

# **At a Table with Seven Facilitators: a conversation exploring facilitation.**

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## **Abstract**

The practice of facilitation came into the conversations about higher and adult education in the mid 1980s. For many practicing Facilitators, it is a matter of getting on with the job. Every once in a while, one is presented with a question about one's facilitation and this invites a level of reflection that helps to illuminate the practice. This paper explores such an event in which seven facilitators contemplated the initial stages of developing facilitation and adding it to one's professional repertoire of practice. The paper draws on the lived experiences of its authors in a form of collaborative practice-led inquiry. In so doing it presents a plethora of insights into the initiation of acquiring facilitation in one's repertoire that reflect the diversity of voices and inputs.

## **Introduction**

This paper and this inquiry were undertaken in a context of practice-led inquiry (Gray, 1996) in that the focus of the inquiry arose out of its' authors shared lived experiences and involved the authors reflecting on their individual and mutual practice. The authors of this paper are members of a community of practice (Wenger 2000) that has been meeting regularly since 2014 to share their experiences the art of facilitation and action learning. The community of practice was initiated as an exercise for one of the community members to enable her to explore her own facilitation of action learning, and it has continued as a working/practice community, with some changes in membership, since then.

This study has been undertaken as collaborative autoethnography (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012) based on a conversation on Friday April 14<sup>th</sup> 2023 between the seven authors.

## **Provenance – How we got here**

In the context of practice-led inquiry (Gray 1996), we hold the view that every professional practice has a provenance, that is an origin, as does each practitioner regarding their engagement with their practice (Hill and Lloyd, 2018). In this study we acknowledge the provenance of facilitation, the practitioners (the authors of this inquiry) and the context in which the conversations at the heart of this inquiry were undertaken.

## **The Practice Provenance**

Facilitate comes from the Latin *facilis*, for 'easy'.

The Cambridge University Dictionary defines facilitation as

*the act of helping other people to deal with a process or reach an agreement or solution without getting directly involved in the process, discussion, etc.*

The practice of facilitation has long been talked about between peers.

The term 'facilitation' is believed to have been migrated into an adult education usage by Stephen Brookfield (1985) in a definition of adult education and was elaborated in his (1986) book the following year.

In our experience as a community of practice we note that the term facilitation is also evident in Dick's (1984) *Helping Groups to Be Effective* (predating Brookfield) which was derived from his student handout notes for his University of Queensland fourth year candidates studying techniques for social and organisational change.

There are countless texts focussed on Facilitation, of which this group thinks specifically about -

- John Heron's *The Facilitator's Handbook*.
- Gerard Egan's *The Skilled Helper*.
- Bob Dick's *Helping Groups to be Effective*.
- Ian Plowman's *Cooperative Conversations*
- Andrew Rixon and Cathryn Lloyd's *Facilitating with Stories: Ethics, Reflective Practice and Philosophies*.
- Adam Kahane's *Facilitating Breakthrough*.
- Roger Schwartz's *The Skilled Facilitator*.
- Diane Tillman and Pilar Colomina's *Living Values Education Program*.

'Communities of practice' as a vehicle for professional development also has provenance. Most attribute this model of professional development to Etienne Wenger (2000), and like many professional development models, this initiative has undergone change since its inception.

The particular experiential activity of '**at a table with...**' also had provenance in that the activity first came to light for one of the authors at the International Experiential Learning Conference in Washington in 1994 and was subsequently used at the Philosophy Cafes organised by the Action Learning and Action Research Association (ALARA) Brisbane. (Swepson, P., Dick, B., Zuber-Skerrit, O., Passfield, R., Carroll, A. and Wadsworth, Y., 2003). This provenance is particularly important for facilitators, as the repertoire of practice for many facilitators is based on what they have seen and experienced as participants and adopted into their own practice. There are many different models for people engaging in a conversation that form elements of a facilitator's repertoire of practice.

