

Review

The Art of Facilitation

the essentials for leading great meetings and creating group synergy

by Dale Hunter, Stephen Thorpe, Hamish Brown, and Anne Bailey,
2007 Random House NZ

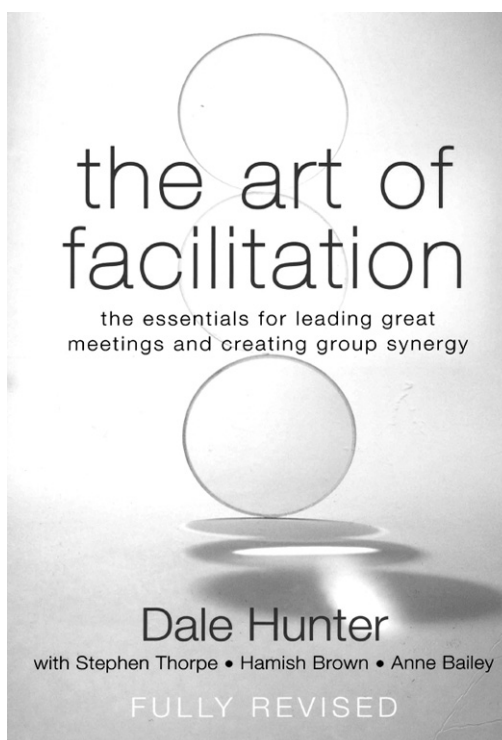
Reviewed by Vivienne Thomson

The authors of this new book all live and work in Auckland, New Zealand, and have drawn on their work as members of Zenergy, a company that specialises in facilitation, mediation, coaching and facilitator training.

While Dale Hunter, a co-founder of Zenergy, presents the bulk of the content, the book is the result of the authors' collective effort and wide range of experiences and expertise. It is a revised and updated edition of *The Art of Facilitation* first published in 1994 incorporating new thinking and research. There is now a chapter on "Facilitation Online" that highlights the benefits and issues associated with facilitating online groups. In addition, Hamish Brown, ANZPA member and psychodramatist, has contributed a chapter entitled "Facilitation and therapeutic group work" in which he relates spontaneity, warm up, role theory, and creative genius to facilitation.

This book focuses on the role and skills required of a group facilitator. Facilitation is defined as a discipline learned through experience, skill acquisition and personal development. It is presented as part of social ecology and much of the writing is imbued with permaculture principles of "care of the people, care of the planet, and share the resources".

The book is presented clearly and organised into three parts. Part One outlines the conceptual framework for facilitation exploring the history of facilitation as a profession, underlying concepts, and description of the work of a



Part Two focuses on a variety of contextual applications of facilitation e.g. facilitation in organisations, facilitation and ethics, sustainability, values, therapeutic group work, and online facilitation.

Part Three provides a resource for budding facilitators through a structured self directed training program. The program includes a range of activities for use with groups, reference materials, tools and techniques, and a list of competencies.

Its purpose is to provide a training resource for facilitators to enable group members to understand more about what is happening in a group and how they might participate in order to progress the work of the group.

I think it achieves this aim and would appeal to people who are interested to learn about what is involved in the practice of facilitation and looking for specific ideas and techniques for practical application. Information and examples are presented clearly and could be applied directly from the text. .

Along with an emphasis on the importance of experiential learning, the authors provide a significant amount of instruction by describing specific activities to use as a facilitator. While experienced group leaders are less likely to look for activities such as energizers, check-ins, games, or “how to” steps to develop their ability and applications, people at an earlier stage in their development as facilitators would value the resources that are to be found in the book.

Drawing on an eclectic methodology ranging from story telling to neuro-psychology the topic of facilitation is well researched and supported by an extensive bibliography that in itself makes for interesting reading.

In his chapter on “Facilitation and therapeutic group work”, Hamish differentiates the purposes of group facilitation and group psychotherapy. He states that therapeutic methods are often based on human development, change, or social theory, whereas this is not necessarily the case for facilitation. He promotes the idea that facilitators, and everyone for that matter, can benefit greatly from psychotherapy both in terms of understanding the process of change as well as attending to their own personal development.

He goes on to present psychodrama as the method that connects and integrates personal development with community development and social development. His description links

role theory and warm up to change and a belief in our generative capacity. That is, by attending to our own personal development we become involved in creating the world as we imagine it could be which in turn generates further development.

I found the style of this chapter quite different from the rest of the book in that it presented the information for the reader to digest and stopped short of translating it into specific action or giving guidance. Instead it provides a summary of a number of methods and theories, suggesting a relationship between them, and linking them to facilitation. For a novice it condenses a number of psychotherapeutic methods to straightforward summary, and for those people who know about psychotherapy and groups the theory is likely to stimulate further interest in psychodrama and its application.

I would have liked this chapter to be expanded particularly to learn more of the links between psychodrama and facilitation and what Hamish has integrated from his experience in these two fields.

Reading this book caused me to reflect on how I function as a consultant and psychodrama practitioner and the values and principles that guide my work. In this respect the book prompted a useful experience for me in identifying the similarities and differences between psychodrama and facilitation, in particular the notion that a facilitator doesn't get involved in the content of the group's work and that, “the primary role of the facilitator is to focus the group on its purpose and act as guardian of the group culture”. I certainly enjoyed the stimulation of grappling with the translation of theory into practice.

'The Art of Facilitation' (1994, 2007) by Dale Hunter, Stephen Thorpe, Hamish Brown, and Anne Bailey was published by Random House, New Zealand. It is available from <www.zenergyglobal.com>

