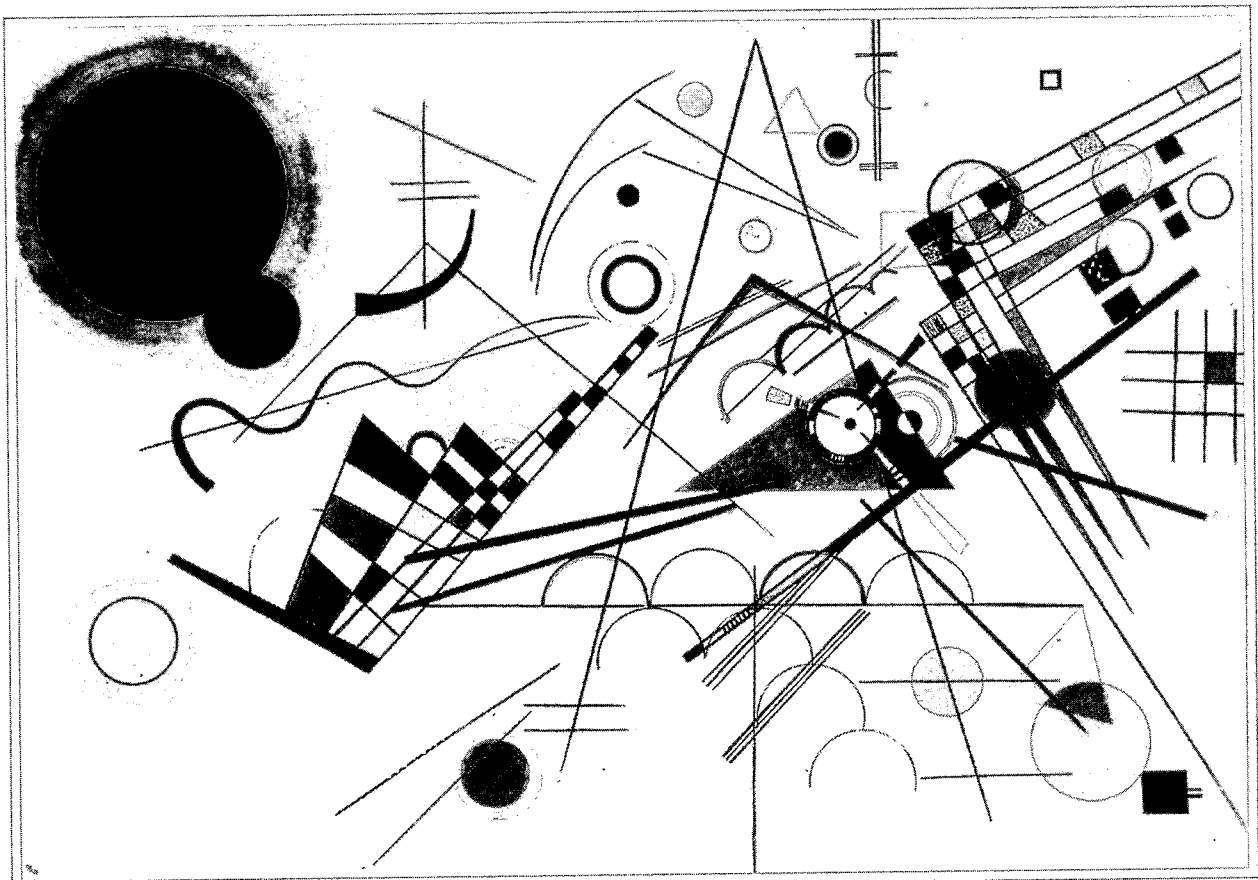


EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

Dynamic Facilitation

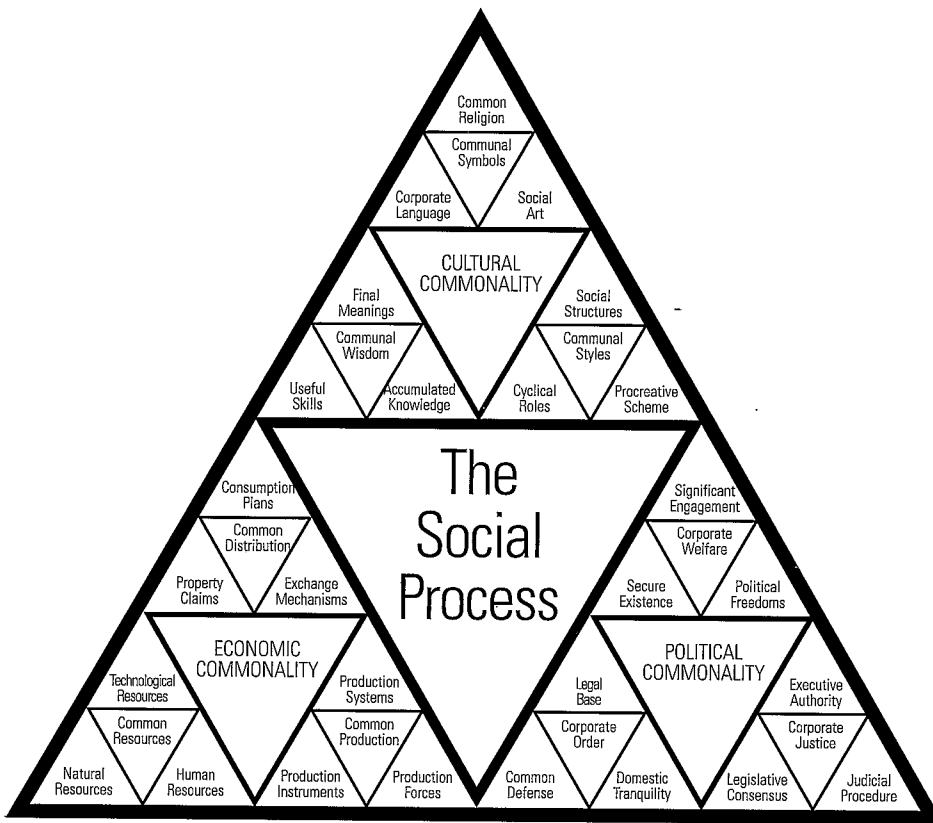
Facilitation is not a collection of group techniques. At a deeper level, facilitation gives birth to new public vitality. It is about the rapid change of society.



Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VIII*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 140 x 201 cm. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

INSIDE:

**1996
ICA Facilitation Skills
Training Catalogue**



These Social Process triangles, developed by ICA, form a map of the parts of society. They show how the economic, political and cultural processes of society are meant to work with each other to care for the whole society.

Facilitating Social Change

DUNCAN HOLMES

Facilitation is one of the buzz words of the '90s. It's trendy, and its meaning is highly flexible—it means about as many different things as there are people. To some, it means chairing a meeting; to others, negotiating or mediating; to some, getting a group to accept a decision; to still others, simply organizing who is going to talk next. In one way, facilitation is the quick fix of the '90s. It's the fashion to say, "Let's get a facilitator," just as it's the fashion for politicians to have a media consultant or spin doctor. But the popularity of facilitation is related to something much deeper in society.

To begin, I'd like us to make a quick review of four questionable trends of our social situation.

Over-reliance on Government Safety Nets

For a long time we have been in a mode of asking and receiving. When faced with a money shortage, our habit is to put out our hand so that the government or someone else can dish it out to us. We are preoccupied with money, money, money, debt, more debt, and mostly debt, and the banks have loved it. We have heard a great deal about bank failures and the deficit, but the most massive debt has been piled up by the consumers of bank loans and credit cards. For a long time, consumerism has been the biggest force at work, but today there are forces that are making us all re-evaluate the wisdom of consumerism.