### **Practitioner's Provenance**

We align with the practice-led inquiry view that a practitioner's 'personal history illuminates the way in which the practice has evolved for a specific practitioner' (Hill and Lloyd, 2015, 3). Each of the authors/facilitators have histories that involve advancing their knowledge about facilitation as well as actively engaging with learning as facilitators.

**Stephen Berkeley** was thrown into the facilitation deep end early in his career when he was Quality Manager for a large teaching hospital where he was required to facilitate quality

improvement teams and root cause analysis for critical events. By touching base with other Quality Managers in other industries, both one on one and in self organising communities of practice, they talked all things facilitation to refine their craft. He learnt the being side of facilitation from Diane Tillman the author of the *Living Values Education Program*, a facilitated learning program to help teachers incorporate values into school education curriculum. The domain for his facilitation practice grew to encompass all aspects of organisation and community development which was experienced in different cultural and geographical contexts.

**Dolores Cummins** was from childhood, deeply curious about how we become who we become. How individual identity emerges? This led her to pursue studies in Anthropology, Psychology and later the Cognitive Sciences. She transitioned into Management consulting, coaching and corporate education, designing, developing and facilitating executive leadership and change management programs in Australia and Europe. She also facilitates boards and senior teams in strategic planning, talent management and organisational development.

**Bob Dick** began his working life as shop assistant, apprentice electrician, and electrical draftsman. Then, by accident, he became a practitioner Psychologist in the early 1970s. Although he didn't think of what he did as facilitation, that is what it was. As part of his job, he was expected to be up-to-date with the literature on industrial democracy and employee participation. When, also by accident, he became an academic and consultant he learned more facilitation, as he facilitated classes and client groups to enhance their democracy and participation.

**Geof Hill** came into facilitation from the initiation of an industry 'Train the Trainer' course, and subsequent undergraduate Education courses. He moved into the practice of facilitation as a part time university lecturer and Management consultant, facilitating many different adult groups and continually exploring elements of facilitation in his post-graduate research.

**Cathryn Lloyd**, with a background in visual arts and design, and as a creative practitioner, has been an educator in arts organisations and higher education sectors. A move to the UK and a professional role at the University of Arts London became the catalyst for her transition into creative facilitation and led her to undertake a practice-led doctoral degree. Her inquiry into how the arts can be used in individual and organisational learning and development became a pivotal inquiry into her facilitation, coaching and business practice.

**Graham Miller** was in the Navy and was posted out of his operational role into a corporate planning job. With no previous experience, he began facilitating business planning workshops and Total Quality Management (TQM) process improvement teams (he terms this approach 'deep end therapy'). 'Facilitation' followed him into various other corporate roles following his naval career, but it wasn't until he became a self-employed Management consultant, that he undertook formal facilitator training courses and joined the International Association of Facilitators to continue his professional development. He now incorporates facilitation or a 'facilitative approach' to all his consulting activities.

**Ian Plowman's** baptism into facilitation came about through his postgraduate studies at University of Queensland. Among those who made the greatest impact on his understanding of facilitation was Bob Dick. Skills were honed through Ian's work as a tertiary educator, then in executive coaching within large organisations and over the past two decades in private

consultancy. Reflective practice led to the publication of *Co-operative Conversations*, a facilitator's manual (Plowman, 2021).

The variety of disciplines in our backgrounds lays foundation that our community of practice is trans-disciplinary (Klein, J. T., Baptista, B.V. and Streck, D., 2022)

### **The Setting Provenance**

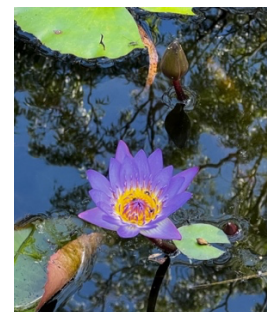
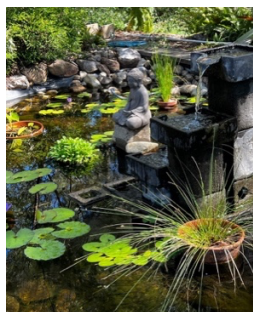
We sat around the table. Not just any table, but one located in a beautiful rural setting in the middle of a national forest. Juxtaposed to our talking table was another loaded with food (vegetarian rolls, scones with jam and cream, fruit and nuts, cheeses, sushi, salad, cold meats. biscuits, dips, tea, coffee and water) as we believed and have practised that rich conversations often are enhanced by sumptuous food. As tends to happen our gatherings and initial conversations begin with a general divergent catchup before focus on the topic we have chosen for our time together.

