonwood, Hocking, & Elwyn, 2001; Loftus-Hills & Harvey, 1999). Burtonwood et al. (2001) mentioned that although it was difficult for facilitators in their study to show how Professional and Practice Development Planning (PPDP) was valuable to the organization's needs, making sure the participants see the connection and the need for change is

vital to keep up motivation. Their results indicated that medical practices with a clear understanding of how the PPDD project related to patient care were the ones with the most consistent action and achievement.

*Action research.* Generating accurate information about a system can demonstrate the need for change (Armenakis et al., 1999). Accurate information can also help determine 'where the client is at', and what approaches or interventions would be most beneficial (Argyris, 1970). Argyris (1970) explained that effective interventions provide the client with valid data, the ability to make free and informed decisions, and promote internal commitment. Valid data should be useful to the client, in that it can be used to change the system. Changes should be both realistic but challenging, otherwise the result could be psychological failure. If valid data are withheld, participants may have distorted perceptions of their organization's needs, and as a result, their decisions are no longer informed or free.

After data have been collected and goals and objectives have been determined, a facilitator could then choose appropriate interventions that enable participants to achieve their goals and continue improvements by guiding and teaching the steps and processes of continuous improvement (French & Bell, 1999). Roosa, Scripa, Zastowny, and Ford (2011) demonstrated the effectiveness of using action research through a *local learning collaborative*<sup>1</sup> with substance abuse and mental health providers. They concluded that use of the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle to implement evidence-based practices was beneficial for agencies because they were able to receive quick feedback related to their efforts, and staff in provider agencies were highly engaged in the process, which accelerated implementation and diffusion of practices in the organization.

*Leadership support.* Research has shown that the support of leadership can impact participants' work on a change project (Bray et al., 2009; Ford, Krahn, Wise, & Oliver, 2011; Looney et al., 2011). In a study of facilitator experiences in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI), Stetler et al. (2006) found facilitators identified leadership support as an important factor in the change process. The value of leadership involvement and support was also highlighted in qualitative interviews with staff members in the Veterans Affairs' Mental Health System Redesign Initiative. Clinician interviews revealed that lack of involvement by leadership was seen as an obstacle to sustainability (Ford et al., 2011). Ford et al. suggested that when leaders are

involved in the process and their commitment is clear, members may see more benefit and credibility in the changes.

In another study showing the importance of leadership support, Bray, Cummings, Wolf, Massing, and Reaves (2009) examining 13 agencies, identified characteristics related to the sustainability of their activities, and found leadership commitment to be the second most common characteristic. Commitment from leadership was indicated by actions that included: creating policies, funding for resources and data collection, and regular review of implementation data by leaders. Similarly, results from Looney, Shaw, and Crabtree (2011) also indicated that leaders were powerful contributors to their project team; however, it was also noted that input from leaders was usually beneficial, but in some cases was an obstacle. Leaders who were seen as positive tended to introduce the facilitator, explain the intervention and goals, and were more open to both positive and negative feedback. Alternatively, leaders who were seen as negative generally disliked the democratic nature of meetings where members voiced their concerns and confronted the leader, who usually stopped attending meetings. Progress was delayed without the leader because the team required leader support and agreement (Looney et al., 2011).

In looking at the experiences of facilitators involved in a Professional and Practice Development Planning (PPDP) project, Burtonwood et al. (2001) found in those medical practices where managers demonstrated good leadership qualities, there was more innovation and ability to implement changes. Qualities that facilitators viewed as fundamental to the success of projects were *communication style* and *interpersonal skills* of the manager.

*Participation.* Internal commitment contributes to members' ownership and responsibility over choices and their implications, and participation increases that commitment (Argyris, 1970; Block, 2011). Since participation is an essential component of change projects, involving members in the decision making process of the change project is critical because it enhances participation and ownership (Argyris, 1970). In a meta-analysis of change projects both successful and unsuccessful, Dunn and Swierczek (1977) found that effective change projects were more often associated with change agents who had a participative approach compared to those with a non-participative approach. Participant interviews in Loftus-Hills & Harvey's (1999) study of medical practice facilitation emphasized the importance of having ownership over a project so the changes could continue after the facilitator departed. In another study, Onondaga County Department of Mental Health brought together a local learning collaborative comprised of chemical dependency and mental health treatment providers that increased their

<sup>1</sup> A multi-organizational learning collaborative is focused on improvement as a mechanism that helps accelerate the diffusion of innovations (see Wilson, Berwick, & Cleary, 2003).

involvement through holding regular meetings (Roosa et al., 2011). The authors noted that having regular meetings seemed to keep multi-organizational providers involved in the change process and maintained motivation to continue (Roosa et al., 2011).

*Guidance and support.* Facilitators can be a source of encouragement and support through their relationships with organizational members (Stetler et al., 2006). In evaluating the role of facilitators, Stetler et al. found the role boosted the members' abilities to succeed through building their sense of accomplishment while providing help only when needed. Facilitators can enable members to develop skills to succeed on their own, but also serve as process guides when necessary through sharing their knowledge, encouraging teamwork, and enhancing understanding (Burtonwood et al., 2001).

Loftus-Hills and Harvey (1999) identified multiple categories of facilitation that all involved some aspect of encouraging action, providing support, and enabling participants to succeed. For teams to work more efficiently, facilitators enable teams to identify issues, problem-solve, and evaluate and implement change. Argyris (1970) suggested that members should be free to explore as many options as they choose, and use those that are relevant to their needs. Providing guidance through that exploration process is part of the facilitator role; it helps members examine possible distortions when making significant decisions. Effective interventions should offer an opportunity to learn how to solve problems and perform more competently which, in turn, decreases reliance on outside help.

## Learning

Part of the facilitator support role can be as a trainer which may involve teaching a group methods or techniques needed to achieve their goals (Schwartz, 2002). In this role, the facilitator may be using their own skills and knowledge or ensuring that adequate training and opportunities are available for members to develop the appropriate skills (Burtonwood et al., 2001). For changes to be sustained beyond the commitment of the facilitator, some degree of learning may be necessary for participants to carry on activities (Looney et al., 2011). Results from Looney et al. (2011) pointed to the importance of creating a foundation that enables teams to continue changes. The learning of necessary skills to sustain changes creates the foundation needed to continue.

*Internal facilitator.* In planning for a project's sustainability, preparing a team member to take the lead is essential (Looney et al., 2011). While Dunn and Swierczek (1977) found that internal facilitators had the same level of influence as external facilitators in change projects, others

have suggested that by pairing internal and external facilitators, the client system can benefit from their different strengths. An internal facilitator's familiarity with the organization can be a benefit in that it enhances the external facilitator's understanding of the organization (Armenakis et al., 1999; Loftus-Hills & Harvey, 1999). The external facilitator teaches the internal facilitator and team the skills needed to be able to continue efforts after the external facilitator has departed, consequently establishing a path for sustainable change. Choosing an internal facilitator should occur in the beginning stages of a project, as it could impact an organization's ability to carry on efforts (Looney et al., 2011).

The effectiveness of internal facilitators has been found to be based on the support and contributions of other organizational members, including leadership (Looney et al., 2011). Although internal facilitators were able to learn strategies and techniques from the external facilitator, Looney et al. (2011) found that they were less effective without the organization leader's support of the team and acknowledgement of contributions and accomplishments.

Stetler et al. (2006) proposed that the external facilitator role starts when a relationship has been established with the internal facilitator. They reported that external facilitators appeared to help the internal facilitator get an implementation plan started through problem solving and providing support. Internal facilitators gained a better understanding of how to use data through the external facilitator's guidance (Stetler et al., 2006).

*Learning Opportunities.* Some frameworks, such as Total Quality (TQ), give less value to the role of leadership by suggesting that other characteristics of an organization fill in the leadership role. Training and formalization of the organization may be considered substitutes for leadership involvement (Dean & Bowen, 1994). The facilitator should be aware of the skill areas needing development, which can be related to interpersonal skills, improvement processes, problem solving, team-building, and statistical analysis (Hackman & Wageman, 1995). For instance, team members may need to learn how to conduct effective discussions, so the facilitator may need to model appropriate techniques (Looney et al., 2011).

Although changes can occur without the interventionist having had an important role, these changes do not always allow the organization to learn and have control over their problem-solving abilities (Argyris, 1970). Therefore, opportunities for learning and to address weaknesses should be made available to participants (Atkins et al., 2001). Similarly, Hackman & Wageman (1995) suggested that when organizations are committed to continuous improvement, people will learn if opportunities are presented. Therefore, facilitators should make learning



opportunities available so that teams can proceed with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle each part of the change process.

### Other Factors for Sustaining Changes

*Planning.* Pluye et al. (2004) proposed that implementation and sustainability are related, so 'when' and 'how' sustainability is planned for are of equal importance, and suggested that sustainability should be planned for during the implementation phase. Additionally, Hormozi, McMinn, and Nzeogwu (2000) emphasized planning as a factor for project success by explaining that a facilitator's actions during the final stage of a change process will likely be affected by earlier stages of the project, so when planning for sustainability, a plan for project termination should also be included (Hormozi et al., 2000).

In addition to preparing for later stages of a project, other possible benefits of planning include clarification of expectations for everyone involved, and provision of a realistic view of the project. Effective planning through each stage of change may help to identify possible challenges that could develop, and show participants the amount of effort that will be expected of them (Armenakis et al., 1999). Burtonwood et al. (2001) explained that all projects have problems that develop through the change process, but if problems or anticipated barriers are not addressed early in the process, the result could be failure.

*Flexibility.* The ability of the facilitator to adapt plans to fit an organization's changing needs could factor into the sustainability of the project, so the facilitator's role can vary throughout the project stages to include the role of expert, guide, or support (Atkins, Duffy, & Bain, 2001). Besides being flexible with the facilitator role, Hackman and Wageman (2005) suggested that timing also plays a central role in facilitation, in that different issues come up during different stages, and participants' openness to interventions can also change throughout the process. In a study by Okhuysen (2001), flexibility was shown to have a direct impact on performance because there were more opportunities for change. Flexibility was beneficial because groups were able to incorporate effective practices and discard those that were ineffective (Okhuysen, 2001).

*Availability of resources.* At the end of a change effort, the focus should shift to making sure the change is institutionalized (Armenakis et al., 1999; Harrigan et al., 1998). However, getting changes to be institutionalized requires commitment from organizations because of the necessity to provide resources and training for staff. Although providing time and resources can be a sacrifice for organizations initially, those efforts can lead to better outcomes and longer lasting improvements (Repenning & Sternman, 2002).

The importance of providing resources for change projects was demonstrated by Roosa and colleagues (2011), who examined agencies participating in a local learning collaborative based on the NIATx process improvement model. They identified a lack of resources to be a common reason for failure to sustain improvements. The authors noted that some agencies in the study were unable to collect data due to the lack of resources or funding (Roosa et al., 2011). Of the sustainability characteristics identified by Bray et al. (2009), *assurance of resources* was the third most common characteristic, which included staff and infrastructure support. *Pursuing additional funding* to continue activities was the fourth commonality among sites in the study. Those sites that did pursue funding used the data collected from the initiative to show a need and the ability to manage project activities (Bray et al., 2009). The *formation of partnerships with other agencies involved in the project* was the last theme in the study sites. The partnerships that were established allowed for more access to funding, resources, and planning (Bray et al., 2009).

*Communication.* A collaborative environment that allows for open communication and constructive feedback is important for effective communication (Bray et al., 2009). Bray et al. (2009) found that a collaborative environment was shown to be supportive of six identified sustainability characteristics, the most important of those being peer support and partnerships. By creating an environment of open communication where members can voice their concerns, managers can help keep commitment levels high (Harrigan et al., 1998). Poor communication was also identified by Repenning & Sternman (2002) as a factor in what staff and supervisors believed to be a cause for project failure. Supervisors held the view that failures resulted from insufficient effort from the workers, while the workers saw failure as a result of inadequate time and resources. Continuously not recognizing the actual cause of failure led to a cycle of problems (Repenning & Sternman, 2002).

When open communication and collaboration is a set norm, it provides a way of dealing with conflicts, and has been shown to lead to more positive outcomes (Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001). Lovelace et al. (2001) found collaborative communication to be associated with finding mutually beneficial decisions regarding problems. This type of communication is more oriented towards problem solving (Lovelace et al., 2001). The effect that disagreement had on performance outcomes depended on how the disagreement was communicated, how free members felt in expressing concerns, and how the leader's effectiveness was perceived (Lovelace et al., 2001).

Providing feedback can influence group expectations and establish norms for effective communication (Keyton, 1993). When leaders offer constructive feedback, they set

the expectation that disagreement is normal and should be expected (Lovelace et al., 2001). The team's communication pattern has been shown to result from the group's attitudes and behaviors, as well as influence from the leader. Effective leaders can influence communication by creating a positive atmosphere that focuses on resolving problems (Lovelace et al., 2001).

### Summary of Sustainability Implications for Facilitators

The literature suggests that the facilitator's primary goals in a change project include fostering motivation and commitment in team members, and providing opportunities to learn. Facilitator actions to enhance motivation and commitment can include: action research, gaining leadership support, increasing participation, and providing guidance and support. The secondary goal of fostering learning can involve teaching individuals and teams, and coaching an internal facilitator. Facilitators can encourage learning by teaching team members through their own skills and knowledge, and also ensuring adequate training opportunities are available. If these factors are important to sustaining changes in an externally facilitated project, then facilitators should take actions that promote those factors in preparation for withdrawal.

### LITERATURE ON FACILITATOR DEPARTURE PRACTICE

Despite the limited number of studies on when and how facilitators should address project termination, some common themes have emerged. The themes tie into the goals and objectives of the facilitator throughout a project, and point out the importance of planning prior to reaching the termination stage (Hormozi et al., 2000).

### Member Awareness and Involvement in Termination

Participation is just as important in the termination process as it is through earlier stages of a project as it increases loyalty and commitment to the project and the organization (Hormozi et al., 2000; Keyton, 1993). As demonstrated in Ford et al. (2011), staff involvement throughout a project was a factor for sustainability, therefore when project completion is near, it seems a logical step to include making sure group members are aware and included in decisions related to the termination process and the withdrawal of the external facilitator (Harrigan et al., 1998; Keyton, 1993). Facilitators should take steps to make sure members are aware of, and involved in, the termination process. This could include providing members with information about when the facilitator plans to withdraw from their role, as well as working with members to create a plan for sustainability so they are prepared to continue efforts without the facilitator.

### Addressing Concerns

Stresses and concerns can result of project termination and may need to be addressed. The facilitator's decision to leave may result in clients feeling betrayed, which can make the decision of when to leave difficult for the facilitator (Argyris, 1970). Team members might experience stress as a result of losses that occur during termination, which need to be recognized and responded to or there could be a decrease in productivity and effectiveness (Harrigan et al., 1998).

Project managers need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the stresses that can occur until the organization is settled into a stable routine. If organizations are not responsive to participants' concerns, the result could be long-term negative effects on productivity and commitment (Hormozi et al., 2000). Harrigan et al. (1998) suggested that a manager's role in project termination involves making sure transitions are as orderly and stress-free as possible by managing teams and maintaining the group's morale. Actions or activities to express appreciation, deal with transitions, and discuss interpersonal and organization issues related to the termination can help maintain positive attitudes through the termination process (Harrigan et al., 1998; Keyton, 1993). For that reason, discussion should occur that addresses the group's completion and the continuation of supportive and productive relationships that were established through the group's work together (Keyton, 1993). When the facilitator's role is near completion, the facilitator can make sure management is aware that their staff may experience stress as a result of the facilitator's departure, and create a plan for managers to deal with these issues should they occur.

### Expressing Appreciation

During the termination process, activities should take place that allow leadership to express appreciation for the group members and their contributions (Hormozi et al., 2000; Keyton, 1993). Having senior management acknowledge and reward the team's accomplishments is vital because it allows for a culture that encourages success and increases motivation to do well (Hormozi et al., 2000). It is also important that there is no penalty for team members who participate in an unsuccessful project because that may affect attitudes towards future projects (Hormozi et al., 2000). Towards the end of the project, a facilitator should encourage management to praise the team for their efforts so members know that their work has not gone unnoticed.

### Review Experiences

Group members should be given an opportunity to review their experience related to the change project (Keyton, 1993). Having leaders provide time for members to reflect

on the processes and work of the team, and evaluate accomplishments and interactions during termination, can maximize members' experience and output. In reviewing experiences, both negative and positive experiences are important to discuss because it may increase awareness of problems to anticipate in future projects, and identify successful practices that can become part of the organizational culture (Keyton, 1993). The facilitator's role is to make sure time is set aside for the team to come together and discuss their experiences, which might mean negotiating with management to provide time for these activities.