Isolation versus Community

There is a pronounced movement away from community towards isolationism. This sovereignty trend, where people want separation rather than collaboration or alliances, is rampant across the world. It is not difficult for some people to project a movement from sovereign isolated provinces to sovereign isolated regions to sovereign isolated walled communities with security guards at the entrance to keep everyone else out. Finally we come to the sovereign isolated family sitting in front of their sovereign TV set or multimedia computer. How much isolation can the world stand? The trend towards privacy and "cocooning" has reached its zenith and local communities are suffering from it.

Confrontational Ideology

We see more and more confrontation as social crises increase and opposing camps confront each other on any number of issues. One camp opposes another. Each camp stands on some unshakable ideology—"My solution is the only right one, and I'm prepared to fight to the finish on it." Many people are unaware that Einstein's relativity banished ideology from the face of the earth, and that Heisenberg's quantum physics almost banished absolute certainty. But most people do not have access to strong enough images to counter ideological stances.

Several years ago the city of Buffalo was strongly divided by a confrontation between the ProChoice and the ProLife sides of the abortion issue. The Catholic Church brought in a team to work with people on both sides of the issue. They had everyone talk about the events that

brought them to decide to be ProChoice on the one hand or ProLife on the other. They shared the different thinking and experiences that had brought them to their current standing point. By the end of their time together, some arch enemies had become best friends—they had discovered the commonness in their experiences and reactions. Moving into a non-confrontational stance made a world of difference. There was tremendous healing as people began to understand that those on both sides of the issue were authentic and deep persons who cared even as they themselves did. That healing event did not make big headlines—situations like this usually don't—and is not repeated often, so the dichotomy of confrontation continues.

We are often asked how we deal with divisions and disputes that are surfacing in an organization. We find that, when people have an opportunity to listen to each other and be heard, many of the divisions and disputes disappear or are placed in a different perspective. When each person is heard and understood, the confrontation often disappears.

Cost Cutting Mentality

Cost-cutting and budget trimming, reengineering and downsizing is the current trend in government and organizations. While we all understand the importance of living within our means and making a profit, the current emphasis is on reducing the pain as quickly as possible, all at once, rather than dealing comprehensively with the root issue. Instead of devising ways for whole groups to decide together about implementing budgets, those charged with administration or governing issue simple fiat. Some people see no alternative to a few deciding for the many. Why do people who should know better operate this way? Since they have neither the tools nor the precedents for making large group decisions, they fall back on the only operating mode they know—issuing orders.

The public reacts the only way it knows—angry demonstrations. We see the anger and do not take the time to examine the real dysfunction in our system behind these reactions. We see other kinds of responses—despair or apathy—in comments like, “There’s nothing I can do, anyway, since someone else is pulling the strings.” Many people don’t have the tools for turning around these unhelpful kinds of reactions. Tools do exist, however, that enable groups to look more deeply at what is happening to society and to build creative solutions to the crisis. These tools can work when there is a consensus, but operating by consensus is

difficult, though possible—so most people don’t even believe in it.

There are places where innovative work is being done. Some organizations are turning their culture upside down, or inside out, to achieve high levels of consensus. This involves a commitment to a long-term, complex, integrated process. Approaches such as the learning organization and participatory methods are being used effectively in many of these organizations.

There is an increasing awareness that as much as we don’t like change, society needs it, especially that kind of change that goes to the very core of our daily lives. We need change that is driven not only by economic reality, but by economic, political and cultural catalysts. We need change that allows people to look from a big picture understanding toward their new vision, their values and their communities, and allows them to make decisions proactively about the short and long term.

