



Facilitation insights



Facilitation insights — a free ebooklet on some tips and techniques for group facilitation

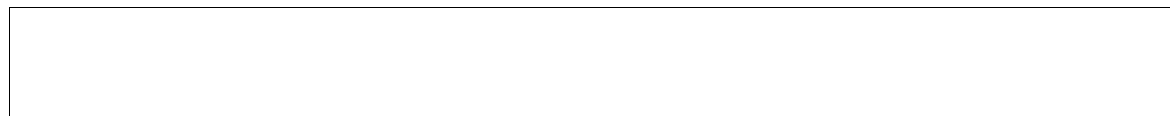
Prepared by Bob Dick



I offer this ebook as a “taster” for two forthcoming facilitation workshops:

Foundations of facilitation 16-17 May 2019
<http://www.aral.com.au/wshops/wsff.html>

Advanced facilitation 18-19 July 2019
<http://www.aral.com.au/wshops/wsaf.html>



I prepared this brief document to be read slowly and thoughtfully. I don't expect you to agree with everything here. That's not my aim. Whether or not you agree, I think the issues and situations I describe are worth your thoughtful consideration.

That may lead you to **your own** insights. They will be more valuable than any insights I can convey to you.

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Over the years I learned to facilitate by facilitating, by co-facilitating, and by being facilitated. In all of this, one of the important insights for me was this ...

if I was successful in creating a **sense of community** among participants

and if I was able to include myself in that community

and the community shared responsibility for learning and enjoyment ...

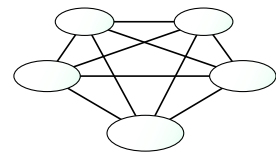
everything else about the facilitation became easier.

This is now an early priority. For instance, in a two-day workshop it is what the participants and I attend to on our first morning. We address such issues as —

- Who are we, individually and collectively? What do we bring to this endeavour?
- Why are we here? What is our purpose? What outcomes do we want?
- What topics will we explore? What processes will we use to do so?
- How will we share responsibility for those outcomes and processes? How will we keep track of how we're going?
- If relevant, who else has a stake in what we are doing? How will we take their legitimate views and needs into account?

I've decided that the most important parts of this are twofold.:

- In a large group, we disclose enough of ourselves as real people to *begin* to build a real sense of community.
- Then in a small group (or in several small groups) we experience each other as real, complex human beings.



For the second of these there are several processes that can be used. (There's an example later.) All of them legitimise high levels of self-disclosure. It is careful process design and instruction that achieves this.

(For groups who are initially sceptical, it also seems to be important that the relevance of the activity to the group purpose is understood.)

This, for me, was a **key insight**. After a brief detour, other insights follow ...

Process and content

A brief detour ... If you are reading this you probably understand the distinction between **process** and **content**. Just in case, let me clarify what **process** and **content** mean to me. The following material depends on that distinction.

Briefly, the content is **what** we discuss. The process is **how** we discuss it.

Imagine, for example, that you're taking part in a typical unstructured meeting. How does it happen? Perhaps you and some colleagues are sitting around a table grappling with a decision that has to be made.

How would you describe the process used? And who is paying attention to it?

Or perhaps it's a more formal meeting. There's a chairperson at the front of the room. The rest of you are seated in rows, facing the front.

What's *this* process? Who is paying attention to it? How well does it work?

Or perhaps you and some colleagues are using some established process such as SWOT analysis. The **process** may be something like this ...

- 1 You all choose a social unit — team, section, organisation, etc. — for analysis
- 2 Working together, you and your colleagues identify and record the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats that the social unit faces
- 3 You and your colleagues agree on some actions you will take as a result.

There may be someone who facilitates — who guides you through the steps.

The **content** consists of the chosen social unit, the information recorded under the four SWOT categories, and the actions that are decided. It may also include any other information shared as you work through the steps.

Take a moment to consider the three examples above. What conclusions about process would **you** draw from their similarities and differences?

Paying attention to the process

For me another important **insight** was about process. It has several pieces to it ...