### **The conversation**

Ahead of the conversation to explore the specific issue we had gathered for, the divergent conversation has lead us to investigate the term 'they' and we discussed many of the implications associated with using 'they' when referring to others; we also discussed the contentious nature of such a task of providing insights for a new facilitator and the implications of a 'tips and tricks' agenda, when we know facilitation is much more than that; and we also acknowledged the variety of ways of facilitating and the contested nature of providing insights or advice to a new facilitator.

Our conversation soon converged on our topic for the day and in this collegial atmosphere we were asked to contemplate and respond to the following catalyst question and scenario -

*A young person new to facilitation (a friend of a friend) contacts you to seek your advice on what they should know about facilitation. You agree to meet with them for a coffee. After pleasantries, they say to you "As you know, I'm just starting on my facilitation journey. You are an experienced facilitator, and I'd really appreciate your advice to help me be the best facilitator I can be. What are five tips you could give me to help me on my way?"*



Following on are the range of responses each author of this paper had considered critical to their facilitation practice and to the catalyst question.



The authors of this paper

### **Stephen Berkeley -**

- **I know enough:** There will always something more to learn and know. What you know and have experienced is enough for you to get in and have a crack. Often we put off having a go by filling our minds with a whole heap of “what ifs”
- **Find a Co-facilitator:** It is easier to take a step when someone is by your side. It gives you someone to bounce of ideas off in the design phase and during the facilitation, gives you another set of eyes and ears to tune into how things are going.
- **De-brief every time you facilitate:** Whether I am co-facilitating or going solo, I always spend 60-90 minutes debriefing. I use three questions. 1. What did we do well. 2. What could have been done better 3. What did we learn about ourselves?
- **Be a participant (frequently):** Being a participant in facilitated sessions is a great way to refine your facilitation skills. By watching others, you work out what you like and don't like; how to be and not be. Going to conferences on facilitation is a great way to rack up your frequent facilitation participant miles.
- **Find opportunities to practice:** Let people know you want opportunities to practice facilitation and ask them to be on the watch for you. Bring together a group of friends who are willing to be ‘crash test dummies’ and ask for their feedback.

### **Dolores Cummins -**

- **Understand your audience** and what they want from the workshop. Identify learning outcomes and participant expectations as one of the first agenda items. This is key to keeping the session on track and the participants engaged.
- **Manage yourself**, your ego and your mental state. Stay fully present and focused on the process, the audience and the energy in the room.
- **Preparation is essential.** Tools like Tony Buzan's (1996, 2018) mind mapping is wonderful in the design stage for initial brainstorming and ordering of ideas around content , time management and learning activities. The completed map can be used to keep the sessions focused, on time and relevant, in line with the agreed outcomes.

- **Stay current with research, latest trends and data on the subject matter.** This contributes to your professional growth, integrity and ability to bring content alive and meaningful.
- **Honour the voices and input from participants.** Invite and acknowledge contribution. Find joy in the room. Aim for transfer of learning by ending with reflections, key insights and action plans or next steps.

### Bob Dick

Offers five hints are for a novice facilitator wishing to improve decision making with small groups of decision-makers. The hints are organised into a narrative ...