Facilitation Can Change the Prevailing Culture

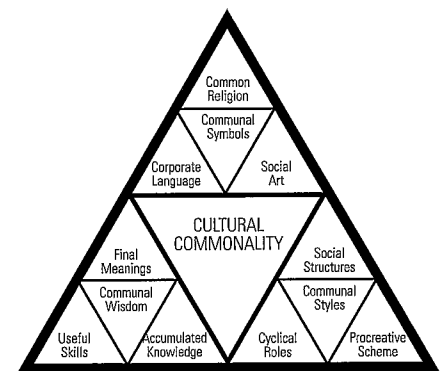
Given this situation, what is the edge of facilitation? Facilitation is about changing society and its culture. Depth change only happens when the cultural fabric changes. But changing culture involves looking at the *wisdom, styles and symbols* of our lives together (refer to triangle). When people first consider facilitation training, they come looking for *useful skills*. They soon move to a different level of thinking when they realize our facilitation skills are based on the *accumulated knowledge* from years of involvement with change. On a still deeper level, facilitation is based on learning styles, motivational theory, education principles, and community development principles. Facilitation is much, much more than a new bag of tools, or a new management arrow in one’s professional quiver; it is a life skill. Finally, we reach a different understanding when we get beneath the wisdom to what the discipline says about life. The decision to facilitate is a decision about a new style of life.

Facilitation Creates Significant Engagement

Now, let’s look at facilitation from the political, or decision-making aspect of the social process. And here I want to focus on people’s significant engagement. You can see that facilitation is about shifting people’s images so they can find meaningful involvement. Change happens when people change the images they operate from. Many people in the workplace, for example, operate from quite disempowering stances: “I can’t wait until Friday”; “I am

over-stretched beyond the limit”; “I don’t make any difference in this place”; “I hope I’m not being shafted”. We have all heard them, and, at times, stood in those stances ourselves. I know a university professor who made the extraordinary statement, “I don’t believe that a single human being enjoys the job he or she is in.” But it doesn’t have to be this way. When workplaces believe in the principle of participation, then each good participatory experience helps participants be significantly engaged.

At the beginning of four days of training with one organization, a secretary said with some conviction, “I don’t understand why I am here at all, since I make not the slightest decision, and have not the slightest impact on the organization.” But by the end of the four days she understood her role in a new way and volunteered to help lead the administration team meetings. In our next session four months later, another person was about to be laid off. Normally such a person would sit there detached and not involved in the planning. However, this person showed up to plan the next five years, saying, “I know I have a role to play in this: I’m still concerned with the future of the organization even though I won’t be here three weeks from now.”



Another client runs a department under a mandate to close shop in five years. The mandate is public knowledge, so you can easily imagine the high resistance. In working with the staff, we focused on shifting the department’s image from being victim of this enforced shutdown to looking at the significant role they can play. We involved them in looking at the history of the department and the current trends in society. We pulled out from them how their engagement in the process over the next five years could be significant. Their victim image hit the dust; they saw that they could affect the outcome. They went ahead to build in the caring structures that would help them through the transition, and—bingo!—resistance became motivation to move into the future.

Facilitation is about Community Building

Most of us play roles in various communities we are part of and operate out of a certain style that seems natural to us. But facilitation can offer us new patterns and ways of relating. Every facilitation situation demonstrates to individuals how their own ideas and uniqueness can be held in the larger picture.

One friend asked me to do a three-hour training in our Focused Conversation Method so the staff in his company would learn ways to communicate that would get beyond the suspicion, rumours, hurt, frustration and anger of past experiences. It sometimes seems that our beings have become hard-wired into these ways of relating. But organizations don't have to operate out of that kind of hard, hostile mental wiring. A higher order of connectivity in organizations, communities and social structures is possible. This does not banish the frustration, anger and hurt we experience at times, but it does mean we can find effective ways to express them, to learn from them and still get the job done.

Facilitation Recreates Language, Art and Values

With facilitation we are recreating the language, art and values of our participants. People need a language with a rich meaning that says there is an alternative mode of operating. Aristotle said that the function of language is to glue society together. When you listen to some people's words, you might wonder about that.

But language is not just a tool. The kind of language we use points to our world view. During our facilitation people experience a different worldview. They then search for how to describe their experience. We are all searching for the words and images that give form to what we want to see happen.