This page is headed “Paying attention to the process”. But it seemed (and seems) to me that

most of the time, most people *don't* pay attention to process

— at least, not consciously. They give their conscious attention to the content.

Habit guides the process, and for the most part it does this unconsciously.

Sometimes (often?) that doesn't work very well. For instance, it is my experience that in meetings, unstructured discussion is the most common process used. Yet I observe that quite often it isn't very effective.

Sometimes, someone takes responsibility for the process. That helps. Is that person experienced at facilitating the process? If so, so much the better.

Deliberate process facilitation is an improvement over unstructured discussion.

Sometimes the person providing the facilitation guides us through a structured process. For example they may use something like a SWOT analysis to help with decisions about what deserves attention.

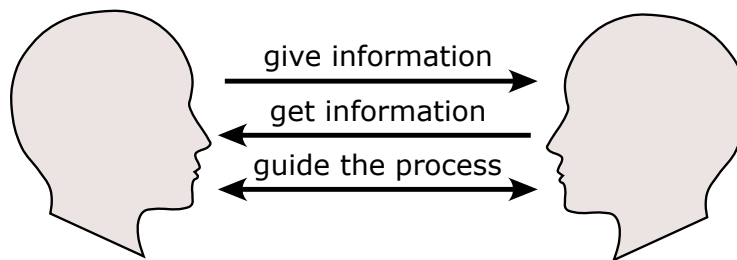
And an insight occurred to me. A process like SWOT *provides some of the facilitation*. SWOT analysis is simple. If we, the participants, can agree on its use and are familiar with it we don't really need someone else to facilitate.

If there is an appointed facilitator, SWOT still provided some of the facilitation. That frees the facilitator to pay attention to what is actually happening.

That was a useful insight for the novice that I was. **A good process provides some of the facilitation**. The process can be by recipe. Or it can be designed to fit the situation. The person facilitating uses **communication skills** to do so.

To facilitate a process I communicate information about the process.

Therefore, **communication is crucial**. I think of communication as a broad set of skills. They fall into three general categories:



Re-ordered by priority, they are ...

- 1 **Guide the process:** The highest priority is to provide a process that helps participants to reach the outcomes that they desire.
- 2 **Get information:** To guide the process well, I must collect good information on what the participants want. So that is the second priority.
- 3 **Give information:** In getting information and guiding the process I will give information in the form of instructions and explanations and the like. Although still very important, that's third priority.

Facilitation is about guiding the process. Much of the rest of this document is about some ideas that I've found helpful in guiding the process.

The next page presents a model that helpful in thinking about how to listen.

Briefly, here are three considerations when I plan how to **give information**:

- I **invite** the participants into a discussion or exchange of information. I try to be clear that a core goal consists of mutually-satisfying outcomes for all
- I am clear about what I **want to say**. I describe the purpose of the activity. I provide any necessary context. I express — and check — my assumptions
- I am specific about **evidence** relevant to purpose, context or assumptions.

Then, importantly, I encourage everyone to **listen** to the responses ...

A key communication and facilitation skill is: **listening for understanding**

When people think they are “listening” they may instead be ...

- pretending to listen, while they plan what to say when it’s their turn or
- listening for ammunition, that they can use to press their own argument or
- temporarily putting aside their own concerns — and genuinely, with curiosity, trying to understand what it is really like for the person who is speaking.

I suspect you agree that the third approach gives us the best chance of getting good outcomes — for all of us. Especially if all of us practise it.

Listening — really listening for understanding — is **active**. I have to work at it. It takes effort to put aside my own concerns for the moment. It can be hard to give the other person **all** of my attention. To really understand what they are saying I have to be alert and skillful. I have to “read between the lines”. I have to listen with eyes as well as ears, with intense curiosity, and with empathy.

I think of listening as having four elements (though three or two can be enough):

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L isten | for understanding, with eyes and ears — what is the “real message”, both stated and implied |
| A cknowledge | what I have understood — restate it in my own words; label it as my understanding, not as fact |
| C heck | that I have understood by making it as easy as possible for the other person to correct or challenge me |
| E nquire | for more information to increase my understanding. |

I find it is better to omit enquiry if the other person is upset. When they are no longer upset I can then use it to speed up the process (though I can do without it).

