

The Art of Facilitation: The essentials for leading great meetings and creating group synergy.

By Dale Hunter (with Stephen Thorpe, Hamish Brown, and Anne Bailey)

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Reviewed by Glyn Thomas

It was a pleasure to review “The art of facilitation” and Dale Hunter, with the help of some colleagues, has done a good job writing a book that is well researched and easy to read. Hunter, practices the principles of co-operacy in this book through her acknowledgment of the work of others in the facilitation field and in her willingness to share the learning gained through her practice of facilitation and facilitator education. The book is organized in three parts and a quick analysis reveals that this fully revised second edition of Hunter’s earlier book (see, Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1995) contains 11 new chapters and 12 revised chapters.

Part one describes the emerging profession of group facilitation, the role of a facilitator, the conceptual framework used in the book, and some of the key elements of facilitation. Within this section, I particularly enjoyed the chapter on facilitating yourself because I believe the facilitation literature has not emphasised this aspect of facilitation training enough. Hunter is not prescriptive about the methods that emerging facilitators should use to enhance this developmental process but she is adamant that being a facilitator “requires you to extend and develop the part of yourself that can give free attention – that part of your awareness not caught up with thoughts, feelings (emotions) and body sensations” (p. 51). The other chapters in part one provide practical suggestions on: how to make interventions (chapter seven); how to increase awareness of, and tap into, the different levels of a group’s functioning (chapter eight); reflective strategies facilitators can use to foster understanding and find meaning (chapter nine); ideas to help groups to use consensus decision making more effectively (chapter ten); and finally, strategies facilitators can use to manage conflict and other challenging situations (chapter 11).

Part two of ‘The Art of Facilitation’ moves beyond the practical discussion of facilitation strategies to consider some of the issues and challenges that facilitators individually and collectively face. Chapter one in this section explores the implications determined by the way the facilitator’s role is defined with their clients. The next three chapters on co-operative processes, ethics and the facilitator’s contribution to a sustainable society reveal Hunter’s heart and desire for facilitation. She demonstrates her commitment to, and belief in, the principles of co-operacy and social ecology. Also, she refutes the notion that facilitation is value-neutral and

encourages facilitators to embrace the emancipatory challenge of co-creating a more peaceful, sustainable world.

Part two also includes valuable contributions from colleagues Hamish Brown and Stephen Thorpe, who also work with Zenergy, a facilitation and facilitator education organisation based in Auckland, New Zealand. In chapter five, Hamish Brown provides a discussion about the overlaps and distinctions between group facilitation and therapeutic groupwork. This clarification is important because, as evidenced by my own research (Thomas, 2007), some emerging facilitators find the line between facilitator training and group psychotherapy blurry. Thorpe’s discussion of online facilitation (chapter six) is essential reading given the increasing use of the Internet. Although, some traditional facilitators will cringe at the rise of on-line facilitation, society’s obsession with all things on-line shows no sign of abating. Thorpe considers the purpose, scope and issues relevant to on-line facilitation. Finally, in a nice lead-in to part three of the book, chapter seven focuses on mapping the field of facilitation and summarises some of the historical roots that have shaped the field.

Part three of the book is focused on facilitator education theory and processes. In chapter one of this section Hunter outlines the ‘whole person’ approach to facilitator education, which is one of the hallmarks of Zenergy’s facilitation training programs. Chapter two, provides a sample program that could be used with a group of peers to develop facilitation capabilities through experiential learning. The process described appears to be based on Hunter’s experience running numerous Zenergy facilitation training programs and several chapters of the book form the theoretical basis for different sections of the described program. The chapter on facilitation processes (chapter three) includes 52 processes, greatly expanded from the first edition, which only contained 14. The processes described are useful for both facilitators and facilitator educators alike.

I think it is reasonable to sometimes question whether second editions of books are warranted, but in this case I think Hunter has done an excellent job of revising previous chapters, including new material, improving the overall presentation, and highlighting recent developments and current issues. One of my only criticisms is that the numbering of each chapter

restarts in each part. This may be a bit confusing for a course textbook and I don't understand the reason for doing this.

In summary, current and aspiring facilitators alike will find the book useful to their development. For those involved in the delivery of facilitator education, or the mentoring of emerging facilitators, the book is a valuable resource. For me, the best feature of Hunter's writing is that she demonstrates an extensive knowledge of the facilitation field and its literature. Readers can benefit from Hunter's experience and wisdom gained through her postgraduate studies, her co-authorship of four previous books, her experience as a facilitator educator, and her contributions to the Australian Facilitator's Network (<http://www.facilitators.net.au>) and the International Association of Facilitators (<http://www.iaf-world.org>).

REFERENCES

- Hunter, D., Bailey, A., & Taylor, B. (1995). *The art of facilitation*. Auckland, New Zealand: Tandem Press.
- Thomas, G. J. (2007). *A study of the theories and practices of facilitator educators*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

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