The charts we create during facilitation are a form of social art: they harmonize the

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to life.*

tensions in participant input into an inter-related unity. The documents they write become social art: they remind people of how the universe of their organization got reconstructed during the facilitated event. Facilitation creates a stage where people can help birth a new set of more human values.

In one program I did in Northern Ontario, a group of 20 people worked to articulate the impact of facilitation on their community. I was totally amazed by what they came up with; a whole new set of personal values that could be changed by conducting effective participatory facilitation.

Facilitation Assumes a New Life Style

Finally, facilitation is a new life style for you as a facilitator. We sometimes say that there is a new discipline emerging called facilitation and we are giving form to what the discipline really is. *Discipline* can refer to a subject that is taught—a field of study—or training that corrects, moulds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character. When you take on a science discipline, you take on the values, thinking style, language and all aspects of that disci-

pline. It permeates everything you do. The same is true for facilitation. This is not only a discipline; it is a life style change. You don't just use the methods and approach when you are in front of a group. This facilitation "discipline" embodies a set of values, a life understanding about people, a set of skills and accumulated knowledge that gives a new meaning to life. In a sense, we are not in the facilitation business—we are in the rapid-change-of-society business, helping people cope effectively with and give a human direction to that change. We are demonstrating that a new culture is possible that can effectively involve people.

I once heard someone say that "facilitation is a quick fix for people—it enables them to get involved; maybe even get heard." But that is just the beginning, because then comes the hard question: will anything be done about what the people said, or was the facilitation just an exercise to fulfil a political necessity of the time? If it was just an exercise, cynicism will walk into the room shortly after the facilitator leaves for home.

When people get beyond facilitation as a "quick fix" and start asking the question of how to sustain involvement over the long term, they begin to realize the need for a set of methods designed in a new paradigm—methods with different values, methods that require new decisions of everyone from all areas of life.

In a nutshell, what is this new dynamic of facilitation? It is changing peoples' images of how significant involvement is possible in society. It is creating situations where people experience new possibility for the structures they have decided to take responsibility for. ♦

Duncan Holmes is Executive Director of ICA Canada. This article is abridged from an address made at the ICA Canada Facilitators Conference, Victoria College, University of Toronto, in October 1995.



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Proactive Public Meetings

DUNCAN HOLMES

We are all painfully aware that there are good public meetings and there are unrelentingly bad public meetings. We've been to them both. We need many more good public meetings that respond to the current trends and needs of a community.

How have we got ourselves into this situation of so many bad public meetings? I am going to first examine some of the history and trends in this area. Then we will consider what public meetings could be, and what is currently blocking that possibility. We will look at some directions that will move us towards this new possibility.

If we go back far enough, our nation has a history of great community involvement. Neighbours helped neighbours; in farming communities they raised barns; in townships, they built hospitals and schools and whatever a community needed. There was individual initiative but also great community support. Gradually more and more money came from the government and more programs were run with government funding. The "safety net" with its over reliance on someone else—on governments, agencies, someone who is paid to do it—became a way of life. We now find citizens asking, "So why should I do anything? It's the government's responsibility." As the government increased its spending on local services, which became institutionalized, individual involvement and ownership decreased. Today, when we face increasing government cutbacks and fewer government programs, there is increased apathy and cynicism about organizations and about the government.

At the local level, there is decreasing participation in public meetings. People show up, but often only to engage in confrontation, which seems to be the only way to be heard. Add to that an over-emphasis on individualism and "cocooning", together with turf protection and duplication of services, and local communities are really up against it.

Local people want change, but they do not want it dropped on them from somewhere else; they want the kind of change that they have a healthy control over. They are tired of officials promising to do things that people feel no need for. They are tired of the tokenism involved when someone attests at a meeting that the "community"

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whose decision is right.*

was consulted, when what actually happened was that the meeting convener rounded up the usual regulars. People are tired of meetings where their input disappears into a bureaucratic black hole never to be heard of again.

