

History of the ICA Network - ICAN

and

International Association of Facilitators - IAF

By Beret E. Griffith and Jean Watts - 2008

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The story begins in 1973 with the ICA, a private, not-for-profit program division of the Ecumenical Institute (EI). The ICA is concerned with the human factor in world development and is committed to helping people in groups and organizations around the world participate in creating their own future. At that time, many ICA facilitators were engaged in community development, using EI/ICA methods in their work as consultants, trainers, and facilitators in coalitions and organizations in all sectors of society. They began to feel the need for support, learning, collaborating and pushing the edges of the methods they were using. Thus, in the mid 1980's, a group of ICA facilitators began meeting to explore creating a loose-knit "association" of people using ICA Technology of Participation (ToP TM) in their professional activities. ToP group facilitation methods are an integration of highly participatory intellectual, social, and spirit processes developed by the ICA. The early meetings set the tone for highly participatory sessions that shared facilitation methods and techniques.

Today, the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) has grown from this initial small nucleus of ToP facilitators to an organization of 1000 members from around the world. IAF was officially incorporated in January of 1994. This is the chronicle of its evolution.

The Birth of an Association

Twenty-seven ToP facilitators responded to a survey sent to ICA staff and ToP facilitators in October of 1987 saying they would come to an exploratory meeting in order to research new, innovative group technologies and to become familiar with leading edge methods. They also expressed a desire for a directory of ICA consultants, a way to share client case studies, and interest in receiving a newsletter. In November of 1988, at a global ICA meeting in Mexico, the concept of creating an association was shared with colleagues from around the world. The positive response gave the concept energy and direction and motivated the Change Master's Guild in Dallas to extend an invitation to gather at Brookhaven to "Share Approaches that Work" (a phrase coined by the ICA.)

Meeting One: The Change Masters Meeting - January 1989, Dallas, Texas

Twenty-seven people bunked with old colleagues and friends or stayed at the Crowne Plaza Hotel where rooms were a whopping \$49.00 a night! Sharing stories and experiences of how ToP methods were being adapted, modified and used was first on the agenda for that initial meeting. Those who attended discovered they shared a common interest in establishing credibility as facilitators; developing a means of interchange; bringing spirit methods into facilitation work; ensuring quality in facilitation; conducting focused research; looking at the components of organization transformation; and looking at the future of facilitation.

Meeting Two: The ICA Network Gathering - December 1989, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In December of 1989, Vance Engleman extended an invitation to continue the dialogue in Pittsburgh. Sixty-seven facilitators met at the Carrington Club. Two of the 67 traveled from countries outside the USA just to attend this gathering, establishing it as an international group. The fee for the meeting was \$75.00 which included all the meals. Open Space Technology was used with people meeting to dialogue around such topics as: Spirit Edge Research, Sharing Approaches and Products that Work, Collaboration Options & Business Practices, and Facilitator Certification and Training. Celebrating on a river boat set the stage for ongoing festivities at each of the subsequent meetings. Trust and a desire to work collaboratively was growing. The group gave itself a name: The ICA Network (ICAN).

Meeting Three: ICA Network Gathering - December 1990, New Orleans, Louisiana

Jean Watts offered to host the next gathering in New Orleans. Seventy-five facilitators met at the Dominican Conference Center and Loyola Law School. The theme of the gathering was “*The Organization as a Learning Community*.” The intent was to provide an opportunity for further interchange; share edges in the field of Organization Transformation; and explore and establish collaborative partnerships while having a good time. Reports were given by the ICA Asian Organization Transformation Network (OTN), and a panel presented case studies of facilitation within large organizations in the private and public sectors. This set the stage for the Marketplace dynamic. Interest was high around catalyzing cultural change in organizations, marketing facilitation skills, publishing strategies, and facilitator certification and training. A “Cajun Night on the Town” provided wonderful eating and dancing. A workshop focusing on “where we go from here,” created the sense that a new association of facilitators was emerging.

Meeting Four: A Midwest Winter ICA Network Gathering - December 1991, Minneapolis, Minnesota

One hundred people arrived in the winter woods outside of Minneapolis at the Wilder Conference Center for the next ICA Network gathering - *New Paradigms in Leadership: Ordinary People in Extraordinary Teams*.” Many people arrived early for a site visit to the Minnesota Department of Administration where they were hosted by Sue Laxdal, Mirja Hanson, Virginia Pierce and Doris Conway-Rettig and were introduced to an award winning change project demonstrating commitment to institutional transformation and culture change.