Acknowledgement is the element that has the most effect. It removes misunderstanding. It builds relationships. It lets me know how successfully I’ve understood. I say it in my own words so people know that I *have* understood.

(The *way* I acknowledge may remove the need for the “Check” component.)

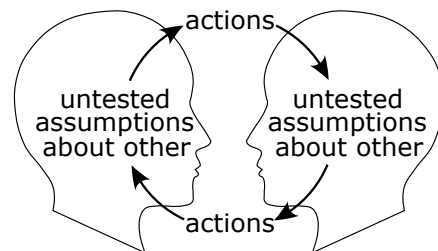
With these elements in place I’m almost ready to **facilitate the process**

But first, another important **insight** — powerful especially when used rarely

Take a moment to recall a recent difficult conversation. As you do so, notice what you *thought* but didn't *say*. Notice the assumptions that you were making about the other person, especially about their motives.

Work by Chris Argyris shows that, often ...

- we form assumptions about others, especially about their motives
- we don't check our assumptions for accuracy
- we act on them as if they were factual
- and in response the other person forms assumptions about us and our motives.



The other person is also likely to treat *their* assumptions as factual, and to act on them. Sometimes, they escalate the actions that began the interaction. They and we become locked into a mutual self-fulfilling prophecy, as diagrammed above.

What creates and fuels self-fulfilling prophecies? **Acting on untested assumptions**, especially assumptions about each other's motives.

In facilitating, is it possible to reduce the danger (for us and others) of forming untested assumptions? Yes, to some extent — by being transparent about our own assumptions and motives ...

"I think some of you look puzzled or uncertain. Though I may be mistaken, I suspect that I wasn't clear enough with my instructions for some of you. So let me say it again, in more detail, with a better explanation."

What about our own assumptions? We can test them by voicing them and inviting others to correct us when we are mistaken.

"[With compassionate non-verbals] Fred, I notice you spend a lot of time looking at your phone, or out the window. I'm curious. I'm just guessing, but I wonder if perhaps this material isn't relevant for you, or if for some reason you'd prefer not to be here. I'd like to understand your situation, so we can do something about it if possible."

A caution ... It's counter-cultural to voice our assumptions about other people's motives. So it's for use sparingly, when necessary.

Now we're ready to return to our exploration of **insights about process** ...

Here's a model that I use to think about how to guide the process

The model derives its value from four questions about the nature of people —

Are we individuals who like to succeed and excel — who put effort into doing as well as we can?

Are we individuals who place our own welfare above that of all others?

Are we social beings who contribute to cooperative efforts that benefit all?

Are we social beings who conform to (what we think are) social conventions rather than risk offending others?

I assume that all four statements are true of most of us at least some of the time. They are hard to escape. They are the result of individual and social impulses that have been hardwired into us by many thousands of years of evolution.

We are individuals. We inherited, from those who preceded us, a strong commitment to our own survival.

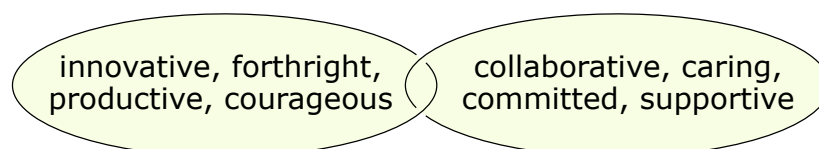
We are social beings. Our forebears survived because they found there was strength and survival in collaboration.

Our socialisation further builds on this hardwiring through instruction and imitation. It may emphasise the individual or the social dimensions of behaviour.

From our earliest years we are praised for excelling, or perhaps for winning.

From our earliest years we are praised for being considerate of others.