### Summarize Outcomes

Keyton (1993) suggested substantive and symbolic actions to take place during the termination phase. Substantive actions that might benefit team members and the organization include reviewing accomplishments and evaluating what was completed compared to the planned objectives. Activities should allow members to build a shared view of the group's experience of the change process, and support members' transitions to new roles. Incorporating a performance outcome into the research design in the beginning of the project might create an advantage for evaluating accomplishments during the termination phase (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001).

### Reporting

Part of summarizing the group's outcomes includes a written report to be distributed to organizational members (Harrigan et al., 1998; Keyton, 1993). Summarizing provides a means to examine what changes occurred and evaluate them in order to determine if the changes should be made permanent or not. The final report discusses the successes and failings of the project and should be distributed to management as well as the group. This report can have a considerable effect on how the organization handles future projects (Hormozi et al., 2000). Wardale (2008) suggests that facilitators can assist by guiding the group in the creation of a final report.

Additionally, Hormozi et al. (2000) suggested including sections of the report for project and administration performance, structure of the organization, administrative and project teams, and management techniques.

Each section of the report should have comparisons of actual results to prior objectives (Hormozi et al., 2000). Limitations of the project should also be included, such as how the organizational structure helped or limited the project. Hormozi et al. (2000) recommended having a confidential section discussing the team member's abilities, aptitudes, and openness to working as a team to assist

management in deciding which employees should be included in future projects. If performance will be reported, members should be notified of this at the beginning of the project. Whether or not performance should be reported is controversial, and therefore something that may need to be addressed, as it could put a facilitator in a conflict of interest (see Mirvis & Seashore, 1979).

### SUMMARY OF SUSTAINABILITY FACTORS

The two tables below provide a summary of the findings in this review. Both tables list the themes identified in the literature and two columns for the support of each theme that are categorized as either theoretical recommendations or evidence from research. Table 1 contains the factors related to the sustainability of a change project, and Table 2 contains themes specific to facilitators withdrawing from change projects.

Each of the factors listed in Table 1 (two pages) have support from theory and research; however, the importance of planning and its effect on project sustainability was an area in need of more empirical research to support the theory behind it. Although all of the factors have been identified as affecting project sustainability, how and when those issues should be addressed was unclear, as well as what a facilitator's role in those factors might be.

**Table 1. Sustainability of a Change Project**

Sustainability of a Change Project		
<i>Sustainability Factors</i>		
Theme	Theory Recommendations	Research Support
Action Research	Armenakis et al, (1999) suggested one part of increasing commitment involves demonstrating the need for change. Producing valid information enables the client to make informed decisions (Argyris, 1970). Action research can increase knowledge and problem solving ability as a result of data collection and learning new processes (French & Bell, 1999).	Bray et al. (2009) found that giving time for staff to meet, discuss data, and review and develop plans related to QI activities was crucial to sustainability. Ford et al. (2011) found an effective system for continuous monitoring was an important sustainability characteristic. Roosa et al. (2011) reported that use of the PDSA cycle encouraged quicker feedback and dissemination of practices.
Leadership Support	Argyris (1970) suggested when approval of top management is necessary for changes, involvement of top management in the process is critical. The commitment of leaders impacts the commitment of team members (Armenakis et al., 1999).	Ford et al. (2011) found the most common factor mentioned as a challenge to implementation was low support from leadership. Bray et al. (2009) found leadership commitment was a common characteristic of sustainability, but continuing activities based on collected data was more dependent on system redesign than leadership support. Looney et al. (2011) found support from leadership to be a characteristic of sustained improvements. Stetler et al. (2006) found facilitators identified leadership support as a key factor in the process.
Participation	Armenakis et al. (1999) suggested involving members in all phases of the change gives them some ownership in the process. Argyris (1970) suggested that involvement in decisions increases ownership.	Looney et al. (2011) found that contributions and support of team members impacts the effectiveness of the internal facilitator. Burtonwood et al. (2001) found in practices where participants had ownership over the process, they were more likely to engage in activities. Loftus-Hills & Harvey (1999) found that groups felt ownership was important to sustaining changes after a facilitator left. Roosa et al. (2011) found that having regular meetings seemed to maintain motivation and keep providers involved. Dunn & Swierczek (1977) found participative approaches were more associated with effective change than non-participative approaches.
Guidance & Support	Armenakis et al. (1999) suggested a lack of guidance throughout the change effort as a reason efforts fail. Loftus-Hills & Harvey (1999) suggested that facilitation involves supporting and encouraging action from participants in the change process. Argyris (1970) suggested that facilitators allow clients to explore options and make decisions, but enable learning to decrease reliance on outside help.	The facilitator role includes providing support and encouragement to support autonomy, and providing guidance when needed (Stetler et al., 2006; Burtonwood et al., 2001). Looney et al. (2011) found difficulty empowering members to be a barrier to sustaining changes.
Internal Facilitator	Armenakis et al. (1999) suggested that influential leaders or peers can be role models and build commitment through their support for the change. Loftus-Hills & Harvey (1999) suggested that internal facilitators provide insight into the organizational culture.	Looney et al. (2011) found that preparing an internal facilitator to take over is necessary to sustain changes. Stetler et al. (2006) found participants identified one objective of facilitators was to help internal facilitators identify needs and how to make changes. Dunn & Swierczek (1977) found that internal change agents were no more influential on the adoption of change projects than external change agents.

Table 1 continued from previous page

<b>Sustainability of a Change Project</b>		
<i>Sustainability Factors</i>		
<b>Theme</b>	Theory Recommendations	Research Support
<b>Teaching</b>	Argyris (1970) suggested that effective interventions allow the client to learn how to solve problems and perform competently, decreasing the need for outside help. For learning to occur, participants need to have learning opportunities available (Hackman & Wageman, 1995).	Burtonwood et al. (2001) reported that facilitators promoted learning with their own knowledge or provided training opportunities. Looney et al. (2011) found learning provided a foundation for sustainability. Loftus-Hills & Harvey (1999) found some participants viewed the role of the facilitator as imparting knowledge and enabling learning.
<b>Planning</b>	Planning each stage of a project helps to address challenges that could arise (Armenakis et al., 1999). Pluye et al. (2004) suggested that sustainability should be planned for during implementation. Hormozi et al. (2000) suggested creating a plan for termination containing guidelines for termination.	Roosa et al. (2011) found that agencies that planned early on had more gains. Burtonwood et al. (2001) found that not addressing possible barriers through planning could lead to failure.
<b>Flexibility</b>	Atkins et al. (2001) suggested that the facilitator role varies throughout the project, and the pace of the project should be set by the team needs.	Ford et al. (2011) found a key attribute of sustainability to be the adaptability of processes to change with the new environment. Okhuysen, (2001) found flexibility was essential to identify ineffective practices and incorporate new ones.
<b>Resources</b>	At the end of a project, appropriate resources needed to continue changes should be in place (Hormozi et al., 2000). Providing resources and training for staff takes time, but can make for lasting improvements (Repenning & Sternman, 2002).	Bray et al. (2009) found having staff and the infrastructure to support sustainability was important. Looney et al. (2011) found limited resources were a factor in practices that did not continue efforts. Loftus-Hills & Harvey (1999) found that participants noted difficulties of a lack of resources and gaining access to certain practices. Roosa et al. (2011) found common reasons for failure to sustain initiatives were staff turnover and lack of resources.
<b>Communication</b>	Argyris (1970) suggested poor communication as a common problem. Open communication helps keep motivation levels high (Harrigan et al., 1998).	Looney et al. (2011) found that practices that continued efforts had a protocol involving respectful behavior, safety and confidentiality for expressing concerns, and democratic decision-making, and increased understanding and communication for members. Bray et al. (2009) found that a collaborative environment supported the six sustainability characteristics; the two most important being peer support for leaders and strategic partnerships. Lovelace et al. (2001) found that practices that had established norms of open communication had better outcomes. Stetler et al. (2006) found that participants identified good communication as critical for effective facilitation, and that facilitators enabled transfer of information through various modes of communication. Repenning & Sternman (2002) found that lack of communication between supervisors and staff affected each party's judgments about the cause of failure.

Summary of Facilitator Withdrawal Strategies

Table 2 summarizes literature on strategies for facilitators withdrawing from planned change projects. There are gaps evident in the literature on the topic of facilitator withdrawal, especially in relation to addressing concerns

and reviewing experiences. Also, most of the support for the facilitator withdrawal themes was based on theory, rather than supported with empirical studies. Some of the research studies that supported the theoretical recommendations were more related to sustainability than to actions of a facilitator withdrawing from a planned change project, leaving the choices a facilitator faces at departure rather unclear.

**Table 2. Facilitator Withdrawal Literature**

Facilitator Withdrawal Literature		
<i>Facilitator Withdrawal Strategies</i>		
Theme	Theory Recommendations	Research Support
Awareness & Involvement	Members should be made aware of termination and included in decision-making (Harrigan et al., 1998; Keyton, 1993). Participation in the process of termination increases loyalty and commitment (Hormozi et al., 2000; Keyton, 1993).	Ford et al. (2011) found staff involvement was a key characteristic to sustainability.
Addressing Concerns	Recognize losses that occur, and help staff transition into new roles (Harrigan et al., 1998). Group should discuss the ending, and the continuation of supportive and productive relationships (Keyton, 1993).	
Expressing Appreciation	Members should know that their interaction was appreciated (Keyton, 1993). Senior management should acknowledge the team’s contributions and reward accomplishments, thus encouraging success and creating motivation (Hormozi et al., 2000).	Looney et al. (2011) found that internal facilitators were less effective if leadership did not acknowledge the contributions and accomplishments of the team.
Review Experiences	Allowing groups to evaluate accomplishments and interactions in the termination phase can maximize group experience and output (Keyton, 1993). The termination period is an opportunity to encourage members to review their process, and work and learn from these reflections (Keyton, 1993). Hulscher, Laurant, and Grol (2002) suggested that reviewing experiences provides insight into participants’ satisfaction with interventions and barriers to implementation.	
Summarize Outcomes	Termination can be positive in that there are accomplishments and reports written and dispersed, providing a feeling of closure (Harrigan et al., 1998). During termination, the practitioner examines changes and decides whether or not they should be continued (Harrigan et al., 1998).	Looney et al. (2011) found that leadership welcomed feedback based on the facilitator’s expertise and objective viewpoint.
Written Report	A report should be generated at the end of a project that provides a summary of the project, including successes and failures, and includes recommendations for future projects, and is given to senior management (Hormozi et al., 2000). Distributing a written report is part of summarizing the group’s outcomes (Harrigan et al., 1998; Keyton, 1993).	Bray et al. (2009) found that generating a product such as a monthly report helped to support improvements. Ford et al. (2011) found providing reports regularly can improve implementation and sustainability. Thor et al. (2004) found that information can be lost when external or internal facilitators leave, suggesting the importance of also documenting what was learned and incorporating new procedures or practices into the organization.

## CONCLUSION

Sustainability and facilitator withdrawal practices are related; therefore, the termination phase and withdrawal of the facilitator may be more efficient if sustainability factors are addressed at the beginning of the project. If the organization is prepared to maintain changes without relying on the facilitator's support, the facilitator's departure may be an

easier transition for all participants in the project. Although there is research on the end stage of change projects and sustainability, little was found related to the role of a facilitator during this stage, specifically how and when facilitators prepare for and address the issues surrounding their departure.

To conclude, there is not enough evidence to make empirically-supported recommendations for facilitators withdrawing from planned change projects because most of the current literature is theoretical, rather than grounded in empirical study. Therefore, a more appropriate recommendation is to call for more research examining how facilitators deal with project termination and the impact of facilitator strategies on both change and team outcomes as well as overall outcomes for the organization.

Perhaps there is little research on facilitator withdrawal from planned change projects because it would take a substantial number of research projects to identify common themes related to withdrawal. Each project is different in

terms of goals, differences in organizations, and styles of facilitation, among other things. In order to get a better understanding of a facilitator's actions at the termination phase and the possible impact of those actions, data would need to be collected well after an intervention has ended. Some facilitated interventions may not have the funding or resources to collect data long after the intervention ends.

Looney et al. (2011) had data for one year of follow-up to determine if changes had been sustained and to identify what factors contributed to changes that were sustained and not sustained. The data used by the authors came from studies that were funded by grants from multiple institutions in the USA, including the National Cancer Institute, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The authors were able to reanalyze data from studies that had long follow-up periods. With funding from the North Carolina state government, Bray et al. (2009) collected follow-up data five months after their intervention ended to determine if sustainability models had been validated and whether or not there was a relationship with sustainability activities during the intervention. Roosa et al. (2011) received funding from Onondaga County Department of Mental

Health in New York State. The authors noted that, due to the funding, their study had the ability to pay for participation in order to ensure the participating agencies did not incur losses due to the project, and that seemed to increase participation.

These studies had the ability to collect follow-up data, but many facilitator projects do not have that kind of support after a facilitator leaves. One study had access to previously collected data while the other two had funding that allowed supported data collection after the facilitator left. Without funding, it seems unlikely that empirical evidence on facilitator withdrawal will be gathered.

With client permission, facilitators from diverse and unrelated projects might be able to document all of their actions and interactions with others during each planned change project, so that the factors involved in the intervention do not have to be collected after the fact. Later, to these data on process could be added project outcomes from follow up data that were planned in advance. Such a database could be used to examine what actions facilitators take prior to and during their withdrawal in relation to outcomes of a change initiative. Planning and factoring in funding from the beginning of a project for collecting such data would be necessary. Funds would need to be available after each project ended, as well as a plan for what data should be collected and how. The intervention data might be self-reported by facilitators. The outcome data would require some form of client reporting about the extent that induced changes were maintained. Such data collection would involve considerable cross-project agreement on standardized categorizations of interventions and of outcomes (see Macy & Izumi, 1993 for more detail on the requirements for such a database). Building such a database would take considerable collective effort, most likely by an association of change agents committed to an evidence base for assessing practices. If such a group could come to agreement on a plan, then they would also benefit from technological support for the storing of data across time and space. The CJDATS II project deployed a web-portal to track facilitator actions across 21 widely-dispersed project sites in which project initiation and completion varied by months.

In the meantime, regardless of why there is little research on this topic, there are ways for facilitators to find guidance when withdrawing from a planned change project, in absence of better data. Facilitators could make use of available literature on termination in clinical settings. Although treatment groups are different from change teams in organizations, there are similarities in the group processes (see Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Bernard et al., 2008; Schermer & Klein, 1996). The treatment literature could at least provide some guidance until there is research that is more relevant to organizational change and group facilitation. Using evidence on sustaining changes is

another option, in that if there is evidence to support factors that sustain change, facilitators can choose strategies during termination that appear to promote sustainability.

Clearly more data is needed on strategies and tactics used by facilitators when withdrawing from planned change projects. Facilitators can help further research on this topic by gathering data on their own experiences with termination. If associations of facilitators could find a way to store such information and share it, facilitators could continue to build on which practices are best.

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# Deliberative Methods for Complex Issues: A typology of functions that may need scaffolding

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## ABSTRACT

When a group of diverse stakeholders face a complex issue that needs to be managed skillfully, the group may need support in order to work effectively. A large number of methods for scaffolding group deliberation on complex issues has evolved over the last few decades, however little research has been conducted to date on what functions these methods actually perform. The study in this article differentiates between the functions that may need to be scaffolded, and the means used for scaffolding such functions. A literature review and interviews with eight experienced facilitators led to a typology comprising of 24 functions that various deliberative methods are assumed to perform. The typology also describes some of the risks associated with a neglect to scaffold each function. An inventory was made of techniques and facilitator actions used in different methods and by individual facilitators in order to scaffold the 24 functions. The typology of functions may be useful in empirical research on deliberative methods, for evaluation purposes, and for supporting further development of skillfulness among facilitators.

## KEYWORDS

deliberative methods, scaffolding, techniques, group facilitation.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This paper offers a useful conceptual framework that can both assist facilitators of group processes to reflect on and develop their practice, and be useful for comparative and evaluative research on facilitation and deliberative methods. Facilitators operate from a range of 'theories of change', which can mean that different facilitators facing the same particular group conditions can make quite different decisions about their process design. This article presents a useful inventory of functions that can be scaffolded in group processes, as well as offering potential risks for not scaffolding in certain situations.

## INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades, a rich range of methods for working with complex issues has evolved. The need for such methods has been felt within organizations (companies, public administration, non-governmental organizations), in inter-organizational interactions, in local communities, and in many other arenas. Rosenhead (2006), while writing about Problem Structuring Methods (PSMs;

one of the families of methods for complex issues), captured a number of important features of the situations for which a large number of methods were designed:

PSMs are appropriate for situations characterized by multiple actors, differing perspectives, partially conflicting interests, significant intangibles and

perplexing uncertainties. They can operate in such contexts because they:

- are designed for deployment in a group format;
- permit the simultaneous consideration of alternative perspectives;
- are participative in nature, with interaction among participants, and between participant and facilitator(s);
- iterate between analysis of judgmental inputs and the application of judgment to analytic outputs; and
- allow closure when participants are satisfied with the progress achieved, rather than requiring commitment to a comprehensive solution of all the interacting strands that make up the problematic situation (p. 762).

The first sentence in the quote above describes the nature of complex issues well, but it might be added that complex issues are usually also dependent on many different types of conditions and complex causal relationships: social, psychological, economic, political, technological, legal, environmental and cultural, for example. Some complex issues are of vital importance for different stakeholder groups, for organizations, communities, countries and even for the global society, but are also difficult to manage. A straightforward difficulty is that for any single actor, it may be hard to get an overview and understanding of all the components, conditions, causal connections and potential consequences that may be relevant to the issue. Another difficulty is one Rosenhead points to: there are often many stakeholders with different perspectives and conflicting interests, which may make communication and agreement difficult (Rosenhead, 2006, p. 762).

Complex issues, it can be argued, require that actors have sophisticated capacities for managing different kinds of complexity. Where is this much-needed capacity to be found? It can be looked for in the skills of individuals - either searching for those individuals who have the capacities needed for very complex tasks, or developing methods for training individuals in the appropriate skills (Jordan, 2011). However, an interesting alternative is to turn attention to the possibility of generating collective capacities for managing issue complexity by means of skillful structured facilitation that enables groups to accomplish tasks that would be out of reach both of any individual and of groups working without the support of a method and a facilitator. A research question can be articulated as: *Is it possible to build capacities for the management of complex issues into external support structures in the form of methods and/or facilitation strategies?* The present study is intended to help address this question by developing a clearer understanding of how deliberative methods can serve a group of people grappling with a complex issue. The study is based on a review of literature on deliberative methods and on eight in-depth interviews with experienced facilitators.

## ON THE USE OF METHODS

External support, in the form of a structured method and/or skilled facilitation, can be talked of in terms of *scaffolding* (Hlemo et al., 1976; Stone, 1993; Wood et al., 1976). This term has found widespread use in the study of learning and skill acquisition, in particular in child development. Scaffolding is the introduction of a support structure similar to what workers need when erecting walls of a new building and when doing other construction work. Metaphorically, the verb 'to scaffold' refers to the provision of the external support a person or a group may need in order to build skills, learn new things, construct a solution to a complex problem or develop a strategy for attaining a desired goal. The methods referred to above may be seen as scaffoldings; they can enable a group to master a task that would otherwise be out of their reach.

Most methods used for scaffolding group processes on complex issues have been designed by practitioners - often experienced consultants or group facilitators. In some cases, their designs have been informed by research-based theories, but mostly the methods are based on accumulated expertise from practice rather than on systematic empirical analysis. One consequence of this is that the theoretically articulated understanding of *how* (and *if*) the methods serve useful functions for groups of people grappling with complex tasks is rather poorly developed.

### Methods are different for various reasons

The richness of deliberative methods can be explained by at least two different types of reasons. One is that conditions vary from case to case and methods have been designed in response to the needs in the contexts in which they have evolved. For example, such variables as the number of participants, the time available for the process, the level of heterogeneity regarding backgrounds and roles among the participants, and the level of complexity of the issues imply constraints and potentials that methods have to be adapted to. The goals or purposes of the deliberative processes also vary considerably. If the goal is to generate a number of creative ideas, the method would need to scaffold creativity. If the goal is to develop a detailed action plan for a very specific problem none of the participants fully understand, the method needs to scaffold inquiry, collaborative learning and decision-making. If the purpose is rather to improve collaboration between different departments by increasing mutual understanding and building relationships characterized by trust, the method should use techniques that scaffold contact and dialogue. As these brief remarks indicate, conditions can vary along many different dimensions. However, a more comprehensive treatment of which types of conditions are significant goes beyond the scope of this article.

There is an entirely different type of reason for the differences in method designs, though, namely the beliefs of the designers of methods about what needs to happen for a group to be effective when deliberating complex issues. Facilitators have more or less articulated ‘theories of change’ that guide their practice, which means that different facilitators facing the same particular conditions would sometimes make different decisions about process design. Little research has been conducted on consultants’ theories of change (however, see Argyris & Schön, 1992; Shapiro, 2005), even though a better understanding of the spectrum of theories of change would seem to be crucial for the further development of the field. The present author hopes that the typology developed in this article will be useful for future inquiry into the roles of theories of change in the practice of facilitating deliberative processes.

### Aims of the study

The aims of the study reported in this article are (a) to clearly differentiate between the *functions* served by deliberative methods on the one hand, and the *means* used for scaffolding the functions on the other hand; (b) to develop a typology of the functions performed (or assumed to be performed) by the methods and by the facilitator; (c) to elaborate on the evident risks of not scaffolding these; and (d) to provide examples from the study of means for active scaffolding of such functions. The intended outcome, a typology of functions, can be useful both for furthering group facilitation research and for developing facilitation practice.

### Terminology regarding methods for complex issues

Many different terms are used for designating methods used in supporting groups to develop strategies or decisions regarding complex issues. Some of these terms refer to only a subcategory of the broad spectrum of related methods and reflect the specific function or conditions of the intended application. *Change methods*, or *whole system change methods* (e.g., Holman et al., 2007), is a term often used in organizational settings when organizational change is a major concern. Several publications are devoted specifically to *large group methods/interventions* (e.g., Bunker & Alban, 2006; Bartunek et al., 2011) or *large scale interventions* (van der Zouwen, 2011), terms for methods designed to involve large numbers of participants in the management of complex issues. The terms *participatory* or *collaborative decision-making* (Kaner et al., 2007) have a slightly different emphasis, pointing to the intention to involve more stakeholders in actual decision-making. The term *problem structuring methods* (e.g., Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001) points to an important property of many complex issues: because the issues are complex and because different stakeholders have very different perspectives, a major concern is to arrive at a

formulation of what the issue actually is and what conditions are relevant to consider. The United Nations Development Programme uses the term *dialogical processes* (see Pruitt & Thomas, 2007); drawing on the role of dialogue in their development work and peacemaking. In the fields of community development and politics, names of methods often include the word *deliberative* or *deliberation*, such as in *deliberative forums*, *deliberative workshops* or more generally, *deliberative methods* (e.g., Gastil & Levine, 2005; Abelson et al., 2003). This term points to a quality that seems to be common to all methods: the group needs to intentionally deliberate the issues involved, i.e., to talk and listen, reflect and learn before they can develop well-founded actions plans or decisions.

Key descriptors used when searching for a name for the kinds of methods used for supporting groups working with complex issues seem to be *change*, *collaborative*, *participatory*, *structuring* and *deliberative*. In this article, I will use the term *deliberative methods* as a general designation for all types of methods referred to above.

### Problem analysis: key concepts

Most efforts to compare and analyze deliberative methods have been aimed at identifying key factors for attaining successful outcomes (e.g., Shmulyian et al., 2010; van der Zouwen, 2011). The purpose of the study in this article is much narrower. Terms are defined using the following formulation as a starting point:

In order to assist a group of people in their efforts to attain certain **goals** regarding a complex issue, facilitators use **methods** that combine different **techniques** in order to scaffold the performance of a number of **functions** in the group’s work **process**.

The *goals*, or hoped-for outcomes, of deliberative group processes can be quite different, with significant consequences for the design of the method used. Mingers and Brocklesby (1997) define *methodology* in a way that covers what is meant by *method* above: “A methodology is a structured set of guidelines or activities to assist people in undertaking research or intervention” (p. 490). Thus, a method has several steps or phases organized in a manner that reflect assumptions about what is helpful in order to scaffold the work process. Usually when using the word ‘method’, it is commonly thought of as name for a particular ‘structured set of guidelines or activities’ that is used in many different situations in a recognizable format. However, many skilled facilitators do not strictly follow a standard recipe when designing and facilitating a group process. They adapt the format to case-specific conditions, drawing on a number of different methods and techniques.

During the actual process, they also make new decisions about how to intervene or proceed, depending on what happens and what seems to be needed in order for the group to achieve its purpose. In a wider sense, 'method' can also be a name for a unique process as it manifests, as long as there is some kind of meaningful and recognizable pattern in the decisions and actions of the facilitator and group. *Technique* is a concept used here to designate specific activities prescribed by the method or actions performed by the facilitator in order to serve various functions. Methods and techniques can be seen as the *means* used for attaining the desired goals. *Function*, on the other hand, is a word that points to *how* the means contribute to an effective process. An assumption in this article is that certain functions may need to be scaffolded in order for a group of stakeholders to be able to work together on a complex task; they may need support to agree on what task to work on, to actually communicate productively with each other, to make decisions, and more. *Process* refers to the actual flow of the work the group performs. A group that deliberates a complex issue without a method and without a facilitator still goes through a process. The purpose of the method is to support the process so that it is more effective.

It is clear that the success of a deliberative method is not only dependent on how the actual process is structured and facilitated, but also, to a considerable extent, on the contextual conditions, such as how the process is prepared, to what extent high-ranking decision makers understand and support the process, and the level of maturity of the organizational setting (see van der Zouwen, 2011). These types of conditions will, however, not be subject to further analysis in this study, even though they may be crucially important in many situations.

The primary aim of this article is to make and organize an inventory of the *functions* that may need scaffolding in deliberative processes, as well as of the potential risks of not scaffolding these functions. If the different functions that *may* be relevant to deliberative processes are identified, we may then look into *how* they are scaffolded by turning our attention to the structure of methods and to the techniques used in the form of particular activities or actions by the facilitator.

### Analytical frameworks on deliberative methods

The quantity of academic analyses of deliberative methods is still relatively limited. However, some efforts have been made to develop conceptual frameworks for analyzing and comparing methods<sup>1</sup>. Van der Zouwen (2011) developed

<sup>1</sup> A network of practitioners, The Group Pattern Language Project (see <http://groupworksdeck.org>), collaborated on identifying "patterns" that play a role in group processes. The project ended up with a framework comprising 91 patterns. The present author

an evaluation instrument for assessing success factors and effects of large scale interventions. Her instrument comprises 42 items organized into seven sections: *Context/Task*, *Client*, *Consultant*, *Intervention*, *Effectiveness–Short term effects*, *Effectiveness–Sustainable effects* and *Risks*. Shmulyian et al. (2010) analyzed eight large-scale methods and identified five types of 'success factors', labeled *Issues*, *Individuals*, *Intentional process*, *Information* and *Infrastructure*. Both studies were primarily aimed at identifying conditions that contribute to successful outcomes of deliberative processes rather than discerning the actual mechanisms involved. Eoyang and Quade (2006) offered a typology of three categories of different *means* used to enable a productive group process: *the container* (psychological, physical, social); *significant differences* (diversity of participants); and *transforming exchanges* (connections). The framework was used to compare four methods: Open Space (Owen, 2008), Future Search (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010), Appreciative Inquiry (Ludema et al., 2003) and Whole-Scale Change (Dannemiller Tyson Associates, 2000) in terms of how each of the methods cater to the three factors in the framework. The authors argued that all deliberative processes depend on the nature of these three factors, but the techniques used by facilitators can vary considerably. Mingers & Brocklesby (1997; Mingers, 2001) developed a framework to allow a more discriminating understanding of the differences between methods, their purposes and their relative strengths, with the aim of assisting practitioners in skillfully combining techniques and methods in a more context-sensitive way. The authors argue that interventions to various degrees target the *material* world, the *social* world and the *personal* world. Their framework also incorporates a phase model of interventions comprising four different tasks that need to be accomplished:

*Appreciation* of the problem situation as experienced by the agents involved;  
*Analysis* of the underlying structure/constraints generating the situation as experienced;

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made a content analysis of the patterns in order to compare the Group Works patterns with the typology presented in this article. Many of the patterns describe general *attitudes* that are thought to be helpful on the part of facilitators and/or of group members. Other patterns describe *actions* by facilitators (and sometimes by group members) that might be helpful when need arises during the process. A third category are patterns that describe elements of *active scaffolding*, and a fourth category comprises patterns relating to *passive scaffolding*. These four categories are not mutually exclusive, as many patterns can come into expression, for example, both in the form of active scaffolding (as design elements in the method used) and in the form of facilitator actions prompted by what happens during the actual group process. The group pattern framework was used as an additional source for identifying relevant functions.

*Assessment* of the ways in which the situation could be other than it is; of the extent to which the constraints could be altered; and

*Action* to bring about desirable changes (Mingers & Brocklesby, 1997, p.494).

Pulling together the three domains and the four phases, Mingers and Brocklesby constructed a grid that can be used for assessing the properties of different methods in terms of what they aim for, and in what phase of a process their respective strengths are.

Whilst useful studies, none of these four analytical frameworks aim at identifying the functions performed by the various elements of methods and facilitator actions, even though they all offer useful perspectives on goals, conditions and means. The intended contribution of the present study is to offer a clearer differentiation between the *functions* on the one hand, and the *means* of scaffolding the functions on the other.

## METHOD

### Background

The present study grew out of a three-year research project on societal entrepreneurship (see Jordan, Andersson & Ringnér, 2013). A central part of the project comprised action research on groups working on complex issues using The Integral Process (TIP) for complex issues (Ross, 2006). TIP was designed to scaffold increased complexity awareness as a means of developing comprehensive strategies to deal with complex problems. During the course of the research, reflection was conducted continually on what actually happens in the process and how the method and the facilitator support the group in achieving their goals. One of the researchers in the project, Päivi Turunen, conducted a comparative survey of nine deliberative methods through a literature review, a questionnaire to facilitators, and a focus group interview (Turunen, 2013). Building on this, the present author started to develop a preliminary typology of the functions performed by methods for complex issues, drawing on two decades of immersion in the scholarly fields of conflict management on the one hand, and constructive-developmental theory on the other. Despite not being highly systematic, the initiative yielded a new typology of 16 functions. The typology seemed promising and led to the idea of developing the typology further through a more stringent study. The present study is based on two parts: a literature review and a series of interviews with eight experienced facilitators. The idea was to conduct a more systematic study of what methods and facilitators actually do in practice, in order to test whether the functions identified in the preliminary typology were relevant, as well as to look for further functions not described in the preliminary version.

### Literature study

The literature review was conducted in order to identify a number of differently-conceived deliberative methods (and facilitation strategies) and to analyze which functions these methods are designed to scaffold. Five bodies of relevant literature were identified, partially overlapping but still with distinct cores.

The *first* group is the most heterogeneous, comprising texts on 'change methods.' Much of the literature in this group has been written by practitioners who have developed methods based on their own accumulated know-how. There are books about specific methods, such as Open Space (Owen, 2008), Future Search (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010), Future Workshops (Jungk & Müllert, 1981), WorkOut (Ulrich, Kerr & Ashkenas, 2002) and Appreciative Inquiry Summits (Ludema et al., 2003). Some books and articles offer descriptive overviews and, in some cases, comparative analyses of different methods (Holman et al., 2007; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Eoyang & Qyuade, 2006; Shmuliyan et al., 2010). The volume of empirical research on this kind of methods is, however, small and often exploratory (van der Zouwen, 2011; Shmuliyan et al. 2010; Manning & Binzagr, 1996; Worley et al., 2011). It is fair to argue that quite a few of the practitioners in this group present value systems inspired by humanistic psychology, emphasizing not only goals related to enhancing the performance of operations, but also to broader values, such as personal growth and satisfaction, finding meaning, empowerment of individuals, and increased respect and trust.

The *second* group comprises texts on 'problem structuring methods' developed by researchers and practitioners with a background in operational research and systems engineering, most of which are based in the UK (for an overview, see Rosenhead & Mingers, 2001). The most well-known methods in this group are the Soft System Methodology (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) and the Strategic Choice Approach (Friend & Hickling, 2004). In this category, academic researchers-practitioners have played a leading role, and consequently there is a considerable body of articles and books in the field (see the *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, *Omega*, and the *International Journal of Management Science*).