- ***Making a start.*** A foundational distinction is between *process* and *content*. To borrow a metaphor from my friend and colleague David Napoli, when you're chewing gum, chewing is the process. Gum is the content. Similarly, making decisions, the making is the process. The decisions are the content. People can focus consciously on only one or other of them at a time — usually the content. For the process they use whatever process they habitually use — often, unstructured discussion. If the process is poor, probably so are the decisions. As facilitator, when you guide the process for them, you improve their decisions.
- ***Comparing facilitation to cookery.*** Imagine cooking a meal. The meal and its ingredients are the contents. The process has several components organised in a sequence. You gather and prepare the ingredients and combine and cook them.

If you are inexperienced, you can follow a recipe for which all ingredients are available. The recipe manages the process for you. Continue practising cookery, and over time your experience increases. Eventually you can take liberties with the recipes. You may even create your own. You've become a chef.

Let me now describe a facilitation "recipe" that I use, my safety net. It allows me to continue to act with confidence, no matter what happens. You may find that it helps your confidence too.

- ***A facilitators' safety net.*** Suppose that a usually-reliable process you use isn't working. The safety net helps you to improve the process with participant help. You and they put the content aside until the process is fixed. The activity uses 125 × 75 mm (5" × 3") system cards.
  1. You call a halt to whatever is happening and distribute one system card to each participant.
  2. You ask them ...
    - to think back over the previous [e.g.] 15 minutes or so;
    - to recall the way they've been working together — the process;
    - to choose an aspect of behaviour that has affected how they've been working collectively, and
    - to write one short, legible sentence summarising what has been happening.

3. Having written their sentence, they place their card face down in the centre of the group.
4. With all cards completed, each picks one card other than their own.
5. Each in turn reads out the card they've picked, as if believing what it says. Everyone else listens to identify any themes.
6. When everyone has spoken, each person in turn then contributes themes they've identified to a collective list.
7. In a facilitated discussion we decide what to change (if anything) and how to monitor it, taking into account all information contributed.

Some of the elements of this process also occur in other processes. You gradually build a repertoire of facilitation processes. Here are some useful recurring elements.

- ***Recurring elements in effective process facilitation.*** There are many elements that can contribute to better facilitation. They make a difference while illustrating important principles. They can assist the journey from “cook” to “chef”. Here are three. I leave you to identify the principles illustrated.
  1. *Thinking time.* Before exchanging any information, allow a minute (more or less) of uninterrupted thinking time for people to collect their thoughts.
  2. *Postpone solutions.* Keep information exchange and decision making separate. Forbid participants from offering solutions or decisions until the relevant information has been shared and understood.
  3. *Group memory.* When information is being contributed, collect a summary of each item on whiteboard or chart paper. The term group memory is from Doyle and Straus, 1993.

You may have noticed that the recipes and elements tend to model the following key facilitation principle —when a decision-making group has developed a shared identity with a shared purpose, agreement is more easily reached.

- ***A sense of community with quality relationships.*** When a decision-making group has developed a sense of community with an agreed and shared purpose, and when everyone has a quality relationship with every other person, almost every aspect of group work becomes more effective and more enjoyable.

Now, some more detail about achieving that outcome ... Begin with a check-in of the whole-group, one person at a time. Include self-disclosure as part of it. Then organise (or ask the group to self-organise) into small groups, preferably three per group.

In individual preparation, people in each small group prepare some material (as instructed) that encourages self-disclosure. Then, gathering in their groups, they exchange this. Their small-group colleagues listen with intense curiosity. The aim is for participants to recognise one another as real people, not merely roles.

- *A sixth hint?* If I were to add a sixth hint, it would be that you **do what you can to encourage participants to *action*** any decisions they have made.

## Geof Hill

Five steps in practice investigation were made out of the basis of recognising the catalyst question for advice about facilitation as the makings of a practice-led inquiry focussed on facilitation.