It does not need to be like this. It is possible to pull together public meetings that represent a fair cross-section of the community, and that get positive input about issues and directions. It is possible to have meetings where the real situation is stated without blame—whether the facts are good or bad. It is possible to establish trust and dialogue between all the participants—not necessarily agreement—but trust and dialogue. It is possible to find people willing to follow through on the results of the meeting.

In such meetings, the whole community picture can be created and people can have their ideas seen in relation to that whole. It becomes obvious that people have wisdom—they are not the great unwashed who will never understand. They get clear once again that programs in the community are *their* programs no matter who has been entrusted to run them. They can see that these programs are integrated into the whole community's life without turf protection.

Why are the public meetings we know not like this? There are many blocks to good public meetings. There is the "we-know-best" stance of the powers-that-be, which images the public meeting as a token necessity. There is the issue of turf protection. There is a basic unwillingness to trust the community, to trust that it has

wisdom, that it knows what it is talking about. Many government officials are fearful of the community reaction to anything they plan. Where people are running agencies in the community, the agency CEOs may be more concerned about maintaining the agency's programs than what the community says it needs. Then there is the fact that most of us don't have a clue about what the local community shared vision is and we are not sure we really want to know. Therefore the opportunities for community input are not set up. Our expectations of such meetings are low: people usually expect incredible disparity and division on the one hand, or community apathy and non-involvement on the other. This all leads to the lucid cynicism that comes out in comments like, "Nothing will ever happen with this input"; or "What the heck, the decision is already made! You want me to rubber stamp it?"

So, it is critical that we all develop the kind of meetings that work over against these blocks. We need meetings that move people from being purely reactive into a proactive stance where the focus is on solutions. We need meetings that give people healthy control over the issues and solutions that affect their lives; that provide information to the community or get information from them in an ordered way that everyone can follow instead of jumping with complaints every which way and all over the place. It is critical that such meetings be taken to the community, to already existing groups—even to the point of holding kitchen-table dialogues about matters crucial to a neighbourhood. Not only can we get the input that is needed to create a comprehensive picture, but also every citizen can see that their ownership and involvement in the community is important.

Where the community makes proposals that cannot be met, it is highly important that it get feedback on such results, and honest feedback. If the information is unpalatable, people still want the truth. You will hear them say, "Even if the program got stopped, tell me about it. But also tell me why—what are the limitations so we can see how we can work around them." Finally, the community has to set the agenda and get the big picture out. When

the community has the opportunity to do this and see how new programs will fit into the big picture, it is much easier to get its support.

In summary, the challenge is to develop a renewed sense of total community ownership so the community can become invested in their whole community again—not just specific interests.

So how do we do this? We can start by changing our operational patterns at public meetings. Those who come to public meetings, both those who call them and those who attend, often come with their thinking complete and their decisions already made about the particular situation. They are thinking action, or at least, strategy. This is not a problem. It is good that people have done their homework. The problem comes when the whole time is spent arguing over whose decision is right without any attempt to understand how the decision was arrived at.

What needs to happen is that the whole thinking process that has gone into arriving at their respective decisions needs to be taken apart so that others can follow it. This takes time. But if everyone is to understand, the time has to be taken.

First, people need to understand the history behind the current issue that is forcing these decisions. They also need to be reminded of the current trends of the times that create a particular pressure around the issue. They need to see the same vision of what is possible that the framers of the model saw. They need to have a feel of the obstacles encountered. They need to see how the strategies devised deal creatively with those obstacles. And they need to appreciate the sequence of steps that will form the action plan for implementation.

This renewed style of working with communities is based on what is essentially a thinking process of *History-Trends-Vision-Obstacles-Strategies-Action Plan*. Although this is most often referred to as a strategic planning approach, in its essence it is a way of approaching life. By having participants go through this thinking process as a group you allow each person to understand everyone's thinking and how they arrived at their decision. People have a chance to change their positions during the process without losing face, because they can see the whole picture, not just the facet they have been exposed to. By doing this you allow people to understand where

you are coming from and to understand where their neighbours are coming from. People are enabled to make an authentic decision about the future—to make real choices that go beyond token assent.