The *third* group is the literature on 'deliberative democracy' (for an overview, see Gastil & Levine, 2005). Authors writing about deliberative democracy fall into two main categories: practitioners (e.g., Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002, 2005), often with a personal commitment to community development, participatory democracy and social development; and researchers (e.g., Bobbio, 2010; Ross, 2007), mainly with a background in political science. There is a dedicated academic journal in this field, the *Journal of Public Deliberation*.

The *fourth* group of relevant literature is a subfield of conflict management, in the USA generally called 'management of public disputes.' Most texts in this field are manuals on methods, written by experienced mediators (e.g., Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001; Susskind & Cruickshank, 1987, 2006; Mindell, 1995, 2002; Saul & Sears, 2010). There are also some books by academic scholars (see e.g., Dukes, 1996; Forester, 2009; Schwerin, 1995), but these are mostly discussing the potential of using alternative methods for managing public disputes, rather than offering theoretical or empirical analyses of the methods employed.

The *fifth* group comprises textbooks on group facilitation, written by facilitators for facilitators (Bens, 2005; Ghais, 2005; Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006; Hogan, 2003; Hunter, 2009; Kaner et al., 2007; Schuman 2005; Schwarz, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004). In comparison with the other four groups, these texts are less concerned with named methods with specific steps or principles, and more on group facilitation skills and approaches relevant to shifting conditions.

Since the purpose of the present study is to identify what functions various types of scaffolding of deliberative processes have, the literature review focused on texts that in some detail described methods and facilitation strategies. The following methods/approaches were chosen for closer study: Open Space (Owen, 2008), Future Search (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010), Future Workshops (Zukunftswerkstätte, Jungk & Müllert, 1981), Appreciative Inquiry Summits (Ludema et al., 2003), World Café (Brown et al., 2005), WorkOut (Ulrich et al., 2002), Soft System Methodology (Checkland & Poulter, 2006), The Strategic Choice Approach (Friend & Hickling, 2004), The Integral Process for Complex Issues (Ross, 2006, 2007), The 21st Century Town Meeting (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002, 2005), management of public disputes (Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001), the Consensus-Building Approach (Susskind & Cruickshank, 1987, 2006), Deep Democracy (Lewis & Woodhull, 2008; Mindell, 1995, 2002) and Transformative Mediation/The Relational approach (Saul & Sears, 2010). In addition, I have a more superficial insight into dozens of other methods, primarily through the overviews in Holman, Devane & Cady (2007), Bunker & Alban (2006) and Rosenhead & Mingers (2001). The method descriptions were in each case read in order to find explicit references to functions that the authors believed as important to scaffold. However, often the functions were not clearly articulated, but could be inferred from descriptions of specific techniques and steps used in the respective processes.

## Interviews

For the interview series, eight experienced facilitators representing different types of deliberative methods were

chosen. Different pathways were used to locate active practitioners working with the most well-known deliberative methods, and the authors conducted interviews with five facilitators working with Open Space, Future Search, Future Workshops (Zukunftswerkstätte), the Strategic Choice Approach and TIP. A further three interviewees were with experienced facilitators working with deliberative processes drawing on several approaches and techniques. In addition to the five methods mentioned above, one facilitator referred to the technique Opera (Mantere & Slåen, 2001) as an important method they used, one incorporated elements of WorkOut, and one was trained in a proprietary framework of their consulting company in the organizational development field. Seven of the interviewees were Swedish and one was from the USA. The latter was the designer of TIP, *Sara Ross*. It was deemed important to include TIP in the study because of the method's thorough grounding in a particular scaffolding theory, and while there were TIP practitioners in Sweden, they were less experienced than Sara Ross.

The purpose of the interviews was to look for previously unidentified functions that different elements of methods might have, and to collect examples of techniques used to serve the functions. The interview format was therefore designed to minimize the interviewer's direction of the respondent's exposition. The interviewer asked the respondents to choose one reasonably representative group process they had facilitated, and describe very concretely and in chronological order each step in the process, including the preparatory and follow-up phases. The interviewer continually asked for more specific details and the reasons for designing the process steps in the particular manner described. Sometimes the interviewer also asked about what might have happened if the particular process step had been omitted. After having concluded the scrutiny of the case process chosen, the respondent was asked to comment on the preliminary version of the typology of different functions comprising 16 items, and in particular, to think of techniques used in their preferred approach for performing the functions. The duration of the interviews was between 1½ to 2 hours.

Cultural differences might be an important source of differences in group dynamics, and therefore also differences in what needs to be scaffolded. Most of the literature reviewed for this study was written by North American and European authors, and all but one of the interviewees was Swedish. There were no discernible salient differences between the approaches used by the Swedish facilitators and the practices described in the literature on deliberative methods. However, it is to be expected that a comparative study of facilitation strategies in different cultural contexts would yield additional insights into the functions of methods and facilitation.

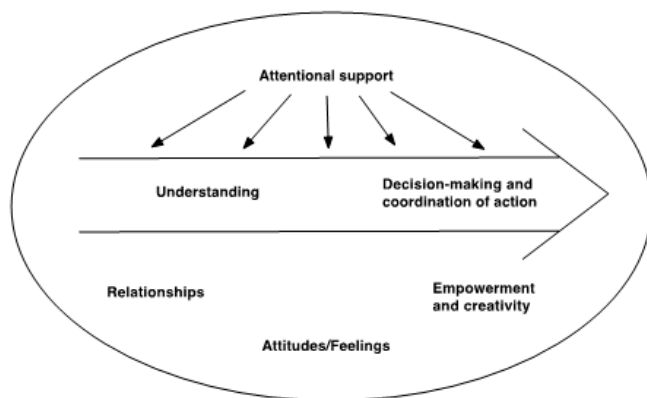


**Analysis**

The approach used in this study is inductive rather than hypothetical-deductive, and hermeneutical rather than quantitative. Thus the results are inevitably dependent on the properties of the researcher's own pre-understanding, not least, in the form of concepts and frames of reference picked up from different theoretical traditions. In an iterative process, the typology was developed by going back and forth between conceptual frameworks and the descriptions of elements of methods provided in the literature and by the interviewees. The final version of the typology was presented in three workshops with 60 group facilitators in total. The participants found the 24 functions highly meaningful for reflecting on their own facilitation practice<sup>2</sup>.

**FUNCTIONS OF GROUP WORK ON COMPLEX ISSUES**

The study resulted in the identification of 24 different functions that elements of methods and/or the overall structure of the method and/or real-time facilitation are assumed to have for enabling a group to become effective in working with complex issues. I have organized these 24 functions into six broader categories.



**Figure 1. Overview of the Six Categories of Functions**

Figure 1 gives an overview of the six categories. Two of them, *Understanding* and *Decision-making and coordination of action* refer to the actual work the group does in inquiring into the issue complex and developing action strategies. One, *Attentional support*, refers to the structuring of the work process, either by the structure of the method used, or by interventions of the facilitator. The remaining three categories, *Relationships*,

<sup>2</sup> This is only a validation of the meaningfulness of the typology to the practitioners who would be unlikely to identify missing elements in the typology.

*Attitudes/Feelings* and *Empowerment and creativity*, refer to different aspects of the creation of favorable conditions for an effective group process<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1. 24 Functions Performed by Deliberative Methods and Facilitator Actions**

Function	Risk if not scaffolded
<b>I. ATTENTIONAL SUPPORT</b>	
<b>1. Issue focus</b> Focus the attention of the participants (whole group or subgroups) on the same issue/topic or supporting the group in clarifying priorities and selecting issue(s), in order to have a common focus for the participants' work.	People talk simultaneously about very different issues and therefore get nowhere.
<b>2. Structure work process</b> Structure the attention of the participants on one task at a time, e.g., making inventory of relevant issues, formulate goals, issue analysis, development of action plan, coordination of implementation, assessment.	People mix thoughts, ideas and suggestions referring to different tasks, and do not penetrate and reflect deeply on each task.
<b>3. Learning</b> Reflect on insights and learning during the process in order to support long-term skill development.	People do not notice their own learning, and therefore do not transfer their learning to new situations.
<b>4. Decongealing</b> Making unreflected assumptions and interpretations visible and opening up (even disrupt) the participants' mental frames in order to open space for new approaches and ideas.	Discourse remains confined to pre-existing conceptions. Restricted range of new ideas.

<sup>3</sup> There are legitimate objections to this particular way of grouping them, since the categories and functions overlap to some extent. Other ways of organizing the functions into categories may also be perfectly relevant.

<b>II. RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
<b>5. Safe space</b> Create safe space: a sense of being welcome and establishment of basic trust that lowers the threshold to engage in conversation and collaboration.	Participants feel insecure, are reserved, and hold back.
<b>6. Rapport</b> Create favourable conditions for establishing rapport (short-term) and personal relationships (long-term) between people who did not know each other personally before.	Conversations remain on a superficial level due to lack of rapport and trust; failure to establish lasting personal relationships that might ease communication in future interactions.
<b>7. Open up communication</b> Supporting participants to be open about their experiences, evaluations, opinions and ideas; make more things speakable; transform norms for what one talks about in public.	People do not express their personal experiences; there are topics that are unspeakable even though they might be crucial to include in deliberations.
<b>8. Dialogue in diversity</b> Release energy locked in conflictual relationships in order to enable a sense of community to emerge, and to enable creative and productive use of differences in perspectives and interests. Pre-empt debating and positional bargaining.	Conversations are permeated by debating, lack of openness; thinking remains restricted to pre-existing perspectives.
<b>III: ATTITUDES/FEELINGS</b>	
<b>9. Management of energy levels</b> Support appropriate energy levels; counteract boredom.	People get bored and become distracted and/or passive.
<b>10. Commitment</b> Mobilize commitment and hope that common efforts might lead to meaningful outcomes.	Sense of powerlessness; expectation that someone else will take action.
<b>11. Focus on possibilities</b> Shift focus from obstacles, frustration, and blaming towards possibilities.	Fixation in position of frustration and blaming; lack of creative and realistic ideas about action.
<b>12. Expansion of scope of care</b> Support expansion of identification to a larger whole.	People remain identified with partial interests and have a narrow focus of attention.

<b>13. Accountability</b> Strengthen the participants' feeling of accountability for actions and outcomes.	No action ensues because no one feels accountable.
<b>IV. UNDERSTANDING</b>	
<b>14. Self-clarification</b> Develop clarity about participants' own needs, values, and preferences.	Weak commitment to process and outcome because proposals and decisions are not anchored in true needs.
<b>15. Complexity awareness</b> Support participants in developing a keener awareness, articulation, and understanding of distinctions, conditions, causal relationships, and systemic interdependencies relevant to the issues.	Low quality of proposals and decisions because significant aspects of the issue complex have not been considered.
<b>16. Whole system awareness/Context awareness</b> Support awareness of the whole system and its environment, as well as long-term change processes in the context.	Need to adapt to changing conditions is ignored; focus remains narrow and strategies only address parts of the system; time horizon is short.
<b>17. Stakeholder awareness</b> Support increased awareness of relevant stakeholders and their respective interests and views.	Significant stakeholders are not considered in strategy development.
<b>18. Perspective awareness</b> Increase awareness of the properties of diverse perspectives, enabling the participants to make creative use of the tensions between different perspectives on causality, values, and desirable measures.	Participants remain embedded in monological perspectives; measures do not draw on the richness of different perspectives; conversations tend to develop into debates between fixed positions.
<b>19. Common ground</b> Develop a shared narrative of the situation and a common strategy.	Not necessarily a problem, but can be if tight collaboration is necessary; communication breaks down because of disparate narratives of the situation; action is impeded by unresolved conflicts about appropriate strategy.

V. EMPOWERMENT AND CREATIVITY	
<p><b>20. Mobilize individuals' resources</b> Create favourable conditions for the mobilization and activation of participants' knowledge, skills, creativity and other resources.</p>	Suboptimal outcomes because available resources are not mobilized in the process; failure to surface creative ideas; unintended negative consequences of measures taken because significant factors were not considered.
<p><b>21. Creativity</b> Support the generation of creative ideas and visions.</p>	Suboptimal outcomes because creative ideas fail to surface.
<p><b>22. Pre-empt domination</b> Neutralize asymmetrical power relations that obstruct effective collaboration.</p>	Persons with high rank or expansive personalities dominate conversations while others remain silent.
VI. DECISION-MAKING AND COORDINATION OF ACTION	
<p><b>23. Decision-making</b> Develop, select, and make decisions on actions that integrate relevant values, interests, concerns, and ideas.</p>	People talk a lot and generate ideas, but firm decisions are not made.
<p><b>24. Support implementation</b> Coordinate implementation of a strategy through planning, management, and evaluation.</p>	Agreed measures are not implemented because accountability is unclear, or implementation is poorly organized.

Table 1 above gives an overview of the 24 functions within the six categories by describing each function briefly and the potential risks, i.e., suggesting what might happen if the function is not scaffolded. The table in Appendix A offers examples of specific methods, techniques and facilitation interventions that may serve each function. In the following sections, I will describe each of the 24 functions.

*1. Attentional support*

The first category is called *Attentional support*. The term ‘attentional support’ (Basseches & Mascolo, 2010) refers here to how a facilitator supports a group by directing their attention towards certain objects or tasks. Without this support, the attention of the group members might be scattered or unfocused, making an effective group dialogue difficult to conduct. Attentional support might also be needed in order to draw group members’ attention to potential conditions, causes, consequences, and tasks that they would otherwise simply fail to notice and reflect upon, which means that this category overlaps with the category

*Understanding* (see below). The category *Attentional support* comprises four functions.

*Issue focus* (1) refers to the function of focusing the participants’ attention on a shared issue or task, thus preventing progress that is impeded by a fragmentation of attention on a broad diversity of issues. Issue focus can be achieved in a number of different ways. One path is to clearly formulate a set issue or task before the group convenes, taking care to communicate before and during the process what task the group is called to work on. Another path is to scaffold an issue discovery process with the group, making an inventory of all possible issues participants can think of, and then gradually inquire into and select a strategically important issue to work with (as in TIP). A third path is to allow participants to self-organize by forming different groups around the different issues group members feel are important to engage with (as in Open Space).

*Structure work process* (2) refers to the temporal or functional division of the group’s work into clearly distinguished types of tasks. The group is thereby supported in focusing on one task at a time - rather than mixing tasks - such as making an inventory of issues, inquiring into causes and consequences, generating solutions, evaluating proposals, and making decisions. Most methods have a certain structure in the form of a sequence of work sessions where each session is centered on a specific task. An alternative to doing this, used in the Strategic Choice Approach (SCA), is to have a terminology for different types of tasks (in SCA: the shaping, designing, comparing and choosing modes), and be clear about how the group moves between these different tasks as the conversation's focus spontaneously shifts.

*Learning* (3) refers to the function of directing attention towards the learning going on during the group’s process. If this function is not scaffolded, participants may fail to notice the insights they gain, the way they go about when grappling with the group’s task, and other types of learning. If participants reflect on their own learning, the chances are better that the experience will have lasting effects on their cognitive and interactional strategies in future work on similar tasks.

*Decongealing* (4) points to the potential need for loosening up the perspectives, accustomed points of view, and value sets that participants may be embedded in. Their meaning-making may be ‘congealed,’ and they may lack awareness of the extent to which they view the issues in ways conditioned by the properties of their perspectives. Scaffolding decongealing can take many different forms. Milder techniques include using non-verbal means of representation, such as associating about how postcards depicting different situations might have a meaning in

relation to the chosen issue, or drawing images of a desired future. Techniques can also be more directly challenging and disruptive, for example by confronting participants with the task of assuming the role of a stakeholder with a very different perspective than one's own.

## II. Relationships

The second category comprises the functions related to *Relationships*, e.g., how the facilitator can support a climate of open communication among the participants. Open communication is a condition for learning about the situation, and for creativity in developing solutions. The category refers to the nature of interactions among participants during the actual event, but also to the process of establishing personal relationships that may in the future lower the thresholds to open communication among stakeholders.

*Safe space* (5) refers to the task of designing the physical environment of the event, as well as the way participants are greeted and introduced to the process and its format. This is in order to invite a sense of being welcome and developing trust and a relaxed atmosphere among the participants. Clarity about what is expected of participants, agreement about norms and roles, and information about what is going to happen are important ingredients in building safe space.

*Rapport* (6) is the subtle process of people personally connecting with each other and starting to establish relationships. Before rapport has emerged, participants are likely to be a bit reserved, keep conversation to 'safe' topics, and avoid exposing their personal convictions, values and ideas. By breaking the ice, and creating the experience that other participants are friendly (or at least civil), it makes it easier to interact in a freer and more personal manner.

