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*This book is dedicated to all the groups
we have facilitated and continue to facilitate
within education, churches and our communities.*

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This book is dedicated to all the groups Sally, Simon and I have facilitated and continue to facilitate in churches, communities and within educational settings, with apologies for mistakes we have made along the way and gratitude for all the learning we have shared together.

Jo Whitehead

How to use this book

We are living in a highly participative culture. Most of us today are accustomed to having a say in decisions that will impact on us and issues that affect us. The days are largely gone when people would simply do as they were told because someone in authority said so. Society emphasizes consumer choice, individual freedom and personal power. Popular culture gives opportunity to shape television programmes through voting and give a running commentary on life through social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

Although trends within some sectors of the Church still focus around more hierarchical and authoritarian models of leadership, collaborative forms of ministry, team ministries and leadership teams are the norm and there is broad recognition that leadership authority needs to be shared, and leadership roles and responsibilities carried out by people with varying gifts and skills. Some of this reflects an embracing of the benefits of participation. For many traditional churches, however, declining numbers have necessitated increasing lay involvement, and new forms of church that have emerged in recent years, such as Fresh Expressions, are increasingly more participative in style. While consumerism is undeniably present within churches, in many contexts people appear to want to be involved in creating ministry themselves rather than in simply consuming it.

Many leaders are keen to adopt more participative approaches to leadership and to develop their facilitation skills for use in all kinds of different church and community settings. This book is designed to assist you in exploring how facilitative approaches might benefit your ministry practice, and to give practical suggestions in terms of developing your own facilitation skills.

We have sought to use a range of examples and illustrations from different contexts, but would encourage you, as you read, to contextualize the material, to make it appropriate for your setting, community and culture. The material focuses on working with groups, but many of the principles and suggestions can also be effectively used with individuals. Between us we operate and have continued to do so in a range of settings, including youth and community work, teaching,

training, church leadership in new churches, traditional churches and pioneering contexts; two of us are ordained; all of us facilitate learning in higher education; and all of us are passionate about using facilitative processes to enable effectiveness and encourage the development and growth of those with whom we are working in all our various work and ministry contexts.

Styles and approaches to facilitation will vary from individual to individual and we are not seeking to prescribe one specific way to facilitate but rather to introduce a range of tools, methods, approaches and skills, which we would encourage you to use, adapt and personalize to fit with your context, personality, values and preferred ways of working.

The first six chapters address generic issues around facilitation and the last six consider some specific situations in which facilitation skills can be helpfully used. You can read the book straight through or dip in and out of different chapters, depending on your interest and situation. Inevitably there are potential overlaps between the issues covered in different chapters, and we have tried to avoid too much repetition by signposting where certain themes or issues are covered in more detail.

At the end of each chapter you will find suggestions for further action and reflection that can be used to help you develop your thinking or practice further. Alternatively, you could use these suggestions in a team or group context to structure reflection or training. There is a list of suggestions for further reading, arranged by chapter, towards the end of the book. Further practical resources, including various tools mentioned, can be found at <www.wholelifelearning.co.uk>. A Bibliography is provided to support the references in the text, but will in its own right give further pointers to reading around the subject.

Introduction and overview

JO WHITEHEAD

People support what they help create. (Abraham Lincoln)

The word facilitation comes from the Latin word *facilis* ('easy'), and literally means 'to make easy' or 'to make simple'. When we facilitate we make things easy for people – or so the theory goes. Facilitation involves an approach to leadership that seeks to empower people to take responsibility for the decisions that affect them, be involved in processes, learn and participate. Facilitators provide frameworks by which and through which individuals and groups are enabled to work collaboratively towards their tasks or goals.

Although facilitators have been traditionally understood to have no official leadership role or decision-making power within the groups they work with (Schwarz, 2002), many of the skills involved in facilitation can be effectively used by people in a wide range of ministry contexts and with diverse roles and responsibilities. Facilitation skills, if used well, can enhance and develop leadership and encourage ownership and participation.

Styles of leadership

Most people have a preferred approach, or approaches to leadership. Your leadership style is likely to be influenced by your personality, preferences, upbringing, experience, training, key people who have influenced you, the culture of the organization, church or community you are working in and the expectations of those around you.

We can identify a spectrum of leadership styles, focused around the level of power and authority exercised by the leader and that given to or taken by the group.

Autocratic or Authoritarian

This style of leadership is dictatorial. Autocratic/authoritarian leaders make the decisions and those participating follow their lead. There

is usually very little participation from the group in decision-making processes. This style of leading can be seen as effective as it often results in things getting done, but it can easily become oppressive and repressive and it does not value or recognize the contribution individuals can make to organizations or churches.

Authoritative

This style also involves significant authority resting with the leader. Authoritative leaders will tend to be confident and assured, making clear decisions and taking action. However, there is usually some listening to others involved and people tend to feel freer to question decisions made and actions taken.

Consultative

This style is similar to an authoritative style, with a strong sense of decisive action, but leaders with a consultative approach tend to talk to others before making a final decision. They may speak to people involved or external experts or advisors. The level of input influencing the final decision will vary.

Participative

A participative style can encompass the consultative but is usually more clearly involving of others in the processes. Normally in a participative approach leaders and others are involved in decision-making together, even if the leader makes the final decision.

Democratic

A democratic approach involves everyone concerned in the process. The idea is that leaders and people work collaboratively to find the best way forward, and decisions are made democratically, usually by a vote or by consensus.