By birth and by upbringing we are individuals. And we are social beings. We are *homo duplex*, as Anton Zijderveld (in *The abstract society*. Pelican, 1974 — after Emile Durkheim) named us. When facilitating, part of my task is to elicit the *constructive* form of individualism and sociality — to combine the best of both:



With good facilitation I can elicit such a combination of qualities. I can encourage the best of individual *and* social attributes. The individual attributes can be directed towards collective goals. The social attributes can encourage and celebrate individual contributions towards relationships, and collective goals.

These are ideas that help me choose or modify or design processes ...

Especially in my early experience, much of my facilitation was of

meetings, decision making, and problem solving

Did it work? Often I couldn't tell. The meetings were to *decide* what to do. The *doing* happened later. And more often than not, I wasn't there later.

I discovered ways to increase the chances that the action would happen. That was another insight: how to prepare and facilitate for good outcomes. Meet "FIDO".

Feelings

- that are ...
- positive about self, outcomes, process, and others
 - and not strongly negative about anything

allow the exchange of

Information,

- which if ...
- specific, adequate, accurate, relevant, and
 - understood and accepted by all

helps to make effective

Decisions.

- If these ...
- have the commitment of those affected,
 - specify who will do what by when, and
 - include monitoring and coordination

then the desired

Outcomes

are more likely to be achieved

In design, I work upwards: what outcomes, and therefore what decisions? What information is required if those decisions are to be made? How can the information be shared? How can I modify my process to improve feelings.

In facilitation I work downward ... Elicit good feelings. Facilitate the sharing and understanding of information. Analyse the information to make decisions. Clarify outcomes, and the actions required to achieve them: who, what, when.

For each element of FIDO there are other specific strategies ...

Here, for each element of FIDO, are just a few (of many possible) examples of what I can do —

- Feelings**
- Help people to relate to each other *person to person*
 - Ask participants to abandon rank and status temporarily
 - Involve participants in establishing a *common purpose*
 - Help to ensure that everyone's views are honoured
 - If negative feelings become aroused, stop and resolve them.
- Information**
- At each stage of information exchange, first allow participants thinking time to collect their thoughts
 - In large groups, perhaps allow time for sharing in small groups before collecting information in the large group
 - If so, refine information further in the small groups
 - On each issue, hear from everyone who wishes to speak
 - In the large group, enhance listening by giving listeners a relevant task — such as listening for themes, for example
 - Collect information publicly, in the words of the participants, on flipchart or whiteboard, etc.
 - If shared information *isn't* being understood, assume that some of the strategies under "Feelings" need revisiting.
- When meetings are virtual — by phone or internet — then all of the above becomes even more important. Also, more structured facilitation is required. I address this a little later.
- Decisions**
- This is often where structured processes may be most valuable.
- If you can keep it playful it will be less onerous
 - Aim for dialectic processes (there's an example soon); ask people to listen and learn, not to debate.
 - Use voting (especially multi-voting) to start the discussion; use it to make decisions only when there is near-consensus.
- Outcomes**
- The important outcomes happen **after** the meeting. Therefore, **commitment on actions** is important **within** the meeting.
- Within the meeting, decide how to action the decisions so that they happen. Decide who will do what by when.
 - Commitment to the actions is as important as the quality of the actions. Therefore, the *who* has to be someone present who will commit to the action — and wants it to succeed.
 - Agree on how the commitments will be monitored.

Some elements of these suggestions are further addressed in following pages.

For a positive culture I first build community and relationships

I can use appreciative interviews for this. In pairs, participants interview each other about the strengths of the social unit or organisation. This involves everyone and lifts energy at the start of a change program, for example.

Below is a variation I sometimes use near the beginning of workshops and task groups. In pairs, participants take their turn in two roles, respondent and coach.

Respondents express genuine optimism and enthusiasm so that their partners experience them as genuine and real. Undue modesty is unhelpful.

Coaches display positive expectations as they elicit a positive story from the respondent, and the qualities of the respondent that contributed to the story.