*Open up communication* (7) builds on the preceding function. *Rapport* and refers to the establishment of interpersonal contact, while this function refers to the potential need to go beyond 'safe' topics and arguments, and also talk about issues that might be more sensitive, in the sense of evoking emotional reactions. Voicing views that might provoke controversy, talking about failures, and exposing deeply personal values and opinions may feel like taking a risk that might result in negative consequences for the climate and for relationships. Groups quickly, often tacitly, establish norms about what one talks about and what is not talked about. Sometimes conscious intervention by a facilitator is needed in order to change established norms about what issues are speakable. Eoyang and Quade (2006) furthermore point out that the modes of communication that become possible through the scaffolding may also have durable effects: "The special conditions that are set during the event help groups discover new patterns of interaction"

(p. 358). An intervention to open up communication may therefore not only be useful for the group process, but may also be a desirable lasting outcome.

*Dialogue in diversity* (8) refers to situations where there is latent or open conflict among participants, possibly in the form of opposing 'camps'. If there are marked differences of opinion and of values among the participants, in particular if there is a long history of tension between perspectives, there is a risk that communication will slide into debating and positional bargaining. Such forms of communication are usually far less creative and productive than dialogues and discussions. Scaffolding dialogue in diversity means supporting the group to explore the underlying interests, needs, and narratives of different stakeholders. This is to enable the participants to productively use the contrast effect between perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at stake, as well as to develop more well-founded proposals for action. (See also the closely-related function 18, *Perspective awareness*.)

## III. Attitudes/Feelings

The third category focuses how both individual participants and the group as a whole feel during the group process. Attitudes/feelings include various aspects of the subjective experience, e.g., the extent to which individuals feel comfortable in the group, the attitudes towards the task and the process, and not least the collective dynamics of energy levels.

*Management of energy levels* (9) is a rather concrete function of the method as such and of the facilitator's interventions during the work process. People may simply get bored and lose concentration if they have to sit passively and listen for extended periods of time, and if there is no variation in the type of activity going on. Some methods are specifically designed in order to get people physically moving and others designed to maintain high energy levels. Many facilitators point out how they mobilize their own energies in order to energize the group and the process, e.g., by the way they modulate their voices, by the use of humor and lightness, by expressing enthusiasm, or by moving about a lot.

*Commitment to engage* (10) refers here to strengthening the sense of hope that positive change is possible, and that active participation may lead to something desirable. Participants may come to the gathering with accumulated experiences of being ignored, discounted, scapegoated, and have the belief that they cannot influence significant issues or outcomes. The function points to the potential need of scaffolding the development of hope and commitment to work with other participants to develop ideas and strategies. (See also function 13, *Accountability*.)

*Focus on possibilities* (11) refers to the common tendency of people who are frustrated about certain problems to remain in a state of complaining and blaming others for their failure to take appropriate action. Groups may need assistance in shifting from a complaining mode to a mode of focusing on how the participants themselves can identify and use possibilities for constructive action. This function is a core preoccupation of *Appreciative Inquiry* (Ludema et al., 2003).

*Expansion of the scope of care* (12) is related to function 16, *Whole system awareness*, described below. If the participants' commitments are more or less exclusively absorbed by personal issues, they may fail to attend to the plight of other stakeholders and of the larger system that they are an interdependent part of. 'Scope of care' goes beyond an intellectual understanding of the big picture into feeling responsible for the fate of the larger system in which one's own roles and responsibilities are only a small part.

*Accountability* (13) here refers specifically to the personal sense of responsibility for seeing that the agreements made about actions to be taken are actually implemented. It is one thing to generate ideas about what should be done, but if no one feels accountable for taking needed action, the risk that nothing happens is large. The feeling of accountability is often related to the experience of having inquired into the issues, their causes, consequences, and appropriate measures. Experience shows that a sense of personal accountability is strengthened by understanding causal connections, but also by understanding why other stakeholders may not feel responsible for taking action. Accountability is therefore intimately linked to and supported by other functions in this typology, such as function 15, *Complexity awareness* and function 17, *Stakeholder awareness*.

#### IV. Understanding

The fourth category is at the core of the actual work process that groups go through when using various methods. It focuses the cognitive aspects of inquiring into the relevant aspects of the chosen topic, and developing an understanding of conditions, causality, potential consequences, interests of different stakeholders and different possible ways of interpreting the issues involved. The first category, *Attentional support*, describes the functions related to the focus and pacing of the discovery process, whereas the category *Understanding* comprises the functions related to various fields of inquiry<sup>4</sup>.

*Self-clarification* (14) points to the potential need to assist participants in exploring and articulating their own needs,

<sup>4</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of complexity awareness, context awareness, stakeholder awareness, and perspective awareness, see Jordan (2011).

interests, values, and preferences. Doing this may be important in different ways. One aspect is that if participants are not clearly aware of what the issue means to themselves on a personal level, they may not feel particularly motivated to invest energies in the group's work. Self-clarification therefore supports the aforementioned functions of commitment and accountability. Another aspect is, of course, that learning about the interests and needs of the participants (who may be representing different stakeholder groups) and how they can contribute to a keener understanding of the issue complex.

*Complexity awareness* (15) is a major function in most group processes. In order to select strategically-central aspects of the issue complex and develop effective action plans, the participants usually need a thorough understanding of conditions and causality. Complexity awareness may imply noticing the variability and compoundedness of the issues at stake, rather than having an undifferentiated image. Methods may assist participants in discriminating causes and conditions in order to identify significant sources of variation. Complexity awareness also refers to developing an awareness of, and knowledge about, relevant causal connections, both in terms of direct cause-and-effect relationships and of more complex interdependent and systemic causation. Increased complexity awareness may allow participants to discover previously ignored potentials for effective measures.

*Whole system awareness* (16) is a function that is stressed by many practitioners, in particular those of so-called large group methods (such as Future Search and Open Space). The assumption is that participants may have only a very partial understanding of the system they are a part of, and may therefore fail to see how other parts fit together. Inviting representatives of the whole system into the room is a common prescription in order to support whole system awareness. Some methods also use more specific techniques for strengthening the awareness and understanding of the whole system. A closely related concept is *Context awareness*, which not only points to the whole system, but also to the environment of the system, however that is defined. As soon as a boundary is drawn in order to define what system is relevant to the process, there is also an external environment where significant conditions can change processes, and other influences may be present.

*Stakeholder awareness* (17) is a function with several layers. The first layer is simply to make an inventory of which stakeholders exist. Stakeholders may be of interest in very different ways. Some stakeholders may control relevant resources, such as knowledge, decision-making power, work time, or money. Other stakeholders may behave in ways that contribute to the problems the participants are concerned about. Still other stakeholders

may react in various significant ways when the group takes initiatives, for example, by trying to obstruct certain measures from being implemented. A second layer of stakeholder awareness, beyond simply identifying stakeholders, is related to developing an understanding of the interests and needs of different stakeholders. A third layer, overlapping somewhat with the function perspective awareness described below, is to develop awareness about the meaning-making patterns of different stakeholders, so that their reactions, standpoints and behaviors can be anticipated. This may allow participants to develop more effective strategies for how to relate to different stakeholder groups.

*Perspective awareness* (18) is perhaps the most sophisticated function in this typology. It refers to the development of a stronger awareness of the properties of different kinds of perspectives that may be used to make sense of the issues at stake. Perspective awareness not only refers to awareness of how different actual stakeholders reason, but to awareness of all kinds of perspectives that may be relevant for understanding causes, anticipating consequences, and developing proposals for actions. Most adults have a weak or moderate perspective awareness, which means that they tend to operate in a monological way: they perceive, interpret and evaluate issues embedded in only one perspective, and regard other perspectives as wrong, misguided or irrelevant<sup>5</sup>. Perspective awareness can be seen as a particular form of complexity awareness, also implying that people become aware of the validity of several perspectives within themselves. There is a considerable potential involved in scaffolding perspective awareness, since an approach that draws on the insights of several perspectives simultaneously may allow a group to discover more potential courses of action and to identify potential unintended negative consequences of proposed measures.

Establishing *Common ground* (19) is a central concern in some methods. In many cases, it is helpful that participants develop a reasonably consistent shared image of the properties of the issue complex, and in particular a consensus on the need for action and on some range of actions to address the issue(s) of concern. But several methods do not aim at focusing on common ground. Rather, they assume that a process that leads to a better understanding of conditions, causes, and possible consequences will assist participants to make more sensible decisions about how they will act, and it is not necessary that all agree or align on the same agenda.

<sup>5</sup> See the empirical studies reported in Kuhn (1991) and King and Kitchener (1994).

## V. Empowerment and creativity

The fifth category, *Empowerment and creativity*, focuses the functions related to making the participants' resources, like knowledge, skills and creativity, available to the group process. The category overlaps with the second category, *Relationships*, which addresses the issue of opening up communication among participants. However, the focus here is more specifically on how to ensure that optimal use can be made of the individuals' and the group's resources.

*Mobilize individuals' resources* (20) refers to creating a climate and a process where individuals feel invited and have space to contribute their knowledge, skills and creativity. This might imply removing obstacles to free contribution, as well as using techniques that actively encourage participants to share anything that might be helpful. (The function is closely related to the functions in the category *Relationships* and function 22, *Pre-empt domination*.)

*Creativity* (21) points to the potential need for using techniques that stimulate the generation of creative ideas, such as brainstorming sessions. Using non-verbal modes may be one way of freeing imagination from customary lines of reasoning. Supporting creativity is closely linked to function 4, *Decongealing*, i.e., opening up or disrupting prevailing mental frames in order to approach issues from new directions.

*Pre-empt domination* (22) can be a relevant concern, particularly in groups where participants have different status or where some participants have a tendency to dominate by talking very much or using communication behaviors like dismissing, debating, monologizing and making ironic remarks. Preempting domination is a concern for the moment-to-moment facilitation, but the function can also be served by using formats that do not leave room for anyone to dominate, like working in small groups or using a talking stick.

## VI. Decision-making and coordination of action

The sixth and final category, *Decision-making and coordination of action*, focuses the last part of the group's work, ensuring that the process leads to firm decisions about what ought to be done, and organizing whatever implementation actions that are necessary in order to achieve desired outcomes.

*Decision-making* (23) refers to supporting the group to forge concrete proposals, develop agreements by making choices, and actually decide on whatever matters need decisions. There are several challenges here: being specific, making hard choices, dealing with disagreements, avoiding cheap closure, and actually *making* decisions rather than just talking and procrastinating. Different group objectives

require different processes for reaching agreement and making commitments. Sometimes the group does not have a mandate to make actual decisions, but still may need to agree on proposals and recommendations to forward to decision-makers outside the group. Scaffolding decision-making does not necessarily require reaching consensus. Different stakeholders may make independent decisions for themselves about what actions to take, on the basis developed during the group process.

*Support implementation* (24) entails ensuring that the group plans the implementation of whatever decisions have been made and coordinates actions among concerned actors. This is often a crucial challenge, involving specifying who is responsible for what, deciding when different actions should be taken and how to follow up, evaluating, and taking corrective action if the need arises. Many facilitators stress that even if the group recommends actions that non-participants need to make, it is important to delegate responsibility among the group participants about who is going to champion the recommended actions in relation to other actors.

## PASSIVE AND ACTIVE SCAFFOLDING

In the preceding section, each of the 24 functions was described briefly. The literature study and the interviews with facilitators generated many examples of *how* the functions can be scaffolded. I believe it makes sense to talk about three types of scaffolding: *passive scaffolding through structure*, *active scaffolding through structure*, and *active scaffolding through facilitation*.

### Passive scaffolding through structure

It is clear that in several methods, it is assumed that the general format used will serve several of the functions in the typology above, without further specific activities or prompting by facilitators. Five types of passive scaffolding turned up in this study (but further inquiry is called for to identify more types):

1. *Selection of participants*. By being careful to invite participants that represent all major stakeholders and/or parts of the relevant system, it is assumed that several of the functions will be scaffolded, just by making different perspectives visible and having people with different roles talking to each other. The functions related to increased awareness are particularly relevant: 15, *Complexity awareness*, 16, *Whole system awareness*, 17, *Stakeholder awareness*, and 18, *Perspective awareness*. Functions 4, *Decongealing* and 12, *Expansion of the scope of care* may also be served simply by hearing people with other perspectives than one's own talk.

2. *Choice and design of premises*. By selecting a venue in beautiful surroundings and with a cozy atmosphere, and by arranging for a relaxed, welcoming ambience through provision of refreshments and appropriate decorations, participants may feel welcome and positive. It will also take them out of their normal surroundings and create new possibilities for change. This may serve function 5, *Safe space*, and possibly also functions 9, *Management of energy levels* and 10, *Commitment to engage*.

3. *Overnight event*. Inviting participants to a venue quite far away from their ordinary workplaces and asking them to stay overnight is a common way to create favorable conditions for people to get to know each other more informally, thereby serving functions 6, *Rapport* and 7, *Open up communication*.

4. *Seating arrangements*. Most methods recommend (or prescribe) that participants should sit in a circle (or several concentric circles if they are many) when convening in plenum, and in small groups around a table when working on tasks demanding much interaction. Such seating arrangements are assumed to serve several functions, such as 5, *Safe space*, 6, *Rapport*, 7, *Open up communication*, 10, *Commitment to engage*, 20, *Mobilize individual's resources* and the awareness functions in the category *Understanding*. Seating arrangements also serve function 22, *Pre-empt domination* by making it more difficult for individuals to dominate the interactions and decision making.

5. *Rules and guidelines*. It may be debatable if the introduction of rules and guidelines should be seen as passive or active scaffolding. In particular, the method Open Space is well-known for the central importance of a few basic rules, e.g., 'the law of two feet', which says that each participant is perfectly free to leave a group if he or she wants to and go to another group. This rule supports functions 9, *Management of energy levels* and 10, *Commitment to engage*, since it gives the individual full freedom to do what they feel inclined to do.

### Active scaffolding through structure and facilitation

What is meant by active scaffolding through structure is that the structures of the methods are designed to support certain functions, and that techniques are used that are specifically intended to serve one or several functions. The scaffolding of functions is purposefully built into the design of the method. However, as has been pointed out before, much of the scaffolding going on during a group work process occurs through the real-time actions of the facilitator when he or she feels that the group needs facilitation interventions.

Appendix A offers examples of forms of active scaffolding through structure and through facilitation. These examples have been compiled from the literature study and the eight interviews with practitioners. Where techniques are typical of certain named methods, this has been indicated through abbreviations for the methods (see the bottom of the table).

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF DIFFERENT METHODS

Based on the interviews, practitioners seem to have a tendency to feel that their own preferred method is effective in scaffolding practically all the functions in the typology. However, when comparing deliberative methods in terms of how actively and effectively they scaffold different functions, it is apparent that methods (as they are described in written sources) usually emphasize the importance of scaffolding some functions, while other functions are only weakly or only passively scaffolded. For example, TIP meticulously scaffolds complexity awareness through a very structured work process that also includes a careful and progressive development of an issue focus. However, less attention is devoted to supporting the establishment of safe space, rapport, and other aspects of the interpersonal relationships in the group. Open Space is an approach that strongly empowers participants, which stimulates commitment, supports energy levels, and creates safe space. The method seems less well equipped to scaffold dialogue in diversity, complexity awareness, and perspective awareness. The Strategic Choice Approach actively supports problem structuring, which in turn facilitates finding an issue focus and developing complexity awareness. SCA also emphasizes the scaffolding of the decision-making process. Not as much active scaffolding is made regarding the functions related to relationships and attitudes/feelings. Future Workshops include a number of techniques for creating safe space and rapport, for managing energy levels, and for stimulating creativity, but seems to be weaker in supporting decongealing, dialogue in diversity, complexity awareness, and perspective awareness<sup>6</sup>.

However, the individual facilitator may well adapt his or her on-site actions to scaffold functions not explicitly emphasized in the manual for a particular method. The variability in how the methods are implemented by practitioners implies that it is unlikely that practitioners and researchers could reach agreement about how to assess strengths and weaknesses of particular methods. Nevertheless, the typology might support a more

<sup>6</sup> It is likely that some practitioners of the methods mentioned here may dispute the validity of these characterizations. A comprehensive, penetrating, and comparative dialogue may be needed in order to develop a consensus on how to assess weaknesses and strengths.

penetrating reflection on methods and habits of practice, eventually leading to a more skillful adaptation of intervention strategies to the particular conditions of specific cases.

## CONCLUSION

In relation to previously published analytical frameworks for deliberative methods, the contribution of the present study is (a) to differentiate between the functions performed by the methods on the one hand, and the means (techniques and facilitator actions) for scaffolding the functions on the other; and (b) to offer detail regarding risks associated with not scaffolding the functions, as well as examples of techniques used in different methods and by experienced facilitators. The typology of functions can be useful for different purposes, four of which are outlined below.