Laissez-faire

A laissez-faire approach is when leaders don't take an active or decisive lead but abdicate responsibility. This may be through lack of confidence, laziness, procrastination, a dislike of conflict or confrontation or through being overwhelmed by busyness or a sense of responsibility. Although a laissez-faire style tends to have quite negative connotations and consequences, occasionally a facilitator might choose this

approach intentionally, to take a step back and encourage a group to take responsibility and ‘manage itself’ for a short time.

Chaotic

A chaotic style describes leadership that is disorganized, unstructured and provides little guidance or support. Leaders who operate like this have a tendency to move the goalposts depending on their mood or the situation. There is no consistency and little responsibility is taken, the leader tending to flit from a laissez-faire approach to authoritarian interventions when things go wrong.

Situational

In exploring leadership with various groups over the years I often find that individuals interpret the leadership style of Jesus through their own preferred paradigm. Those with a democratic or participative preference cite stories such as Jesus sending out the 72 (Luke 10.1–17), where the emphasis is on the disciples working together, taking responsibility and being empowered to minister. Those whose style is more naturally authoritative will cite instances where Jesus appears to eschew participation in favour of being more commanding and assertive (see, for example, the calming of the storm in Luke 8.22–25 or the healing of the demon-possessed man in Luke 8.26–33). In fact it appears that Jesus led situationally, adopting the approach that was most appropriate to each given situation.

Similarly, I would suggest that effective facilitators will utilize a number of the approaches above to work with people in a group context. So, for example, you will need to take a strong lead to give a group confidence, set and maintain boundaries, challenge inappropriate, bullying or discriminatory behaviour or attitudes and actively delegate roles and responsibilities. At other times, particularly when a group is functioning effectively, you may choose to step back and allow the group autonomy, being present and contributing where appropriate but taking little authoritative role in the conversation, discussion or process.

Those with a purist approach to facilitation would insist that a facilitative style should always be situated at the participative-democratic end of the spectrum, arguing that facilitation, by definition, is egalitarian. We would want to take a more pragmatic approach and suggest that all leaders, whatever their preferred style, can benefit

from using facilitative approaches. Indeed, we hope that the suggestions given in this book will help leaders at both ends of the spectrum to integrate more participation, ownership, collaboration and empowerment into their ministry practice. Almost anyone can use facilitation skills to enhance their practice, and this can create valuable space for others to express themselves and their opinions, grow in confidence and see a sense of community engendered.

Participation

A facilitative approach in a ministry context is about empowering God's people to participate; it involves recognizing that everyone has something to give and finding ways to help them bring what they have. Use of power within facilitation is understood to be power 'with' as opposed to 'power over': 'Effective facilitation encourages each person to value, develop and express their full sense of self, and be in authentic relationship with others individually and as part of a group working towards collective goals' (Hunter et al., 2007:21). In this sense participation fosters a culture that encourages people to develop and take responsibility rather than one that encourages dependence on leaders.

There are all kinds of reasons why leaders find it difficult to adopt a participative approach. Yasmina described a session at a conference that had been facilitated rather than taught more traditionally. In this context she reflected with a sense of frustration that it felt as if everyone present was simply pooling their ignorance. Chris shared his concern that adopting a facilitative approach in his context might result in power struggles, particular individuals within the group seeking to take over or dominate. In my experience, good preparation and honed skills can mitigate some of the potential difficulties that might result from using facilitative approaches.

The ladder of participation (adapted from Hart, 1992) identifies a number of different levels of participation and shows how you might seek to increase levels of participation in your setting (see Figure 1). It is important to note that the first three rungs of the ladder are not really genuine participation at all, and I would want to stress at this point that facilitative approaches should not be used as a way of playing at participation, using tokenism, decoration or manipulation to mask a highly authoritarian approach.

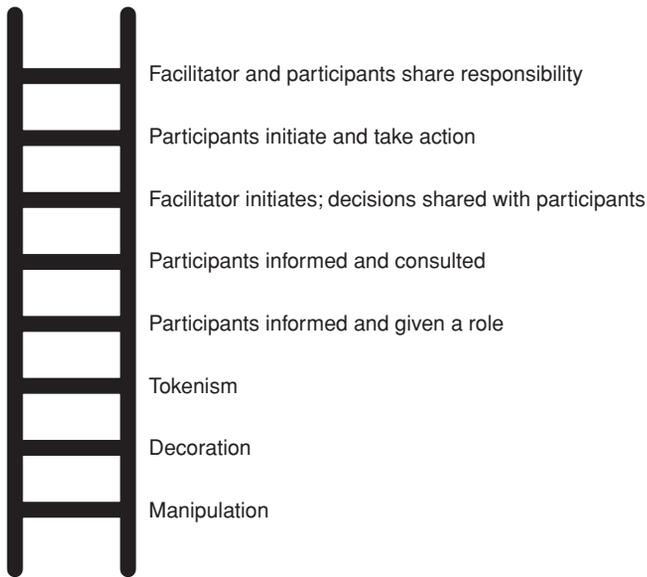


Figure 1 Ladder of participation

Encouraging participation is not always as straightforward as it might at first appear. Groups or individuals can be reluctant to take responsibility because of past experience, preconceived ideas of what the group is about, fears about what people might think, low self-esteem, apathy, boredom, unhealthy group dynamics or simply the mood or level of motivation prevailing. Particularly where a strongly authoritarian style is the norm, adopting a facilitative approach may feel uncomfortable and even threatening for group members. Where people are unused to participating actively it is important to consider how you might provide assistance to increase levels of involvement gradually and move people further ‘up the ladder’, developing the confidence of individuals and the group as a whole.

Different needs in facilitation

One model that is helpful as we consider facilitation in its broadest sense is John Adair’s model of group needs (adapted from Adair and Thomas, 2004) – see Figure 2, overleaf. He identifies three areas of need:

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