Here's an example of the instructions I might give to "coaches" at a workshop —

| Your role as coach | Examples (<i>substitute your own words</i>) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Warm the person to the task by asking them to <i>think of their achievements</i> . Be a good listener. Celebrate their achievements with them. Listen well. Be enthusiastic. | <i>"Think back over your life so far. Think of times when it went really well for you and you achieved a lot. In a brief sentence for each, what were some of those times?"</i> |
| 2 Ask them to <i>choose one</i> of these times when they felt effective, and joyful, and "in the moment". Ask them to <i>tell you the story</i> of what happened. Keep them talking. <i>Enjoy their story</i> . | <i>"Choose one of those times when you felt successful and effective, in control, joyful, living in the moment. ... Tell me about it all — what happened? How did it take place? ..."</i> |
| 3 Elicit from them the <i>personal qualities</i> that helped their success. Don't allow modesty. Insist, warmly, on hearing <i>their own</i> contribution to success. | <i>"What did it feel like? What was it about you and what you did that contributed to the success? What qualities and talents of yours assisted success?"</i> |
| 4 Orient to the future. Ask what they hope to achieve with those qualities. Encourage aspiration and optimism. | <i>"How could you use those talents, those qualities, those skills, to help you to be what you want to be in the future?"</i> |
| 5 Bring them back to the present workshop (etc.). How will they use their talents to achieve value for themselves from the workshop. | <i>"What do you wish to achieve from this workshop? How can you use your skills and talent to make the workshop a truly valuable experience for yourself?"</i> |
| 6 Ask them what they can do in the workshop (etc.) to help make it valuable for other participants too. | <i>"How are you going to use the same talents to make the workshop memorable and valuable for the other participants?"</i> |

Share results (in general terms) of items 5 and 6 in the whole group.

At all stages **dialectic processes** are a valuable alternative to the more common adversarial and consensual processes. Here are the three process styles ...

Adversarial (win/lose). Only one person wins; others lose.

Actions?: Do whatever it takes to win. *"That's not correct. The facts are ..."*

Examples: debate; some negotiation styles. Most politics and law. Much industrial relations. ("Compromise" is very often partial win / partial win.)



What happens?: People exchange selective information to support their own case. Relationships may or may not be close — they may remain formal. Many people are comfortable with this style of relating. However, outcomes may be disappointing except for one person, and sometimes eventually for all.

Consensual (Easy win/win). The participants agree on (some) goals.

Actions?: First identify areas of agreement and then build on that agreement. *"Yes, I agree with that"* (sometimes whether you do or not).

Examples: Many visioning or ideal-seeking exercises



What happens?: If there are genuine shared goals and no "burning issues" the effect can often be beneficial. But useful dissent may be suppressed.

Dialectic (tough win/win). Agreement is crafted from disagreement.

Actions?: Pool information, explore disagreements, make collective decisions. *"That's interesting. I have a different view. I'd really like to understand your position."*

- honest information, directly communicated
- vigorously seeking out different views, opinions and information
- striving to understand what others say, with genuine curiosity
- assume that disagreement signals that understanding is inadequate.



Examples: The delphi process; sociocratic consent process; Chris Argyris's "Model II" communication; Rosenberg's "non-violent communication"; some approaches to conflict management.

What happens?: *Dissent is welcomed* because it can lead to deeper understanding. *Relationships are valued* and eventually enhanced (though perhaps not at first unless the communication is skilful). Decision-making and performance improve.

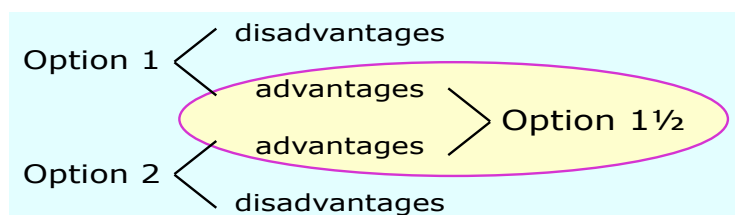
In effect, this style leads to a process of **mutual education**. Participants deepen their understanding by learning from one another.

The next page describes an example of a dialectic process ...

Option 1½ — an example of a dialectic technique

Suppose there are two polarised views. Option 1½ offers the possibility of developing a creative, mutually-satisfying “best of both worlds” alternative.