First, a typology of functions may be useful in designing empirical research on deliberative methods. A differentiated understanding of the functions performed by methods and by facilitators may allow a more detailed analysis of causal relations behind various types of outcomes of interventions. It may also be useful in comparative analyses, for example when assessing strengths and weaknesses in different methods. Secondly, a typology of functions may serve as a platform for designing evaluation instruments for interventions. Thirdly, facilitators may find a typology useful when designing a particular process, because the typology allows for more clarity in identifying what the specific needs are, considering the circumstances<sup>7</sup>. Fourthly, a clearer understanding of the functions served by methods and by facilitation may be valuable for the purpose of skill development among facilitators. The typology may be useful when designing training for and coaching of novice facilitators. It may also serve as a starting-point for practicing facilitators' own reflections and self-assessments. Facilitators have theories of change, i.e., concepts about how desirable change processes occur. The typology of functions presented in this study may assist in reviewing, and possibly expanding, the range of the practitioner's own theories of change.

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<sup>7</sup> A checklist intended for facilitators is available for downloading here: [thomasjordan.se/eng.html](http://thomasjordan.se/eng.html)



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APPENDIX A - EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVE SCAFFOLDING

	Examples of active scaffolding through structure	Examples of active scaffolding through facilitation
<b>I. ATTENTIONAL SUPPORT</b>		
<p><b>1. Issue focus</b> Focus the attention of the participants (whole group or subgroups) on the same issue/topic or support the group in clarifying priorities and selecting issue(s) in order to have a common focus for the participants' work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful process of formulating purpose and issue before group convenes. [FS]</li> <li>• Prominent posting of purpose/task in invitation, in workbook, on walls. [FS]</li> <li>• Participants are free to formulate their own preferred issue and form work groups based on interest. [OS]</li> <li>• One or several process steps are used to analyse the issue complex and carefully select what issue to work with. [TIP]</li> <li>• Procedure for generating themes/issues in small groups, and then stepwise in larger groups select the most important ones. [O]</li> <li>• Issues are posted on wall, participants agree on 'decision area' by drawing a boundary around the issues to be worked with. [SCA]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask questions about formulations and terminology, to make sure people understand each other and talk about the same thing.</li> <li>• Draw mind maps of issues on whiteboard.</li> <li>• Let each participant distribute three dots on the issues they find most important.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Structure work process</b> Structure the attention of the participants on one task at a time, e.g., making an inventory of relevant issues, formulate goals, issue analysis, development of action plan, coordination of implementation, assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method has a distinct sequence of process steps. [TIP, FW, FS, SSM]</li> <li>• Different types of tasks are named and referred to as group process shifts between types. [SCA]</li> <li>• Participants are thoroughly briefed about the structure of the process (e.g., by a written agenda) so that they can contribute to focussing on one task at a time. [FS]</li> <li>• Participants are provided with a workbook with predesigned work sheets for different parts of the process. [FS]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator structures ideas and other statements during and in-between meetings, e.g., by using different flipcharts, drawing figures and writing up summaries. [SCA]</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Learning</b> Reflect on insights and learning during the process in order to support long-term skill development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process step(s) for reviewing learning. [TIP, OS]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator names insights and learning.</li> <li>• Facilitator invites participants to reflect on insights and learning.</li> <li>• Facilitator summarizes each step before proceeding to the next step.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Decongealing</b> Making unreflected assumptions and interpretations visible and opening up (even disrupting) the participants' mental frames in order to open space for new approaches and ideas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw cognitive maps of existing concepts to enable reflection. [SSM]</li> <li>• Use of non-verbal creative activities to open up mental frames to new patterns. [FW]</li> <li>• Use sequence of first reflecting individually, then talking in pairs, then talking in the larger group, in order to make a variety of points of view visible and reflect on diversity. [FS]</li> <li>• Have participants consider how different stakeholder groups view the issue by moving between tables marking different stakeholder groups. [FS]</li> <li>• Describe meaning-making through different perspectives and deliberating the issue through the perspectives. [TIP]</li> <li>• Meticulously map aspects of topic, differences in conditions, causal relations, and systemic properties, thereby disrupting assumption that the issue is simple. [TIP]</li> <li>• Explicitly reflect and reassess on own motivation and intentions regarding the issue. [TIP]</li> <li>• Formulate, clarify, and select a range of criteria and use them for evaluating alternative options. [SCA]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator points out and asks questions about assumptions and mental frames.</li> </ul>

<b>II. RELATIONSHIPS</b>		
<p><b>5. Safe space</b> Create safe space: a sense of being welcome and establishment of basic trust that lowers the threshold to engage in conversation and collaboration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear communication of purpose, format, roles, guidelines for participation. [FS]</li> <li>• Negotiate communication rules. [MPD]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome participants with warmth.</li> <li>• Facilitators center themselves in a mode of confidence and clarity.</li> <li>• Formulate norms and expectations regarding behaviour, communication, and attitudes towards diversity.</li> <li>• Use appropriate jokes and humour to create a light atmosphere.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Rapport</b> Create favourable conditions for establishing rapport (short-term) and personal relationships (long-term) between people who did not know each other personally before.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities that include moving about, being active, having to talk with other participants about different tasks. [FS]</li> <li>• Playful icebreakers and other activities, such as giving groups the task of presenting their ideas in the form of a sketch or non-verbal presentation. [FW]</li> <li>• Participants form groups based on their own preferences, therefore meet people with similar concerns/ideas. [OS]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of icebreaker activities, e.g., asking participants to find someone they don't know and start talking to them.</li> <li>• Ask participants to pairwise interview each other and present the other person to the group.</li> <li>• Have participants give each other a shoulder massage.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Open up communication</b> Supporting participants to be open with their experiences, evaluations, opinions and ideas; make more things speakable; transform norms for what one talks about in public.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants are asked to bring along a physical object that symbolizes some aspect of the issue for them; they tell other participants about the meaning of the object. [FS]</li> <li>• Invite storytelling, e.g., appreciative inquiry into personal experiences of success. [FS]</li> <li>• A round is made where participants are invited to tell the group in what way the issue is personally relevant to themselves. [TIP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator invites participants to disclose their personal experiences, feelings and views.</li> <li>• Facilitator speaks of his/her own personal feelings and commitments in order to set a precedence.</li> <li>• Introduce guidelines for dialogue.</li> <li>• 'Doubling'/'Ghost roles': facilitator takes the role of a participant and expresses what he/she thinks the participant feels or thinks but is unable to say. [TP; DD]</li> <li>• Use of icebreakers, such as having participants form pairs and draw portraits of each other without looking at the paper. [FW]</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Dialogue in diversity</b> Release energy locked in conflictual relationships in order to enable a sense of community to emerge and to enable creative and productive use of differences in perspectives and interests. Pre-empt debating and positional bargaining.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite storytelling, which makes dissimilar participants more intelligible and human.</li> <li>• Take perspectives as object of inquiry and reflection. [TIP]</li> <li>• Explore meaning of different types of criteria for evaluating options. [SCA]</li> <li>• Clear instructions about no debating; focus on understanding and reflection. [FW]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator may talk to individuals or groups about their tendency to use debating mode rather than dialogue.</li> </ul>

III: ATTITUDES/FEELINGS		
<p><b>9. Management of energy levels</b> Support appropriate energy levels; counteract boredom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities that include movement, humour, variability. [FW]</li> <li>• Alternating types of activity in order to stimulate engagement. [FS]</li> <li>• Consistently work in small groups, even when presenting action plans. [GE]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator uses own energy level to energize atmosphere.</li> <li>• Facilitator uses 'energizers' when needed: activities with physical movements.</li> </ul>
<p><b>10. Commitment</b> Mobilize commitment and hope that common efforts might lead to meaningful outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular sessions of reflecting on learning. [TIP]</li> <li>• Sharing round where participants are invited to articulate how the issue impacts them. [TIP]</li> <li>• Only individuals who are known to be engaged and constructive are invited to participate. [FS]</li> <li>• Have high-ranking persons talk about the importance of the topic and the process at the beginning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize that participants are invited because their experiences and competences are expected to contribute to desired outcomes.</li> <li>• Ask participants early on to formulate their own hopes and expectations for the process.</li> </ul>
<p><b>11. Focus on possibilities</b> Shift focus from obstacles, frustration, and blaming towards possibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session on critique and problems before proceeding to visioning and action planning; frustration is expressed, then left behind. (FW, CBA)</li> <li>• Group make a sketch of their vision showing what it looks like when it is functioning well. [FW]</li> <li>• Brainstorming sessions using the rule that critical comments are not allowed.</li> <li>• Session with individual, pairwise and group reflection on what I/we are doing well. [AI]</li> <li>• Careful formulation of the purpose in terms of a positive vision/value for the future. [FS]</li> <li>• Clear formulation that the purpose is to make decisions. [SCA]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator asks participants to formulate concrete and practicable suggestions about actions.</li> <li>• Consistently use appreciative inquiry philosophy in asking for what works well.</li> <li>• Using a language that talks about challenges and improvement areas rather than about problems.</li> <li>• Celebration rituals for successes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>12. Expansion of scope of care</b> Support expansion of identification to a larger whole.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making timelines of significant events on the individual, local and global scales. [FS]</li> <li>• Make graphic models of the whole system. [SSM]</li> </ul>	
<p><b>13. Accountability</b> Strengthen the participants' feeling of accountability for actions and outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Templates for action plans with clearly assigned responsibilities. [OS, FS, SCA]</li> <li>• Invite participants to choose what kinds of actions they are willing to engage with: immediate voluntary actions; actions requiring policy decisions; actions requiring further deliberation among several stakeholders. [TIP]</li> <li>• Explore stakeholders' views and interests, thereby gaining insight into the reasons that others will not take action to resolve the issue; nothing will happen if we don't act. [TIP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear message from facilitator about individual responsibility and role.</li> <li>• Using direct questions about 'what you want to do.'</li> <li>• Insist on deciding who is responsible for proposed actions.</li> </ul>

IV. UNDERSTANDING		
<p><b>14. Self-clarification</b> Develop clarity about participants' own needs, values and preferences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sessions where participants are asked to reflect individually on their experiences, values, and ideas. [FS]</li> <li>• Process for articulating each party's interests. [MPD]</li> <li>• Sharing round about how the issue impacts each participant. [TIP]</li> <li>• Process step focussed on formulating and deliberating evaluation criteria for selecting among action options. [SCA]</li> </ul>	
<p><b>15. Complexity awareness</b> Support participants in developing a keener awareness, articulation and understanding of distinctions, conditions, causal relationships, and systemic interdependencies relevant to the issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Categorize issues/concerns into Attitudes/ Behaviours/System properties. [TIP]</li> <li>• Explore how issues are causally or otherwise interconnected by drawing arrows between map of issues. Identify causes and consequences. [TIP]</li> <li>• Formulate a condensed issue portrait, pointing out issue, causes, consequences, and conditions. [TIP]</li> <li>• Post reports from groups on the walls, and give time for participants to read and reflect. [OS, FS]</li> <li>• Consideration of different types of uncertainty. [SCA]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator conducts fact-finding between meetings and presents reports to participants.</li> <li>• Facilitator assists participants in inquiry into underlying causes of presenting problems.</li> </ul>
<p><b>16. Whole system awareness/ Context awareness</b> Support awareness of the whole system and its environment, as well as long-term change processes in the context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw 'rich pictures' of the whole system. [SSM]</li> <li>• Construct long-term timelines on the wall with significant global and local events. [FS]</li> <li>• Develop a 'portrait' of the issue, including attitudes and behaviours that sustain it. [TIP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe background and context to participants.</li> <li>• Use metaphors for the whole system: e.g., a ship, a journey.</li> </ul>
<p><b>17. Stakeholder awareness</b> Support increased awareness of relevant stakeholders and their respective interests and views.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make an inventory of stakeholders relevant to the issue and explore their interests and concerns.</li> <li>• Review which categories of stakeholders are present in the event, and which are not represented. [FS]</li> <li>• Have participants move between tables, where each table represent one type of stakeholder, and talk about what is important to each type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask questions about different stakeholders' views, interests, needs, expected reactions.</li> <li>• When participants get to mark what they think are important issues, different types of stakeholders have differently coloured dots, so that it becomes apparent which issues are important to particular stakeholder groups.</li> </ul>
<p><b>18. Perspective awareness</b> Increase awareness of the properties of diverse perspectives, enabling the participants to make creative use of the tensions between different perspectives on causality, values and desirable measures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue frame by describing properties of 3-5 different perspectives on the issue and deliberate on the perspectives. [TIP]</li> <li>• Build conceptual maps of how 'systems of purposeful activity' are assumed to work and compare map with reality. [SSM]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate story-telling in order to have participants really listen and consider others' experiences and views.</li> </ul>
<p><b>19. Common ground</b> Develop a shared narrative of the situation and a common strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work out a condensed portrait of the issue/a 'rich picture'/a 'root definition': describe why the issue is significant, its causes and consequences. [TIP, SSM]</li> <li>• Engage participants in making timelines of significant events on individual, local, and global scales. [FS]</li> <li>• Focus on and formulate actions participants can agree on; notice but set aside disagreements. [FS]</li> </ul>	

V. EMPOWERMENT AND CREATIVITY		
<p><b>20. Mobilize individuals' resources</b> Create favourable conditions for the mobilization and activation of participants' knowledge, skills, creativity, and other resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use techniques where participants work in small groups with changing composition in order to cross-fertilize ideas. [WC, FS]</li> <li>• Set aside time for individual reflection before participants start talking with each other. [FS]</li> <li>• Make an inventory of who has needed competence/knowledge. [WO]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take care to listen to and affirm individuals' statements, using their own languaging.</li> </ul>
<p><b>21. Creativity</b> Support the generation of creative ideas and visions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brainstorming session.</li> <li>• Session where participants are invited to freely create visionary future scenarios. [FW]</li> <li>• Use contrast between different perspectives in order to identify and refine ideas for action. [TIP]</li> </ul>	
<p><b>22. Pre-empt domination</b> Neutralize asymmetrical power relations that obstruct effective collaboration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rule that participants can leave and join whichever group they fancy. [OS]</li> <li>• Use of talking stick (or similar device) and sharing rounds: only one person at a time can speak. [OS]</li> <li>• Use a procedure where valid arguments have to be presented in support of proposed actions. [SCA]</li> <li>• Take different perspectives as objects of reflection, thereby pre-empting perspective hegemony. [TIP]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator intervenes when some participant(s) dominate conversations or use manipulative communication behaviours.</li> </ul>
VI. DECISION-MAKING AND COORDINATION OF ACTION		
<p><b>23. Decision-making</b> Develop, select, and make decisions on actions that integrate relevant values, interests, concerns and ideas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop criteria for evaluating alternatives. [SCA, MPD]</li> <li>• Draw decision-trees or decision matrices (e.g., dividing decisions into categories: decide now, decide later, postpone until further inquiry has been made). [SCA]</li> <li>• Use the 'single text method,' iterative working with one single draft of agreement until consensus is reached. [CBA]</li> <li>• Use forms to specify what actions will be taken when and who is responsible. [FS, OS]</li> <li>• Let group develop proposals, and have decision-makers make decisions at the end of the session in the presence of participants. [WO]</li> <li>• Formulate criteria, use a table to evaluate each option against all criteria, and then make decisions. [SCA]</li> <li>• Process step where uncertainties (about environment, values, and related agendas) are explored. [SCA]</li> </ul>	
<p><b>24. Support implementation</b> Coordinate implementation of a strategy through planning, management and evaluation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use forms to specify what actions will be taken when and who is responsible. [FS, OS]</li> <li>• Plot planned action on a timeline posted on the wall. [FW, FS]</li> <li>• Form project groups which develop implementation plans. [OS]</li> <li>• Include formation of coordination group in the preparatory phase, which has the role of following up the implementation phase. [FS, WO]</li> <li>• Make agreement about a procedure for managing disagreements and unforeseen complications in the implementation phase. [MPD]</li> </ul>	



# Online Facilitator Competencies for Group Facilitators

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## ABSTRACT

Modern group work typically involves a mix of face-to-face and online collaborative engagement between organizations. In today's fast-moving workplace, individuals and groups within and between organizations commonly need to work effectively together across time, distance, and cultural norms. The threshold competencies needed by group leaders to effectively facilitate the online aspects of these communication activities is an emerging area within group facilitation. Competency in the design and delivery of participatory processes is the domain of the group facilitation profession, with facilitation competency work by Pierce, Cheesebrow, and Braun (2000) and others now well established within the profession for face-to-face group facilitation. However, no one has yet articulated a set of competencies orientated for the work of the online group facilitator. Facilitation is increasingly being used as a participatory approach that enhances online team effectiveness in dialogue, analysis, decision making, planning, divergence, and convergence. One assumption remains that facilitation in face-to-face groups is the same as in online ones presents a significant gap in research knowledge worthy of empirical investigation. Drawing on a number of facilitated online discussions, involving 60 practicing group facilitators from 13 countries, this paper presents a series of online facilitator competencies that were synthesized from in-depth conversations held within a series of online facilitation skills training programmes held over six years. These competencies provide a new framework for expanding the awareness of the complexity and skills required of group facilitators in online collaborative group work. The framework articulates seven areas of online facilitator competencies and the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to demonstrate these competencies.