Two keynote speakers set the tone for the weekend. Antonia Schusta, a Group Executive from Household International, spoke about her international in-house experience with ToP methods. Roger Harrison, a senior organization development consultant and writer in the arena of organization culture change, shared his edge work on linking personal development with professional work and bringing heart into work. A special treat was celebrating the American Teacher Award given to Olive Ann Slotta, newly named Math Teacher of the Year, for her participatory, facilitative approach to teaching. The Marketplace included sessions focusing on: Revitalizing Human Spirit in the Workplace; Case Studies in Catalyzing Team Synergy; Working with a Changing, Multi-cultural Workforce; and the Mission of the ICA Network Meeting. International dancing lessons, snowshoeing and regular walks in the snow offered a wonderful winter experience.

In addition there were conversations on becoming “an official association.” Possible names were even considered and a decision was made to officially submit a request to the ICA Board of Directors to become a separate association affiliated with the ICA.

At a post-conference Advanced Facilitator Think Tank, twenty-five people began to develop facilitator competencies and an advanced facilitation training scheme. Thus the seeds were sown for what became the IAF Think Tanks.

Meeting Five: ICAN Meeting - January 1993, Phoenix Arizona

ICA Phoenix hosted the next meeting, *Creating A Culture of Participation*, at Embassy Suites in Camelhead. The precedence for meeting on Martin Luther King weekend in January had now been set. One hundred and forty people attended. ToP training courses were offered prior to the conference and the ICA Organizational Transformation Research Team met for a day following the conference. Twenty-five sessions were held. A sampling of topics: Facilitative Leadership in Russia; Beyond Methods: Insights from Native American Ways of Honoring and Inviting Participation; Facilitation as a Spiritual Practice; Deploying a Transformation Process; IBM Team Focus Demonstration; Transformational Leadership Lab (from India); and Exploring the Technology of Image Change. A conference notebook was given to participants that included session descriptions and some session handouts. The bookstore, Round Table sessions, Share A Method, and a Focused Market Interchange were added to the gathering.

Mirja Hanson led a vision workshop on “What would we like to see this network do or be in 1-5 years?” Three-fourths of the conference participants attended. The Shared Vision included the following elements:

- Profession Enhancing Publication;
- Develop and Promote Edge Participative Facilitation Technologies;
- Coordinated Information Service for Marketing & Resources;
- Focussed Strategic Collaborations; Facilitator Training & Mentoring;
- Network Expansion;
- Providing and Transferring ToP;
- ICA Network Association Standards; and
- ICANetwork Association Practices
- The momentum and commitment to become an official association had emerged.

Meeting Six: Planning for the New Association - August, 1993, Chicago, Illinois

Bob Vance, Cynthia Vance, Jim Troxel, Jean Watts, Carol Fleischman, Sue Laxdal, Sherwood Shankland, Beret Griffith and George Packard met at the ICA training center in Chicago to develop a strategic plan for launching an independent association in January at the ICA Network Conference in Alexandria, Virginia. Pat Tuecke, Gary Forbes and Mirja Hanson were not able to attend the meeting, but helped plan the conference.

Launching the International Association of Facilitators (IAF)

Meeting Seven: ICA Network Conference - January 1994, Alexandria, Virginia

The IAF was incorporated and the association was founded at the ICA Network Conference, *Creating a Culture of Participation*, in Alexandria, Virginia in January 1994 with seventy-three charter members. One hundred and twenty facilitators arrived in spite of the snow blizzard that prevented fifty from attending. Eunice and Sherwood Shankland chaired the Alexandria conference planning team and sent out the first Request for Proposals. Twenty-one sessions were held within four tracks. The ICA offered pre-conference training. Everyone was encouraged to sign up for email and an email training session was held. Global communication was established and the global virtual community began to regularly communicate. A great, wonderful, humorous celebration was held to herald the beginning of the IAF. The Craft Room was launched and everyone made masks to wear at the celebration. A slideshow with at least one photo of every conference participant was a hit and skits spoofed all of us in our roles as facilitators.

During 1994

The Association Coordinating Team (ACT) was formed, dues were established and actually collected at the meeting. Kanbay Corporation became the first corporate sponsor. Planning for the organizational structure was done during sessions at the conference. Task Forces were named and people signed on to get them rolling. The Newsletter was launched, as *The Facilitator*, only to discover that the name chosen was already being used by Susan Nurre and the Dallas Facilitator Network. The newsletter was quickly renamed *Facilitation News*.

