

# DYNAMIC FACILITATION MANUAL

*by Rosa Zubizarreta*

*with Articles by Jim Rough*

*Dynamic Facilitation Manual*

Copyright © 2008 by Rosa Zubizarreta

First Edition 1999

*Permission is granted for non-commercial educational use only.  
For any other uses, please contact the author.*

## **CONTENTS**

### ***Prologue***

Introduction... 7

Who Is this Manual For?... 8

### ***1. Groundwork***

History and Overview of Dynamic facilitation... 9

Similarities and Differences with Other Approaches... 11

Choice-creating Conversation... 13

The Relationship between Theory and Practice... 14

### ***2. Basic Elements of the Facilitator's Role***

What We Mean By "Really Listening"... 15

Trusting and Supporting Self-organization... 16

Recording Participants' Contributions... 18

Using the Charts to Keep an Open Flow... 19

The Difference between Dynamic Facilitation and Brainstorming... 21

We-flection and the Role of "Designated Listener" ... 22

### ***3. Getting Started***

Before the Group Meetings... 24

Introducing the Process... 25

What about "Ground Rules"?... 26

Beginning the Content Exploration... 27

"Jumping In"... 28

Creating an "Issues" Page... 29

**4. Key Aspects of the Initial Stage**

- From Complaints to Creativity... 31
- Eliciting Creativity by Welcoming Initial Solutions... 32
- Welcoming Concerns and New Problem Statements... 33
- Protecting Creativity: Working Effectively with Advocacy... 35
  - Drawing Out Group Divergence... 36

**5. Transition and Intermediate Stages**

- Allowing Convergence to Emerge... 37
- Helping Groups Through the “Yuck”... 38
  - Remaining in a Creative Process... 39
- Each Arrival as a Point of Departure... 40
  - The Appearance of Convergence... 42
  - A “Meeting of Minds and Hearts”... 43
    - Letting Go and Allowing... 44

**6. Concluding Stages and Follow-Up**

- Closing Stages of a Dynamically-Facilitated Session... 46
  - Creating Content Closure... 47
  - Creating Process Closure... 49
- Harvesting the Charts After Each Session... 51

**7. Applying Dynamic Facilitation**

- When is Dynamic Facilitation Appropriate?... 53
  - Exploring the Larger Context... 56
  - The Wisdom Council... 60

**8. What’s Next?**

- Ways to Continue Learning about Dynamic Facilitation... 61

## **ARTICLES**

**Interview with Jim Rough... 66**

By Matthias zur Bonsen (2004)

**Choice-creating and Dynamic Facilitation... 72**

By Jim Rough (Chapter 5)

*Society's Breakthrough: Releasing Essential Wisdom and Virtue in All the People*

**Dynamic Facilitation and the Magic of Self-organizing Change... 87**

By Jim Rough

(first published in the Journal for Quality and Participation, June 1997)

**Choice-creating: How to Solve Impossible Problems... 96**

By Jim Rough

(first published in the Journal for Quality and Participation, September 1991)

**Dynamic Facilitation and Choice-creating Workshop... 104**

By Jim Rough

(description of workshop taught at the  
International Association of Facilitators Conference, June 20, 2004)

## **POSTSCRIPT**



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I want to begin by acknowledging the creative genius of Jim Rough, the originator of this work, without whom this manual would not exist. I also want to acknowledge Tom Atlee, who first introduced me to the world of Dynamic Facilitation. Elliot Shuford, Win Stafford, and Tree Bressen were adventurous co-learners in that first seminar. Elliot and Win later assisted me in my first efforts at teaching DF, for which I am extremely grateful, and Tree has remained a continuous source of inspiration as a colleague and friend.

My initial experiences with Dynamic Facilitation led me to learn more about groups and organizations. I was extremely fortunate to study with Saul Eisen, then director of the Organization Development program at Sonoma State University, who continues to be a dear mentor and guide. Heather Smith, professor of social psychology, directed my master's thesis on Dynamic Facilitation with great enthusiasm. Their support encouraged me to create the first version of this manual.