## KEYWORDS

Facilitator competencies, group facilitation, online facilitation, virtual teams, collaborative computing, inter-cultural group work.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2000, Pierce, Cheesebrow, and Braun published a comprehensive description of the Facilitator Competency Model based on competency identification work undertaken with group facilitators at conferences of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) through 1990-1996. The model contained eighteen competencies grouped into six categories of: (A) engage in professional growth, (B) create cooperative partnerships, (C) create an environment of participation, (D) utilize multisensory approaches, (E) orchestrate the group journey, and (F) commit to a life of

integrity. These competencies subsequently became the Core Facilitation Competencies of the IAF and informed the ToP Facilitation Competencies of the ICA. Both competencies models underpinned the facilitator certification programmes that were subsequently developed.

In any group work there are a number of inputs, processes, activities, and outputs. Some of these are conducted face-to-face and in-person, and others are conducted completely online between organizations, and at different levels within an organization. The value of participatory processes to address organizational needs is no longer questioned in the

workplace. In parallel, the capacity for enhancing participation globally has grown to provide anytime, anywhere opportunities to meet and collaborate.

Opportunities to work remotely and with colleagues at a distance are now becoming the norm, yet optimal team performance and satisfaction is not always realized. Through a range of internet-enabled software tools, communication is conducted between managers, between staff, between organizations, between organizations and their clients and customers, and more. Effective online communication within these collaborative conversations requires a range of skills and competencies for those facilitating them.

This paper synthesizes what several groups of facilitators have discussed and identified as key criteria to facilitating and leading online groups. It focuses on those aspects of organizational group work conducted online, and investigates what are the threshold competencies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) that are required to effectively facilitate those online aspects of collaborative group work.

### Online Collaborative Group work

The world of group work has significantly changed over the last fifteen years with the rapid rise of computing, networking, and internet-enabled group applications. These web tools enable groups of people to work together in ways never before possible. New technologies and devices can now be used by people to plan, lead, conduct, support, and share their group work. Considerable advantages can be realized by organizations through using the wide range of new and emerging forms that online collaborative technologies now can offer.

Research has shown that online and virtual group work has not been as effective or as satisfying to group participants as that of face-to-face group work (Chidambaram, 1996; Lau et al., 2000; Saunders & Ahuja, 2006; Thorpe, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011; Warkentin et al., 1997). In online groups, many of the aspects of face-to-face interaction - vital to the facilitator - are no longer available or are not as easy to read. This means that proven face-to-face processes and techniques are either less effective, or simply cannot be applied in an online group (Nunamaker, Zhao, & Briggs, 2002). Facilitation relies on the intricacies and connection of the body and its complex ways of communication. These elements normally provide a range of feedback to both the speaker and receivers of communication to complete the understanding of a single message. Communicating online however, requires more explicit writing and reading to ensure communication is complete (White, 2001).

Group facilitation has been identified as potentially a key part in improving online group effectiveness, outcomes, and

participant satisfaction (Mittleman, Briggs & Nunamaker, 2000; White, 2004; Pauleen & Yoong, 2001; Rangarajan & Rohrbaugh, 2003; Whitworth & McQueen, 2003; Hunter, 2003; Thorpe 2009, 2011). Facilitation offers vital process guidance to assist groups that may be struggling to navigate the task and technology. They remain impartial and are able to address conflict as it emerges. They assist with both divergence and convergence of group work, and keep participants on topic, orientated to the work, therefore ensuring that all are able to participate and able to bring a range of ways to tackle problem solving and decision making. This can be considered particularly true also for those organizations using a combination of online and face-to-face group work in teams.

While online groups are somewhat of a relatively new and fast growing phenomenon, group leaders and facilitators are beginning to share their online anecdotes and best practice suggestions with each other. They are asking questions about how they can effectively assist groups working in increasingly multi-modal, multi-cultural, inter-generational and geographically-dispersed groups (Thorpe, 2009). Key questions have led to a desire to articulate a satisfactory set of online facilitator competencies that can help identify areas of performance effectiveness and opportunities for furthering professional development.

It is hoped that the competencies proposed in this paper can provide a useful model for improving awareness of the complexity and skills required of online group facilitators and leaders in intercultural collaborative group work.

### Threshold Competencies

Increasingly, organizations have sought, through the implementation of human and professional development and workplace learning strategies, to develop competencies to enable employees to respond quickly and flexibly to business needs. The need for greater flexibility has resulted in a more widespread use of competency approaches as a basis for workplace learning provision (Lei and Hitt, 1996; Spangenberg et al., 1999).

Spencer and Spencer (1993) define a competency as, “an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion referenced as effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation.” (p. 9). They further describe five types of competency characteristics as:

*Motives* - Drive, direct, and select behavior towards certain actions and away from others

*Traits* - Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations

*Self-concept* - A person's attitudes, values, and self-image

*Knowledge* - Information a person has in specific content areas

*Skill* - The ability to perform a certain physical or mental task (p. 11)

They describe competencies as a kind of 'iceberg model' with knowledge and skill competencies apparent above the visible waterline, and beneath the surface are the hidden aspects of motives, traits, and self-concept. Skills and knowledge are considered as being relatively easy aspects to develop through training. However, developing an individual's motives, traits, and self-concept competencies are considered the most difficult to develop.

Competencies are often discussed at two levels – the minimum capability level to be considered competent as a threshold competency, and a high performance competency identifies characteristics that are distinguished and above average in performance. If you consider the acquisition of a new language, those who had picked up sufficient language and use through their efforts and could speak fluently would be considered high performing. Those who had learnt enough language to navigate public transport and order food might be considered to have achieved threshold functioning. Those who may have studied for several years and are considered fluent by native speakers would be considered as achieving a high performance competence in the language.

While competencies are not necessarily the panacea of an organizational performance management system (Zingheim, 1996), nor are they radically useful in improving the quality of communications, they do however provide a useful framework for organizations and people wanting to develop and improve their work and effectiveness. Importantly, they can also be helpful to guide professional development for organizations keen to up-skill their group facilitators and leaders. Competencies therefore provide a useful framework for awareness of the complexity and skills required of those working in inter-cultural collaborative programmes.

### Group Facilitation Competences

Pierce, Cheesebrow & Braun have made a significant contribution to the area of facilitator competencies in their seminal work published in 2000 in *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal*. Building on this work, and on the comments from other prominent facilitators and authors (Wilkinson, 2000; Schwarz, 2000; Kirk, 2000; Tahar, 2000; Baker & Fraser, 2005), the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) developed a set of Foundational Facilitator Competencies (now called the IAF Core Facilitator Competencies). This set of competencies was then picked up by the IAF Board as a key resource for a strategic initiative to develop and disseminate a Certified

Professional Facilitator (CPF) programme that they have developed for group facilitators internationally.

Other competencies work, such as McFadzean's criteria for small groups (2002) and Kolb's (et al., 2002, et al., 2008) model of small group facilitator competencies are based on input from facilitators. Stewart's (2006) study of high-performing and threshold competencies for group facilitators drew on observations of group facilitation in workshop environments and interviews. Her competencies were then validated through a survey of group facilitators and clients of facilitation. Wardale (2008) interviewed both internal and external facilitators and the managers employing them to develop a useful set of criteria. The International Institute for Facilitation (IIF) developed a set of Master Facilitator Competencies drawn from a survey involving over 450 practicing group facilitators and their clients (IIF, 2003).

These are helpful and valuable contributions to the area; however, despite many facilitators now working with online groups, as yet, a set of online facilitator competencies has not been developed and published. This paper aims to address that gap and begin the work towards developing a satisfactory set of criteria for those facilitating in the online technology-enabled group work space.

## METHOD

### Research Question

The research question was *What do practicing group facilitators identify as criteria for effective online facilitation?*

### Research Design

The development of the competencies presented in this paper was intended to be both exploratory and explanatory. There was a need to explore what competencies facilitators might identify as guiding their own practice, and there was a need to integrate with what was already known from their facilitation practice. Group facilitators in this sense were considered central to the study and were considered as experts who would be able to reflectively articulate their own practice and experiences, and through a group process, develop an agreed and synthesized set of working criteria.

Facilitators are well known as reflective practitioners and as developmental experts (Schön, 1993), interested in improving their own practice and the ongoing sustainability and functioning of the groups they work with. The intent of the research design was to involve online facilitation practitioners in the research so that their motivations, ways of looking at things, and questions would have value, and that their professional experiences would be at the heart of

the data generated. Group facilitators offer unique expertise with both group behavior and group processes. As the research project aimed to explore online group facilitation competencies themselves, a research design that was aligned with the underpinning values and beliefs of facilitators was considered beneficial (see the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Group Facilitators at [www.iaf-world.org/site/professional/iaf-code-of-ethics](http://www.iaf-world.org/site/professional/iaf-code-of-ethics)).

The design allowed all those involved to be self-directed, and in a position to contribute to the formulation of propositions, associated discussion, reflection, analysis and synthesis with others of their own community of practice. It was beneficial to explore online facilitator competencies through a series of online facilitated group processes. The approach illustrated the principle that “Research questions that explore an online phenomenon are strengthened through the use of a method of research that closely mirrors the natural setting under investigation.” (Geiser, 2002, p. 3).

It was also important to involve facilitators as there was no existing research in the area of online facilitator competencies. There was a real need to identify the important variables by looking for patterns and themes in a series of reflectively articulated criteria, and to identify how they linked to each other across groups.

The use of a group process itself provided a useful validation of constructs that could take into account multiple perspectives on what could be considered effective practice. A further benefit of group-based processes was the challenging of uncritical subjectivity that improves the quality of each group’s outcomes. For example, participants could inquire and challenge the premises and propositions being offered from each other to test for their soundness and validity. The group approach also allowed for divergence and convergence over the criteria and all their parts, enabling a range of forms of knowing to be articulated within the area of the topic more thoroughly.

As the nature of criteria development can be highly contextual and subjective, the investigation needed to be exploratory to identify the underlying attitudes, beliefs, traits, and motivations that were shaping the chosen criteria. Therefore, in order to gain evidence of the facilitators’ competencies, the research was designed to gain the perceptions of the facilitators over a number of developmental conversations with differing groups of facilitators engaging in the same topic.

### Participants

In total, 60 group facilitators were involved in this study through a series of small groups (8-12) of participants joining in six different 10-12 week online facilitation skills training programmes delivered by Zenergy between March 2007 and November 2013. The participants were from 13

different countries and spread across 15 different time zones.

As part of the 10-week online training programme, facilitators would participate in two weeks of facilitated conversation on online facilitator effectiveness using forum conversations, chat tools, video, and teleconferences to discuss, debate, define, and synthesize a working set of criteria. Each group developed their own set of agreed criteria that were then used later in the training programme as a framework for self and peer assessment on their overall learning and facilitation performance.

### Open Coding Technique

Each of the sets of competency criteria that the six groups developed were brought together and coded using open coding techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Open coding involves “the naming and categorization of phenomena through close examination of data” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 62). The aim of the coding of each criterion was to develop clusters, and ultimately category titles, that would capture the meaning of the competency descriptions provided. A strength of this approach is that open coding is key to keeping the contribution and voice of the participants at the forefront of the synthesis. Open coding is an accepted approach and has been used in competency identification and categorization previously by Jean-Anne Stewart (2004) in her doctoral research that developed a model of group facilitator competencies, and published in her article *High-Performing (and Threshold) Competencies for Group Facilitators* in the *Journal of Change Management* in 2006. Where relevant, each categorization was linked to common facilitator constructs and terminology from literature that many group facilitators would recognize (Schwarz, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004; Bens, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Schuman, 2005; Hunter & Thorpe, 2005; Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006; Hunter, 2007; Kaner, 2007).

## RESULTS

### Competency Model for Online Group Facilitators

From the synthesis of the coding, merging, and categorization of the suggestions from the facilitator groups, a new set of 26 competencies grouped under seven categories are proposed. These are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Competences for Online Group Facilitators**

<b>Competences For Online Group Facilitators</b>
<b>Develops a shared group purpose</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiates conversations on the group purpose</li> <li>Works with others to develop the group purpose</li> <li>Encourages alignment on the group purpose</li> <li>Keeps the group on purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Sets and maintains a shared group culture</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Care and respect are present in interventions</li> <li>Uses behaviours and attitudes that enable a group to more fully participate</li> <li>Valid information is shared that enables participants to learn together</li> <li>Holding and supporting the group in their culture</li> <li>Works with others to set expectations for participation and acknowledgements</li> </ul>
<b>Plans and prepares</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops appropriate lead times</li> <li>Prepares access to group technologies</li> <li>Ensures that the right decision making people are involved</li> <li>Assists members to learn to effectively use the group technologies</li> <li>Timely and responsive to others</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledgeable and able to work with a range of online collaborative tools</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aware of the advantages and disadvantages of group technologies</li> <li>Can match the group technology to the group process and needs</li> <li>Keeps up to date with latest developments</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledgeable and able to work with a range of group process or methods</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained and skilled in group process and facilitation</li> <li>Aware of advantages and disadvantages of processes and techniques</li> <li>Able to work with and manage a diverse group</li> </ul>
<b>Communicating with presence online</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to presence self and others separated by time, distance and cultural separation</li> <li>Deep listening and careful communication</li> <li>Enables whole-person connection</li> </ul>
<b>Reflective practitioner</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to reflect on practice</li> <li>Identifies gaps between espoused values and beliefs and those reflected in interventions and actions</li> <li>Seeks evaluation and addresses feedback</li> </ul>

Table 1 presents a concise set of categories containing competences for online group facilitators. These are not intended to be exhaustive, but to represent a synthesis of the criteria identified by the 60 facilitators involved in the study. To many practicing facilitators, the above set will offer no surprises as several will overlap with the IAF Core Competencies and other known competency models.

Unique categories identified for online facilitation are ‘knowledgeable of online collaborative tools’ and ‘communicating with presence online’. Each of the

categories and criteria are articulated further with the following descriptions:

**A. Develops a Shared Group Purpose**

Group purpose was seen as central to the facilitator’s work. Similarly to that of face-to-face facilitation, an online facilitator works with the group to develop and clarify the group purpose.

*Initiates conversations on the group purpose*

It was expected that an online facilitator would initiate purpose conversations to allow participants to clarify their understandings, and ensure that the purpose of the group was clear to all.

*Works with others to develop the group purpose*

If a group purpose was not articulated or was unclear, the facilitator would be expected to initiate discussion and work with the group until a purpose was established.

*Encourages alignment on the group purpose*

Also considered important was that the facilitator encourages full alignment on the group purpose and avoids any cheap closure (see Hunter, 2007, p. 112) from participants eager to engage quickly in the group's task activities.

*Keeps the group on purpose*

The facilitator monitors the group's progress towards the group purpose and makes timely process interventions to focus the group on its objective.

**B. Sets and Maintains a Shared Group Culture**

Establishing a working group culture with a group was seen as central to the facilitator's work, and considered highly determinant on the potential success and satisfaction of the group outcomes.

*Care and respect are present in interventions*

It was identified as important that the facilitator takes time to develop and articulate their online interventions to avoid any potential misunderstandings – misunderstandings that could be much more damaging in online groups than those experienced in face-to-face groups where they are more quickly resolved. Respect was considered important in communications for creating a culture where people could freely speak, whilst minimizing any cultural or communication style clashes between participants.

*Uses behaviors and attitudes that enable a group to more fully participate*

The facilitator works to develop and model the behaviors that assist a group to more fully participate. Interactions that are disruptive to the group are addressed both with care for the individual, and with respect to the needs of the remainder of the group.