We are looking at a new (or renewed) style of working with communities where they say what their needs are; where they own the vision, the obstacles, the solution, and the actions. The results are tangible. There is well grounded data which can be verified; people understand the problem within an overall context; they can see links between data and issues; there is community ownership of the issue and the solutions; the process encourages motivation and involvement, resulting in faster implementation and change.

It is not easy to shift a community's relationship from reaction to proaction; from apathy to involvement. When it happens, then you will find yourself saying what the Chair of one Economic Development Corporation said, "We have given the ownership of the economic development back to the community." ♦

This is abridged from a talk presented at the Community Health Needs Assessment Conference in Winnipeg, in October 1995.

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ICA's First Annual Facilitation Conference

WAYNE NELSON

What happens when 46 Technology of Participation (ToP™) facilitators come together for a meeting of minds and a mingling of methods? The answer is megabytes of creativity! On October 21 and 22 we held ICA Canada's first conference in Toronto for facilitators using ToP methods. Who were these people? Almost all had been involved in ToP events: either of facilitated consultations in their workplace or group facilitation training events. Some of them were long-time practitioners of ICA methods. All of them wanted to learn more.

Duncan Holmes in his opening talk (see "Facilitating Social Change" in this issue) dug down underneath the surface gimmicks of participatory methods to look at their depth implications. What came clear is that our facilitation is rapidly changing society.

Folk then got down to the work of sharing their experiences of facilitation and the learnings they had picked up. See the sidebar for some learnings that are worth quoting. Participants "papered the walls" with situations in which ToP methods had been used. They generated a set of key facilitation questions that formed the basis for the afternoon workshops. As the day went on, participants were individually interviewed on video on their use of facilitation methods.

On Sunday morning the whole group joined together in a workshop on the Soul of the Facilitator. The primary question was "What are the interior qualities that enable a facilitator to be effective?" They didn't stop at generating ideas answers like: the objective outsider, the believer in possibility, the drawer out of the genius in the group, the believer in the group's wisdom, the treasurer of every contribution, the one who can sing in the rain; they also drew graphics and pictures to help carry the meaning.

Throughout the conference, there was an underlying thread of dialogue related to ways ToP facilitators can engage in meaningful interchange and networking. The focus was on future activities rather than on the formation of an organi-

zation. Some of the key directions included an electronic interchange system, a facilitators roundtable, participation in ICA Canada's social research initiative and advanced facilitator training. As the year progresses, a group will be formed to plan the next conference.

While participants saw the confer-

ence as a valuable training and networking experience, it also served as a membership development initiative. In the past, members have related mainly to ICA staff. After this event, members are working with each other and staff as colleagues in a similar endeavour: facilitating a culture of participation. ♦

Learnings

Here are a few:

"Our business has a business purpose and a social purpose. Business realities have forced certain pains on the organization that can only be healed by integrating both sides. ToP workshops have been instrumental in bringing about this integration."

—President of Walmar

"The ToP method provides a structure for human passion. You have to make it a lifestyle."

—Consultant from Philadelphia

"In the process of doing a series of strategic planning sessions over five years for a department of public health, I learned that I was a lightning rod for feelings, and, as such, was providing a rare opportunity for front-line staff to talk about issues they had been unable to raise before."

—Department of Health facilitator

"ToP methods are really focusing on a new way of working together rather than a neat way to "attack" problems."

—AIDS Conference organizer

"You can use all the methodology and still get it wrong. You have to do it right—which means combining method and process and skill in reading the situation."

—Member of Action for Sustainable Communities

"The use of ToP methods has enabled decision-making to take place at lower levels in the organization."

—Health Department executive

"Trust the method, even when you don't believe it's working. Keep on going with the method. The result will be exactly what's needed."