The enthusiastic feedback I received for the initial manual from Jeff Conklin, Al Selvin, and Simon Buckingham Shum was very reaffirming, especially since so much of what we do in Dynamic Facilitation is counter-intuitive to mainstream facilitation practice. Other positive responses included Jack Travis' generous gift of professional editing services, which greatly improved the polish of that first edition. I am also very grateful to my mother, Alma Flor Ada, for her work in creating the Spanish version of the manual.

Since the first edition six years ago, the team at Jim Rough and Assoc., Inc. has grown. Jean Rough and DeAnna Martin are dedicated co-explorers in this work, and it has been a real gift to share experiences and reflect together as we continue to evolve our understandings. Our working together helped to motivate this new edition of the manual. Jean's support in this project has been invaluable, from requesting particular topics to careful readings and editorial suggestions.

Also in these six years, my own household has grown. Bruce Nayowith has become my husband and partner, accompanying me to Dynamic Facilitation seminars and contributing his own valuable insights and perspectives to this work. I am most grateful for his helpful editorial comments, his willingness to explore these principles in our daily life together, and the rich learning that continues to unfold from our on-going conversation.



## **PROLOGUE**

### ***Introduction***

In *The Promise of Mediation*, Bush and Folger acknowledge that many practitioners of mediation have been intuitively practicing a transformational approach, long before they wrote their definitive book describing the philosophy and practice of Transformative Mediation (1994, 2004).

In a similar vein, I want to acknowledge that many practitioners of facilitation have been intuitively practicing a transformational, “emergent process” approach as they help groups address practical issues. The spirit of what they do may be very similar in some ways to what is described in this manual.

At the same time, Jim Rough is one of the first who has begun to explicitly name, define, and teach a transformational approach to the practice of facilitating creative collaboration. He calls his method, “Dynamic Facilitation.”

This work originated in an industrial setting, helping production teams find creative answers to the practical and logistical problems they were facing. It was originally designed to help groups apply creativity to practical issues, including ones in which people are highly invested or emotionally charged.

At the same time, practitioners have discovered that this approach can be used effectively to address a broad range of human concerns. In the last twelve years, participants in Jim’s seminars have learned Dynamic Facilitation by facilitating small-group dialogues on a host of human issues, including homelessness, drug abuse, the “health care” crisis, etc. In the process, we have learned a lot about the power of this approach to help groups address community and social issues.

With Jim’s encouragement and support, I have written this manual in order to make Dynamic Facilitation available to everyone. The challenges we face as a species in our world today call us to share our tools as freely as we can, and we want to make this work as widely available as possible.



### ***Who is this Manual For?***

You may be interested in this work if you are:

- A professional facilitator, mediator, or consultant wanting to expand your repertoire of ways of working with groups
- A lay person interested in learning to facilitate creative group dialogue and/or practical group breakthroughs
- Someone who is engaged in an ongoing exploration of self-organization, creativity, collective intelligence, and transformation

While many professional practitioners have found this work extremely helpful, we would also like to see Dynamic Facilitation widely used by lay people. We believe this is possible, given that there are many people in our culture who have been developing the basic skills that we see as foundational for this approach to facilitation.

These basic skills include:

- 1) The ability to listen well to others;
- 2) The ability to not “take sides” but instead to “take all sides”;
- 3) The ability to trust, allow, and follow an emergent process;
- 4) Having enough self-understanding to be able to “get out of the way.”

Many lay people who have been active in the self-help, personal development, and spiritual growth movements have developed a strong foundation in these skills. Dynamic Facilitation offers a way that these skills can be put to use for the purpose of helping groups experience the transformational power of generative dialogue. Of course, to practice Dynamic Facilitation professionally, it helps to have a number of related skills as a consultant that are not the subject of this manual.

In order to support sustainable change, it is not enough to help a group engage in a creative and transformative process. Every group forms part of a larger organization or network. As a result, we also need to be able to work with the larger system as a whole. However, being able to usefully hold a creative and generative space for a group is still a valuable skill in and of itself, and we would benefit as a society from having many more people develop their abilities and confidence in this area.