*Valid information is shared that enables participants to learn together*

It was considered important that a facilitator encourages sharing of information in the group in a way that enables others to understand, reason, and determine for themselves the validity of shared information. In other words, relevant information is not withheld from all participants. This was especially important to avoid privileged information power dynamics to surface, given that the online tools provide opportunities for private conversations between the facilitator with individuals in a group.

*Holding and supporting the group in their culture*

An important behavior identified was creating space for everyone in the group and for all that is happening in the group, including enabling members to participate through different levels of access and through technological interruptions.

*Works with others to set expectations for participation and acknowledgements*

An expectation identified was that the facilitator would establish with the group some shared expectations of timely participation and acknowledgements of important contributions.

**C. Plans and Prepares**

It was considered that online group sessions involved significantly more planning and preparation than those needed for face-to-face group work. Resources and online meeting spaces need to be prepared and access details shared in advance, as well as assisting participants in learning to use the chosen software tools.

*Develops appropriate lead times*

It was considered important that the facilitator works to enhance attendance and participation by attending to time differences, and providing sufficient lead times, resources, and pre-work for participants.

*Prepares access to group technologies*

Also linked to sufficient lead time was a requirement that the facilitator worked well in advance of an online facilitated session to set up and test participant access to any group software tools to be used.

*Ensures that the right decision-making people are involved*

It was considered an important task if important decisions were to be made by the group that the facilitator would work to ensure that the key decision-makers were going to be present and able to participate in advance of the facilitated session.

*Assists members to learn to effectively use the group technologies*

Unlike face-to-face facilitators, online facilitators were required to often perform an additional 'technology training role' to allow participants to learn the features and functions of a wide range of online software tools. This extra role could include the preparation of resources for access and software tool use, leading extra tutorial or orientation sessions in advance, and bringing in other technical support specialists to assist where needed.

*Timely and responsive to others*

It was expected that an online facilitator would set some clear expectations about time-frames for their own responses and make their interventions within an appropriate time-frame so that they would have impact. Requests are addressed and responded to within those expected time-frames.

**D. Knowledgeable and Able to Work with a Range of Online Collaborative Tools**

It was considered important that online facilitators had an awareness and experience of a wide range of online software tools used for group work.

*Aware of the advantages and disadvantages of group technologies*

It was expected that an online facilitator would be able to distinguish between the benefits and features of a wide range of software tools, as well as understand the implications of the particular disadvantages that certain tools may have on group effectiveness.

*Can match the group technology to the group process and needs*

Appropriate tool selection was considered a critical aspect for the online facilitator. Having the ability to effectively match what group process may be needed by the group in its developmental life cycle with an appropriate software tool that could support the goals and needs of a particular process was identified as an important facilitator ability.

*Keeps up-to-date with latest developments*

Online facilitators were expected to explore and learn about the changes in collaborative software tools and be up-to-date with developments in emerging group technologies.

**E. Knowledgeable and Able to Work with a Range of Group Process or Methods**

It was considered important that online facilitators had an awareness of when a group intervention is appropriate, and also be able to work with a wide range of processes and facilitation methods.

*Trained in group process and facilitation*

It was expected that online facilitators would have completed some appropriate training in the use of group processes, techniques, and methods.

*Aware of advantages and disadvantages of processes and techniques*

It was also important that online facilitators had proficiency in the use of a range of group process, techniques, and methods, and are able to distinguish between the benefits and features of them. They also needed to clearly understand the implications of the disadvantages of choosing some methods over others.

*Able to work with and manage a diverse group*

This competency involved being able to develop a participatory environment involving the valuing of diversity, and include using a range of learning styles, culturally appropriate processes, approaches, participation styles, and ways of communicating.

**F. Communicating with presence online**

This important competence was articulated as the ability to facilitate online groups at a deeply creative and generative level.

*Ability to presence self and others separated by time, distance, and cultural separation*

A key ability identified of an online facilitator was to introduce techniques and interventions that reduce the effects of time differences, geographical distance, and cultural separation. This involves working actively to mirror the group back to itself and improve the participant awareness of others.

*Deep listening and careful communication*

This is articulated in the work of Otto Scharmer (2007) as working through the levels of open mind, open heart, and open will; the depth of work an online group can reach is related to the level to which a facilitator could take them. The facilitator was expected to hold and support a group through deep listening and careful communication, assisting the group through their interventions to harness their collective intelligence and achieve their best performance.

*Enables whole-person connection*

This was articulated as the ability to work with individuals and the group not only on an intellectual and cognitive level, also but through accessing a range of levels of holistic communication, such as working at the heart or on an emotional level, on an intuitive level, and on other levels present and active in a group.

**G. Reflective Practitioner**

Reflective practice was considered essential to monitor, maintain, and improve an online facilitator's effectiveness.

*Ability to reflect on practice*

It was considered important that online facilitators incorporate reflection practices into the online facilitation activities and experiences that they engaged in to help better improve their intervention effectiveness, and also to contribute to forwarding the profession over time.

*Seeks evaluation and addresses feedback*

It was also considered highly important that online facilitators incorporate evaluation and feedback instruments for participants. Areas of praise are acknowledged and areas for improvement are identified and addressed.

*Identifies gaps between espoused values and beliefs and those reflected in interventions and actions*

This is a competency that was considered fundamental to creating integrity in practice, and creating the same level of learning and transformation in online facilitators as espoused to the groups they worked with.

**DISCUSSION**

It is hoped that the competencies as articulated above may provide a useful frame of reference for the IAF professional development working groups, and to stimulate a fresh focus on the particular needs and focus of facilitation practice online given its growing importance. The competencies presented in this paper may also provide a useful resource

for online facilitator education, and ultimately improve the ongoing effectiveness of group facilitation practice. As the first piece of research to investigate group facilitator competencies from a purely online perspective, it addresses a particular gap identified in the growing field of group facilitation literature.

Many of the competency categories overlap those of face-to-face group facilitation, such as the IAF Core Competencies, as would be expected. Knowledgeable of online collaborative tools, and being able to provide software tool training or assistance to participants, are areas of competency that wouldn't typically be expected in a face-to-face setting. More challenging online is the area of communicating with presence online; it is not necessarily easy to achieve without being physically present and able to access the body language, posture, tone of voice, and visual cues from participants.

The categories of competencies for online group facilitation are discussed in relation to other work in the face-to-face facilitation domain.

**A. Develops a shared group purpose**

In the same way that a mission statement or strategic goal aligns an organization's efforts, a group purpose statement aligns group intention on its desired outcome or goal for all to work towards. Although not specifically mentioning a 'purpose' criteria, *Guide the Group to Appropriate and Useful Outcomes* in the IAF Core Competencies covers ground in this area, including: 'establish clear context', 'use a variety of approaches to meet group objectives', and 'assess and communicate group progress'. These are all aspects that facilitate a group to set a shared target and process to take them in the intended direction.

**B. Sets and maintains a shared group culture**

This criteria aligns closely with *Create and Sustain a Participatory Environment* in the IAF Core Competencies. Both online and face-to-face facilitation work includes ensuring inclusiveness, assisting a group to create a shared climate of safety and trust, and evoking group creativity.

**C. Plans and prepares**

While similar in title to *Plan Appropriate Group Processes* in the IAF Core Competencies, planning and preparing group processes and activities were considered to be much more involved when facilitating online groups. Planning and preparing in online facilitation practice involves effort in setup and preparation of the group software tools, as well as the format or process of facilitated sessions. Sessions could easily be hijacked if the group technology was not set



up, did not perform, or if participants found the software tools difficult to communicate through. Participation and subsequent ownership of group outcomes could also be impacted if the wrong technology choice were made, or a lack of preparation reduced a session's effectiveness.

#### D. Knowledgeable and able to work with a range of online collaborative tools

Unique to the domain of online facilitation, it was expected that facilitators would have a broad knowledge of online collaborative software tools, able to match the collaborative tools and process to a group's needs. They were also expected to be competent at training and assisting group participants to use online software tools they may not have ever used before.

#### E. Knowledgeable and able to work with a range of group process or methods

Similar to *Build and Maintain Professional Knowledge* in the IAF Core Competencies, an area for effective online facilitation was knowing a range of facilitation processes, methods, and models for group work, and being able to effectively facilitate them online.

#### F. Communicating with presence online

The initial set of facilitator competencies forwarded by Pierce, Cheesebrow, and Braun in 2000 included a category of *Utilize Multisensory Approaches*, which through review later became the category of *Create and Sustain a Participatory Environment* in the current IAF Core Competencies. Multisensory approaches and the use of time and space to support group process are significant challenges when a group is geographically dispersed and not always able to see, hear or touch each other. The simple technique of shaking hands in an introduction to build rapport, let alone high fives or group cheers to celebrate and acknowledge success, quickly need online alternatives to achieve similar bonding in an online group.

Unique to online group experience, facilitators sometimes articulated this challenging category of communicating with presence or of being present to the group as 'finding one's online facilitator voice'. Without the benefits of face-to-face cues vital to a facilitator's work, online facilitators needed to use various ways of both presencing themselves to a group, as well as also using that 'voice' to assist the visibility of group participants to one another. A facilitator's presence was considered vital to enabling a group to work at depth online - especially if the group was to achieve the levels of satisfaction that can be achieved in facilitated face-to-face group settings. Facilitator presence was also functioned to transition participants from a

collection of individuals connecting through online group technology into an identifiable group or team collaborating to achieve their shared purpose.

#### G. Reflective practitioner

This category is similar to *Model Positive Professional Attitude* in the IAF Core Competencies, where practicing self-assessment and self-awareness are included. As well, the aspects of values and beliefs are included through a link to ethics as described in the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Group Facilitators. Where *Reflective practitioner* is different is in seeking evaluation and feedback from participants and, where relevant, working to address feedback received. This aspect is somewhat included in the criterion of 'assess or evaluate client satisfaction at all stages of the event or project' in *Create Collaborative Client Relationships* in the IAF Core Competencies.

The only area of the IAF Core Competencies that isn't significantly overlapped is the competency category of *Create Collaborative Client Relationships* that includes: Develop working partnerships; Design and customize applications to meet client needs; and Manage multi-session events effectively. There is potential for these aspects of overall client contracting and service management to be included in the *Plans and prepares* category identified by online facilitators. Alternatively, it may be identified that these aspects need to reside in a new additional category following further work and involvement from practicing facilitators.

#### Future Research

Future work will be to refine the competencies and descriptors through a pilot survey with practicing online group facilitators to test the validity, completeness, and usefulness of the competencies as defined. A wider survey of the 1,200+ members of the IAF can then be conducted to identify any further outstanding categories, refine the criteria included, and to identify any criteria that may yet need to be incorporated into this competency model.

While this paper has focused its discussion in relation to the IAF Core Competencies as the most popular and rebound competency set, future work can compare a new lens of online facilitator competencies with the range of criteria proposed by others including Wardale (2008), Kolb, Jin and Song (2008), Stewart (2006), Kolb and Rothwell (2002), McFadzean (2002), as well as the ToP Facilitation Competencies of the ICA, and the Master Facilitator Competencies of the IIF.

## Significance

The purpose of this research was to contribute the first study to address a research gap for online facilitation competencies identified in the literature on group facilitation. The study proposes a fresh set of criteria and the first focusing purely on online group facilitation. The study aimed to capture and synthesize what group facilitators across a number of online facilitation training programmes identified as important criteria for effective online facilitation. It is significant to see that all but one of the categories of IAF Core Competencies were covered by very similar competency categories.

It is hoped that this online facilitation competency set will extend the Core Facilitator Competencies as defined by the IAF, and inform the facilitator competency frameworks and models provided by others. It is also hoped that the competencies proposed here might inform the Certified Professional Facilitator™ (CPF) programme currently offered by the association, and where relevant, the unique aspects of online facilitation criteria might be considered appropriate for consideration in certification evaluation and activities.

## CONCLUSION

In any collaborative group work across organizations, there are a number of activities conducted online between organizations at different levels. This paper has presented a combined set of criteria distilled and synthesized from a number of facilitated group discussions on the topic of what practicing group facilitators identify as criteria for effective online facilitation. While there may be more work to be done on these criteria, it is hoped that they will be a useful resource for identifying facilitator competencies in the online communication of collaborative group work. It presents a set of skills and behaviors that offer guidance for efforts to improve the effectiveness of those leading and facilitating online groups.

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Andrew discovered the power of storytelling at 14 during a classical guitar lesson. His teacher listened to him play mechanically and said, ‘You’ve got to tell a story. What can you picture?’ In 1999 with one of the first PhDs in Complex Systems and Complexity Science from the University of Queensland, Andrew moved to Boston and worked for a management think tank applying complexity insights to the world of organisations. The founder and director of the boutique management consulting company Babel Fish Group, Andrew works as a professional facilitator and change consultant with organisations in Australia, USA, the Netherlands and the UK. Andrew brings a spirited dynamic presence as a professional speaker, leadership coach and workshop leader.



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**Wiebke Herding – IAF Director of Communications and Publications**

ON:SUBJECT, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Wiebke’s guiding question is: How can we collectively work towards a better world? For fifteen years this exploration has led her to campaign with social movements, serve as head of communications for international environmental organizations and as consultant working for the UN, the EU and big business. Today, she specializes in the collaborative design of change processes towards sustainability. Originally from Northern Germany her journey has taken her from a MSc in Computer Science from the University of Edinburgh and studies at the Chartered Institute of Marketing to Brussels and Amsterdam where she continued her education as a coach, Certified Professional Facilitator and practitioner in the Technology of Participation.

# Group Facilitation: A Research & Applications Journal

## Aim and Scope

*Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal* is a multi-disciplinary publication focused on the art and science of group facilitation. The aim of Group Facilitation is to advance our knowledge of group facilitation and its implications for individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. It is published annually.

The *Group Facilitation Journal* is intended for facilitators, mediators, organizational development and training specialists, managers, researchers, and others who seek to use facilitation skills in their practice. Articles represent diverse perspectives, including organizational learning and development, group and system dynamics, collaborative technology, negotiation, mediation, leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, cross-cultural contexts, and education. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, facilitator roles within the group, interventions for conflict management, descriptions of specific facilitation methods, approaches to facilitating specific tasks such as idea generation or priority setting, using computer technology to support facilitation, increasing participation in organizations, exploring the underlying values, beliefs and models of facilitation, and applying facilitation skills and concepts to various settings.

The journal is comprised of the following sections, which are described below in more detail: Application and Practice; Theory and Research; Edge Thinking; Book Reviews.

**Application and Practice** is devoted to articles that reflect on facilitator experience. Articles appropriate for this section include reports on experiences gained and lessons learned presented in a reflective case study, and discussion of facilitator roles, problems encountered by facilitators or their clients, and intervention methods and techniques. Studies should be both descriptive and evaluative and should draw on existing literature appropriately.

**Theory and Research** is devoted to articles that explore, propose, or test practices, principles, or other aspects of facilitation models. Such studies are typically based on survey, experimental, ethnographic, or other research methods.

**Edge Thinking** is intended to stimulate thinking on new concepts and issues. Contributions may be less formal than the other sections, and might include dialogues, essays, editorials, and proposals for new areas of inquiry.

**Book Reviews** presents critical and comparative reviews of recent and classic books related to group facilitation.

### Submission Guidelines

Submission guidelines and other information about the journal may be obtained on the journal website <http://www.albany.edu/cpr/gf/gfj/> or from the Editor (see below).

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### **Writing the Review**

#### ***When writing a review, please include:***

- overall impression of the book
- the highlights and structure of the book
- for whom the book would be appropriate
- what you found particularly helpful, unclear, weak
- your personal learning, if any
- particular benefits to you in your facilitation, if any
- value of the book for facilitators, if any
- significant contribution of the book, if any, to the field of facilitation
- your recommendation of "must read" portions of the book, if any
- a summary or wrap-up of your reading experience.

#### ***In addition:***

- provide definitions of terms, acronyms, references, and background summary statements where appropriate.
- where necessary, be sure to include complete citations and attributions.
- identify specific texts (usually a sentence or phrase) for possible use in pull quotes.
- publisher; ISBN designation; price (\$US)
- background about the book author: facilitation experience and/or other writings.

### **What we are looking for:**

- people familiar with the conceptual and practical sides of facilitation and who are willing to spend the time required to write interesting and thought provoking reviews.
- reviews of books that address facilitation and related issues, such as consensus decision making, participatory problem solving and group decision-making.
- in-depth and critical reviews that help readers decide whether or not the books reviewed are ones that they should consider reading.
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Reviews are typically between 1,000 and 3,000 words. Submissions should be made via email in Microsoft Word or Rich Text (RTF) format. If you are interested in reviewing a book for the Journal, please contact:

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