The two parties work *collaboratively*. They develop an alternative with (most of) the advantages of both options and none (or few) of the disadvantages.



As necessary, precede the process by goal setting (or visioning) and follow by agreeing who will carry out the actions.

Here, in more detail, is a process you could use:

-
- Beforehand, if desirable, use a goal-setting or visioning technique to agree on the desired outcomes from the process.
1. Working separately, the two parties (individuals or groups) define their preferred positions — option 1 and option 2.
 2. Form mixed groups. Working together **cooperatively**, each group identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each option. In their discussion, each person is encouraged to give most attention to the **disadvantages** of their own preferred option and the **advantages** of the other option.
 3. Still working together **cooperatively**, they put together an option that includes as many as possible of the advantages of both previous options, while avoiding as many as possible of the disadvantages.
 4. Still working together **cooperatively**, they agree on what has to be done if the new option is to be successfully implemented.
- (If you used subgroups, collate suggestions in the whole group and have the whole group choose the preferred option. Sometimes suggestions may be combined.)
- At the conclusion of the activity, identify, and document, who agrees to carry out the actions, and by when.
-

You will notice how the process itself encourages cooperative work. How well this is achieved can be improved by careful instructions. It will also depend on the sense of community and quality of relationships developed beforehand.

Sometimes **multi-voting** will identify priorities within a list of items. Here is a typical multi-voting process that I often use ...

Imagine that I've collected a list of possible items for attention. I've done it well. The participants understood the nature and purpose of the list, and enough of its context. I gave everyone time to think. From each person I then collected their highest priority item that wasn't already on the list. I captured each item in their own words. If necessary I went around the group several times, so that all important items were recorded.

For reasons that will become apparent, I numbered each item. I'd now like to reach collective agreement on item priorities. Suppose there are 15 items.

My instructions to the participants might then be as follows ...

Working individually, take a moment to read through the 15 items. Note which items you believe are the most important.

*Now from the items that **other** people contributed, choose the five most important items. Write down their numbers. You will later give each of these items 2 votes. [5 items are one third of the list — in other words, divide list length by 3]*

From the remaining items, choose another 5. This time, your choices may include items you contributed, if you wish. Write these down separately from the previous five. You will give each of these items 1 vote.

I will now read out each item, including its number, in turn. If it's an item in your first group of five, give it two votes by holding up two hands. If it's from your second group of five, indicate one vote by holding up one hand.

For each item I count the number of hands. I write the count in the margin next to the item. (If the group is small I may ask people to place one or two ticks against their chosen items.)

A typical result is usually something like this ... A small number of items attract a large number of votes. There may then be a gap in the number of votes between the top items and a middle cluster. Some other items may have few or no votes.

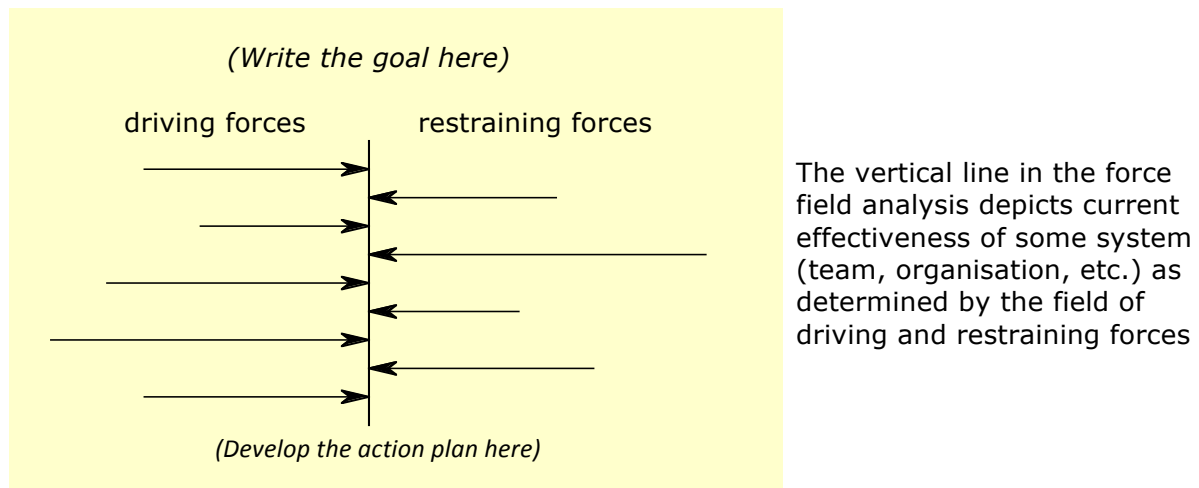
It is likely that everyone, or almost everyone, voted for the most-voted items. If so, it is usually easy to facilitate a process to decide what to do about those items.