—Consultant to Women's Crisis Centres

"There is an incredible power in creating a context in which people can come together, name the problems and obstacles, plan solutions and take personal and collective ownership. You can trust the group."

—Executive, Federal Government Social Services

"ToP is a life method. It helps me move away from linear thinking in dealing with my students. 'I'm going to tell you what to do' is a linear approach. If I'm going to approach students as real people, I have to find out what kind of people they are, how they would like to approach their learning and accounting theory. I know I have to involve them in generating solutions, possibilities, alternative strategies."

—Accountant

"Integrating a grassroots process into organizational life makes it possible to use authentic life experience in the workplace."

—Consultant

"Keep a sense of play; keep it light-hearted. Make sure people have a good time."

—Executive, US Fortune 500 company

For ICA members

Electronic Discussion Group

An electronic mail discussion group has been set up to exchange news, ideas and information among members of ICA Canada. Niky Melichar at McMaster University volunteered to set up an e-mail group at ICA's recent Facilitators Conference. Her idea is that news and comments made on the system will be automatically routed to e-mail addresses of all other participants in the group. Members of ICA Canada can join by contacting Niky, who will forward the procedures for registration and participation in the discussion group.

E-mail: melich@fhs.mcmaster.ca
Tel: (905) 525-9140 Ext. 22103
Fax: (905) 528-8539
Mailing Address
Niky Melichar
Building Management
Faculty of Health Science
1200 Main St. West, CSD Room 3N8
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario
L8N 3Z5 Canada
(As usual, regular e-mail messages to ICA Canada go to icacan@web.apc.org)

The Facilitators Roundtable

The Facilitators Roundtable is a community of facilitators who are developing a vital culture of participation in their own situations. Picture a learning network rather than a training program, a forum for dialogue rather than a debating society, a sharing-approaches-that-work opportunity rather than a support group.

The Roundtable focuses on topics like community change, organizational transformation, the learning organization, the discipline of facilitation, discovering meaning in our work, and the spirit journey of the

facilitator. It also examines new methods for developing creative responses to society's contradictions.

The group operates as a self-organizing system, with participants setting the agenda and facilitating the sessions. They will meet monthly in two to three hour sessions.

No fees are anticipated, but the group will find ways to contribute towards its own maintenance. The next meeting is January 10, 1996 at 7:00 p.m. at the ICA office, 577 Kingston Rd., Toronto. For information, call Wayne Nelson at (416) 691-2316.

Social Research Process

ICA has always relied on and been guided by social research to discern the signs and trends of the times. New responses are always needed in major areas of social crisis and chaos. In this context, social research involves:

- (a) identifying areas of imbalance or concern in Canadian and global society
- (b) locating "pressure points" that could help in the rebalance
- (c) discerning methods and processes needed to catalyse action on these points.

We have published a context paper on social research; we will send the paper and an invitation to the meeting series to any ICA member who asks. At the first meeting in November, participants discerned six major social trends that need attention, then discussed three strategies for extending the work of the group. In subsequent

meetings, the Social Process Triangles will be used as a reflective tool to determine over-emphasized areas and neglected elements of our society. A core group will be developed to work up a comprehensive plan; and participants will seek to expand the circle of involvement. We decided that one of the next steps is for each of us to have a conversation with two or three people on their story about what's going on in the world today by asking four questions. 1) What is a key trend in society today that affects the lives of most people? 2) What is the positive impact of the trend? 3) What is the negative impact? 4) How are people responding creatively to the trend?

The next social research meeting will be held at the ICA office on January 23 at 7:00 p.m. All members are welcome.

EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

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A wave of change sweeping through societies has shaken the foundations of civilization. Every facet of existence is being challenged to evolve into new planetary patterns of knowing, doing and being. The Institute of Cultural Affairs weaves new relations between individuals, organizations and communities. At the core of ICA's work is spirit, sustained by the myths and techniques of many cultures, helping to shape social transformation. ICA's research, education, organizational change, and international linking programs work together to elicit new planetary patterns.

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