A tradition of having the ACT meeting in the location of the next year’s conference began in August of 1994 when the ACT team met for the first time in Denver, the site of the first annual IAF meeting. The Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT) became the first host sponsor of the conference and hosted the ACT meeting in their training space. Already Task Forces had accomplished an enormous amount of work. The required By-laws were complete; the IAF was incorporated in Minnesota; and a bank account was opened in Illinois, where the volunteer treasurer lived. The Mission and Purpose Task Force had completed its task and was disbanded. The Vision was revisited. Membership growth was projected at 100% annually through 1997. *Facilitation News* was published with contributions from twenty-four people in eighteen cities. An electronic IAF conference had been set up..

The First IAF Annual Conference: *The Art and Mastery of Facilitation - January 1995, Denver, Colorado*

Two hundred and seventy-eight people showed up with over one hundred of those registering the week before the conference. The Council of Energy Resource Tribes contributed an enormous amount of volunteer time and in-kind support for the conference and additionally, ten people came in early to help the local team prepare. Pre-conference sessions were offered with an emphasis on hands-on training. The first sessions on Computer Supported Facilitation were held. There were forty-five sessions in three tracks. The first IAF General Membership meeting was held on Monday morning. David Lester, the Executive Director of CERT gave a closing keynote address, “*in the Spirit of Martin Luther King...Advancing the Dream.*” The ACT and Task Forces met following the conference. Peggy Bushee Services in St. Paul, Minnesota was chosen to become the official IAF office.

During 1995...

Second Annual Conference: *The Art and Mastery of Facilitation - January 1996, Dallas, Texas*

Three hundred and eighty-four people attended. Another East Coast snow storm kept about fifty people stuck in the snow. Texas Instruments was the conference sponsor and CoVision and Ventana Corporation were the first two exhibitors. Association-wide participatory strategic planning was launched during the conference and all participants participated in developing the plan to carry the IAF through the year 2005. There were fifty-five sessions in four tracks. Five Think Tanks were launched and continued to expand and work throughout the year. One- and two-day pre-conference workshops on Computer Supported Facilitation and four ICA Top Group Facilitation Methods were offered. The first 250 page *Conference Proceedings* was published. Professional help was engaged to help with registration. The conference on-site newsletter was born and named in Texas style, “The Facilidillo.” The Resource Room was expanded and included books and facilitation products for sale. A Celebration of Diversity event was held on Martin Luther King Day and was followed by the IAF Annual Meeting. Fifty people came to the ACT meeting following the conference. IAF Task Forces were shifted to reflect the changes in the organization.

During 1996...

During the year the IAF web page was initiated and supported by Baylor University and Mark Fuller at the Hankamer School of Business. The Research and Publication Task Force lighted up virtual space with ongoing work to develop the IAF journal, *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal*. The first conference outside the USA was held in Holland in the fall of 1996. Links began to be made with local facilitator groups springing up around the world.

A Strategic Planning Congress was held at the mid-year ACT meeting in Oklahoma City. *Strategic Plan 2005* was developed. The Mission and Core Values were looked at again and revised. The plan included the Vision, Influencing Factors, and Strategic Directions. Work also began on a Conference Management Manual. The process of creating the plan with input from the IAF membership was documented and every member received a copy of the document. In December of 1996 membership was at 657 people. Projections made in 1994 said 400 people in 1996. Expectations exceeded!

Third Annual Conference: *Discovery Along Wisdom Pathways: The Art and Mastery of Facilitation, January of 1997, Tulsa, Oklahoma*

The Oklahoma Department of Commerce sponsored this conference. Four tracks of roughly sixty sessions kept people fully engaged and talk began about adding another day to the conference. Nearly one third of the conference participants attended pre-conference workshops and it felt like the conference actually began on Thursday instead of Friday, its “official” kick-off. Six Think Tanks filled up with people eager to engage in spirited dialogue around: Facilitation as a Profession; Facilitator Competencies; Computer-Supported Facilitation; Chaos Theory applied to organizations; Organization as Community; Spirit in Organizations - Technologies of Meaning. Celebrating continued with a visit to the Gilcrease Museum and Native American Dancing.

During 1997...

During the year an IAF Europe/Africa Conference was held in London with 70 participants from England, Belgium, Netherlands, Scotland, South Africa, Kenya, and Israel. It was a great experience of collegiality with facilitators sharing and learning new techniques and models during seventeen concurrent sessions.

Fourth Annual Conference: *The Art and Mastery of Facilitation: Creating Bridges to the Future* -
January, 1998, Santa Clara, California

Fifth Annual Conference, Williamsburg, January 14-17, 1999: *The Art and Mastery of Facilitation: Weaving Heritage & Innovation* We have no idea whether or not there will be snow.

IAF 21st Century

You, the members, will continue the journey. The story that unfolds will be yours to write.