If not, I facilitate a discussion about what the voting patterns mean.

In partial summary so far, here's a process I like a lot — **force field analysis**

At heart it's a diagnostic technique for situation analysis. Especially suited to group use, it can also be used by individuals. It captures the situation graphically in a way that assists understanding and planning for change.

It works best when preceded by goal setting and followed by action planning. Here's a way of picturing it:



Working with those who are most affected by the situation, and who can most affect it, you can use this 5-step process:

- 1 Describe the situation as a *common goal*. Write this at the top of chart paper or whiteboard. Draw a vertical line centrally. It represents present effectiveness. (You can also substitute a *visioning or goal-setting* process for step 1.)
- 2 Generate a list of "*restraining forces*" — anything that presently *hinders* the situation from being better or more effective than it is. Show these as arrows to the right of the "present effectiveness" line, pushing effectiveness back. Use the length of the arrow to indicate the strength of the force.
- 3 Generate a list of "*driving forces*" on the left — anything that presently *helps* the situation to be as good as it is. Length again indicates strength.
- 4 Of the forces listed, identify the most promising forces for bringing about improvement. Choose the forces that are both *important* and *changeable*. Sometimes reducing or elimination negative forces will produce more change than adding to or increasing positive forces (which may generate pushback).
- 5 Develop an action plan. Decide *who* can do *what* by *when* to implement the actions.
You can also substitute a more detailed *action planning process* for step 5.

Another insight, ultimately even more important than the prior insights —

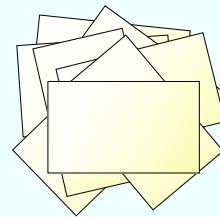
What if the process isn't working? Then I stop and fix it!

I do it collaboratively, with responsibility for both diagnosis and remedy shared with all the participants.

I want process to be a shared responsibility. If I'm unsure if the process is working or not, I check it out with the participants.

Sometimes that responsibility *isn't* fully shared. For instance, some participants may seem to be undermining the process. When that happens, here's a "last resort" process to engage participants in diagnosis and remedy.

Probe cards:



I guide the participants through these steps. I ...

- 1 call a halt to the proceedings
- 2 distribute 125mm x 75 mm (5" x 3") system cards, one per participant
- 3 ask each participant to write a brief single legible sentence about "*what you think has been happening within the group in the past 15 (etc.) minutes*"
- 4 ask them to place their completed card face down in the middle of the group
- 5 ask participants to pick up a card other than their own
- 6 ask participants, in turn, to read out their card as if it were their own and they believed it ...
... while all other participants listen for common themes
- 7 ask participants in turn to identify the themes they heard
- 8 facilitate a discussion on what is happening — what the themes indicate
- 9 facilitate a discussion on what we, individually and collectively, can do to improve the process

and finally ...

- 10 individually and collectively we implement our intended improvements.

Suppose you're a participant, not the facilitator. Next is a process you can use ...

Escalating interventions is a process that slowly engages participants in paying more attention to the process, and then taking more responsibility for it. I first developed it in response to the question: “How can I intervene successfully when I’m not the facilitator”. (It can be used when you’re facilitating, too.)

The chances of success increase if you ...