- In the first instance I would encourage the inquirer to consider their **‘troubling’** (Schön, 1983, 5) about facilitation to try to frame what it was they were wanting to know.
- One important aspect of the question is determining the **Provenance** (Hill and Lloyd, 2018). Of this question, particularly to look at their own lived experience with facilitation (delivering or being on the receiving or experiencing end) that prompted the question/inquiry. This prompts the inquirer to ask themselves about what they already know about this practice based on their history with the practice.
- A question of Provenance sometimes helps an inquirer to discover that there is already a **discourse associated with the practice** they are investigating, and within this they can explore what is already known about what constitutes ‘good’ practice.
- A subsequent step is to think about **de-constructing the practice** and look at the individual elements. Improving a practice might involve working on one of the specific elements of the practice.
- Finally, with all the previous steps under one’s belt, an inquirer might devise their **own way of investigating their practice**. Place themselves as their own data and systematically and transparently investigate.

## Graham Miller -

- **Be clear on what the session is about** (so you and the client have a shared understanding of what you are doing and why). Engage with client to discuss why they are having this session. What does the session hope to achieve? Where does the session fit in the bigger picture - what has happened before and what will happen after? What does success look like - if a session goes extremely well, what will be different the next day, next week, next month the next year? From those discussions, agree on the session aim and objectives.
- **Session design** is really important (so it makes your job easier). If you get the session design right, you are 80% there. Workshop design includes ensuring appropriate levels of participant interaction (e.g. pairs or small group discussions, then larger group discussion), participant introductions (so people know who’s in the room), the agenda (does it flow, is there sufficient time for each element, are transitions logical, will this address the session aim and objectives?), room layout, session closing, etc.
- **Preparation is key** (so you are in the right mindset). Have all possible preparation done prior to arrival (e.g. arrive with butchers paper already drawn up – e.g. the session aim and objectives, agenda outline etc), and get to the venue early to sort out seating, ‘feel’ the space, etc, and so you are ready to go before the first participant arrives. Why? So that you are as calm as possible, and can be as present as possible to welcome participants when they arrive. Remember, starting well is a great start.



- **Get all participants talking within the first 5 minutes** (because early engagement breaks the ice and starts dialogue flow). This could be as simple as asking participants to introduce themselves and identify one thing they want to see discussed today. This could be done in pairs, small groups of 3-4, or whole groups if they are small. But just get people talking to one another sooner rather than later. Challenge the client who thinks it would be a good idea to start the session with a 30 minute PowerPoint presentation of last year's achievements! If they must, do that after everyone has engaged in some form of dialogue.
- **Remember, it's not about you**, it's about them (so put your ego away). A facilitator is not a teacher, an oracle, an opinionator, or a messiah. If you do your job well, you will hardly be noticed. A fellow facilitator once told me that the job of a facilitator is to help people communicate with each other. So simple yet so profound. Always keep that in mind. If people are communicating with each other effectively, you don't have to intervene. If they aren't, ask a question or two to promote dialogue. Facilitation is an 'in service or others' undertaking.

### Cathryn Lloyd –

- **Warming up** – as humans we are always warming up to people, situations, ideas and any number of factors. In facilitation we warm up to one another, to the purpose, context and expectations. Find ways to help people warm up to each other, to you and to the reason for gathering. Make connection with people before the event if possible. On the day, connect with people quickly, and help them connect with others through some meaningful connections.
- **Purpose and Context – Understand the Why**, as the facilitator you need to understand as much as you can why the group is gathering. What is it they want and need. Why have they called you in? What's the purpose? This is you scoping the project. This will help you to understand and contract around your role as the facilitator and how you will design or co-design the facilitation engagement.
- **Drafting and sharing an initial proposal** can be an inclusive and creative way to bring people into the design process. It's an iterative process, where you can introduce your initial ideas for how you interpret your understanding of the needs of the people you will be working with, and how you imagine the process, structure and flow for your time together. This gives others an insight into your thinking and for them to have input into the process. It helps build relationships and gets people focused and on the same page.
- **Technology**. Do you need access to digital technology or are you going analogue? The technology you use influences how you facilitate. I tend to have a preference for minimising reliance on digital technology and prefer experiential kinaesthetic creative approaches like the use of stickies, marker, flipcharts, posters, imagery, storytelling, prototypes, conversations and other engaging process like Liberating Structures. Technology is a crucial part of virtual facilitation, and we need to learn how to use it well.
- **Space and the Goldilocks Effect**: We may not always work in the most ideal conditions. The space maybe too small, too big, lacks natural light, it's too hot, too cold, and other factors. Where possible let them know the kind of space that would help create a conducive environment. I ask for a room that has a bit more space than just accommodating tables and chairs so that people can move and be active. Minimise tables if possible. Sit in circles if possible and have people move around