- *stick to process*: limit your intervention to *how* the group is working
- *start low key and natural*, adding to your intervention each time you intervene
- *consult and involve the group* rather than take responsibility for the intervention.

Here’s what it might look like. You don’t have to go through all steps unless it’s appropriate. The first two steps are usually desirable. However many steps there are, at each step you improve the quality of your information and the depth of your suggested intervention using the structure **inform .. suggest .. ask ...**

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | | ask |
| Ask a simple and natural question that will draw other participants’ attention to the process. An example: <i>Do you think we’re on track?</i> | | |
| 2 | inform ask | |
| If that fails, collect more process information. Then, when you believe you have enough, provide the information and ask if the group wishes to do anything about it: e.g. <i>That’s the third time we’ve sidestepped that issue. Who thinks we should address it?</i> | | |
| 3 | inform suggest minor procedure ask | |
| Still no response? Collect more information. Devise a better way of working. (Minor procedures don’t require pausing the discussion.) <i>That’s the fourth time. What say we take it in turns to speak? Who agrees?</i> | | |
| 4 | inform suggest major procedure ask | |
| Still not? Try again, substituting a major procedure — one that does pause the discussion: <i>There’s that issue yet again. Perhaps we’re not clear what we’re trying to achieve. I’d like to revisit our purpose. Who is willing to do so?</i> | | |
| 5 | inform suggest analysing process ask | |
| Failed again? Perhaps it’s time to analyse group process: <i>It don’t think we’re on track yet. How about we each in turn say what we think is happening here. Who’s willing to start?</i> | | |
| 6 | inform suggest recruiting help ask | |
| Again? Perhaps there is someone (present or not present) who can help: <i>I’m getting really discouraged. Melanie, you have meeting skills. Will you guide us? Does anyone object to that?</i> | | |

That still didn’t work? Perhaps it’s time to ask yourself if doing something else would be a better use of your time.

If you *are* facilitating, you can treat the six steps as alternative interventions.

Finally, **transitions**. Here's an insight that can be applied widely —

(I developed these jointly with my friend and colleague Tim Dalmau)

When we realised the value of **paying attention to transitions**, a number of valuable changes became possible. Here are some of them ...

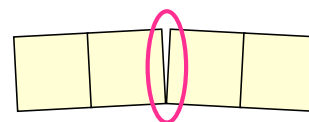
In facilitating any activity, **beginnings and endings** are key transitions — from and to the outside world.

Beginnings There's little point in beginning if people aren't fully present. I help them to be alert and engaged, and then start. Also, how I start is often how I continue. I try to start congruently.

Endings There's little point in an activity that has no influence on the outside world. I try to help people to prepare for the change, and to plan how they will use what they have learned.

Transitions are **rich in information**. Between activities, between speakers, between sentences, at pauses — at these points there is often an increase in participants' non-verbals. I can lift my attention and scan the group at these points. If I do so I often pick up valuable information, perhaps about attitudes.

Transitions are **where processes fall apart**. The pieces may be well practised. Some of the transitions between pieces may be new. If I anticipate a possible break I may prepare myself to remedy the situation.



It's important that by the end of module ***n*** (whatever it is) the preconditions for the next module (***n+1***) are in place. If I pay attention to these preconditions during the earlier module I can often achieve a more seamless transition to the later module. If necessary I can insert a piece to improve the seam.

At breaks — tea, lunch, overnight — momentum can be lost and processes can become hard to facilitate. I can **build a bridge** across the break by letting people know what happens after the break. Perhaps I can give them some homework.

That's all for now. I wish you well in making use of any of these insights.



Bob Dick is an independent scholar, coach, and occasional academic. He facilitates learning, and community and organisational change. A practitioner and an academic for over 45 years, he enjoys both enormously and continues to work in both fields. In both he uses concepts and processes from action research, action learning, action science, narrative, facilitation, and community and organisation development to help people (including himself), teams, organisations and communities to improve their work, learning and life.

You can access his website, full of useful resources, at <http://www.aral.com.au> and his public current workshop program at <http://www.aral.com.au/wshops/>

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