rather than stay in the same seat. If you can see the space before hand, it can help you think through how you will use the room for your activities/workshop process. Make the most of it. Rooms often need some change or tweak to make them more inviting and to achieve the Goldilocks Effect – just right or right enough.

## Ian Plowman

Five ideas taken from the appendix of *Co-operative conversations. Strengthening our culture, one conversation at a time* (Plowman, 2021)

- **Who don't I notice?** This may not apply to all facilitators. It certainly applies to me and I suspect others, so this thought is offered as a caution. The participants represent a diversity of people. My experience is that there is often one person in the group of participants that makes no impression on me. It is though they disappear into the wallpaper. When working with groups of up to 30 people, it is good facilitation practice, aided by the simple name tags, throughout a facilitated session, to personally connect with each and every participant. This is done by referring to them by name and seeking their opinion on the issue of the moment. My epiphany came at the end of the day working with a group of people. In saying goodbye to individual participants, I suddenly realised that there was a person I'd not connected with at all, all day. As a result, I now, early in the workshop, make a point of trying to identify the participant(s) who might otherwise be invisible to me. I then make a concerted effort to connect with them as much as I do with everyone else.
- **Field of vision.** Early in my professional career as a facilitator, a workshop that I was conducting was videoed. When I reviewed the footage, I was surprised to notice that I had a left visual-field-preference. In other words, for most of the workshop, my attention was primarily to those participants in front of me or to my left. People on the right of my visual field received much less focus. Again, this may not apply to others, though I suspect it might! The science tells us that right-handed people commonly show a left visual field preference. And perhaps it is the opposite for left handers. Nevertheless, if you are a facilitator, presenter or public speaker, visual-field preference is something to be aware of and consciously overcome.
- **Tone of voice.** Whereas some facilitators and presenters understandably feel the need to project their voice, my experience is that people's attention is better held by deliberately varying my voice tone. For example, when I wish to make a very important point, I soften my voice so that people strain to hear. And then I repeat myself, again with a quiet voice tone. Tone of voice is critical if there is tension or conflict being expressed by participants. If the facilitator seeks to take control through raising their voice, the participant response may be escalation. More effective is for the facilitator to lower their voice, talk more slowly and quietly, thereby diffusing the tension. Another technique, when the group is working away as instructed and the facilitator wants to regain their attention, is to say nothing. Rather, just stand and raise your hand. Someone will notice, stop talking, and raise their hand too. Quite quickly the animated conversations dissolve into silence.
- **Movement and posture.** The role of the facilitator comes with the perception of power. And, where there is a possibility of potential conflict, some participants seek to rail against this power. The wise facilitator, rather than confront any resistance, can immediately deflate it by adopting a non-threatening posture and tone. For example, say there is clear resistance coming from one particular table-group of participants, a method of deflating that resistance is to go to the particular table, squatting down so

that your head is lower than those of the table occupants. From this position, in a quiet voice, ask questions or seek clarification in order to gain a greater understanding of the resistance. This then enables the resistance to be dealt with in a non-adversarial way.

- **Always on duty.** Early in my professional career, while working with a local government body and its elected representatives, in talking quietly to my client out of session, I made an unflattering remark about a political adversary who was also present at the function. My remark was overheard by a third party who immediately reported my comment to that adversary. My perceived neutrality was immediately compromised. Facilitators are expected to conduct themselves professionally. This is obvious when the group is in session. Yet, it also applies in the relaxed informal times as the previous story illustrates. There are occasions when the facilitation task might run over several days or at least include a relaxed social component, such as a shared meal. For some participants, it is during these informal times, that they feel safe enough to approach the facilitator with a confidence. So, tempting as it might be, after a hard day's work, having a few relaxing drinks is not recommended. On one multi-day team-building workshop at a luxury venue, with all expenses covered by the client, a co-facilitator took the opportunity to cut loose in the evening, imbibing several too many drinks and subsequently making a fool of himself. Participants noticed. The following day, it was obvious that the participants had withdrawn from my co-facilitator any moral authority he may have had on day one. The take-away lesson: While in the presence of clients, you are never off duty.

## **Our process**

The clarity of these insights might give the impression that obtaining these aspects of facilitator wisdom was straightforward. To some extent it was straight forward, in that the question being addressed in this meeting was clear, however the ways in which seven different facilitators approach this was varied, and the process did not fall out in such a linear fashion. Such is the outcome of a diversity of voices and inputs.

Mindful of the adage 'walk the talk' it is important to note that early in the conversation there were discussions which could be seen as the group itself warming to conversation, and soon after one of the group recommended 'preparation is the key', another suggested that we look at the available time and have a plan of action, which was agreed as each taking a turn and making one suggestion from the collection we had generated through our pre-meeting reflection.

Another key element of the process was that the sharing was not one sided. There were multiple moments in the conversation where an offered idea was subject to contention or at least a request for clarification. For example: We had a fair degree of exchange with respect to the impact that pronouns one uses can unconsciously have on others. We talked about what we perceived as a common tendency is to use pronouns 'we', 'they' or 'one', rather than the more appropriate 'I'. Another example is the discussion to clarify the meaning of the term **Provenance** as a step in a practice-led inquiry process invited calls for clarification of what was meant by Provenance? Was it just other literature or previous life experiences? A third example was a discussion about the term '**tricks and tips**' which this sort of question generates, as if there were some magical formulae. There was consensus that facilitation was a learned skill rather than a mystifying one.

## **Where to From Here?**

Selwyn (2014) poses the challenge to any journal article that it addresses the ‘so what?’ question, and that it justifies their contribution to knowledge. At some point with any inquiry it’s time to draw a line in the sand and bring the conversation and inquiry to a close. We have already commented that the facilitation discourse is vast, and what can the reflections of a group of facilitators hope to contribute to that discourse?

One of the realisations that emerges from such a conversation is that facilitation is a complex practice. Facilitators often come to the practice from different disciplines and indeed, their process of acquiring even rudimentary experience with facilitation can be quite different. For example, 'engineering', the process of designing a physical structure is just as much 'facilitation' as is designing a collective conversation. These variations occur as a result of facilitation often being an adjunct to one’s primary career journey, as well as there being a plethora of pathways that can lead a professional to describe their practice as facilitation.

While each facilitator from the group had explored the original question from their personal and professional perspectives and experiences, the round robin responses occasionally diverged and at times deepened the initial response, through the questions asked by the group and the sharing of examples associated with the particular facilitation tip.

What is also evident from these individual submissions is how powerful one’s stories can be in illuminating and clarifying practice. The importance of creating an atmosphere in an action learning group to both encourage and learn from each other’s stories.

It is clear each facilitator has a view of their practice and how they approach it. We can see in the range of facilitation ideas, and we heard through the conversations, various points where ideas intersected and resonated across the group, creating a shared language and understanding.

## **In Closing**

This conversation doesn’t stop here, more than a start it is a conversation we as a community of practice have been having for close to a decade. We now hand our conversation over to you, the reader, the practitioner, the reflector. We invite you to contemplate your own practice. What in this paper speaks to you?

The following catalyst questions are for you to mull over and possibly with your own community of practice.

1. What would be your contributions in this scenario?
2. How might you explore your provenance, the origin story of your facilitation practice?
3. How have the ideas within the context of this paper intersected with your own practice?
4. What do you know now that you didn’t before?
5. What are you curious to learn more about?
6. What questions might you ask?

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