

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF REFLECTION

Like many good things, I learned about Dynamic Facilitation (DF) and Rosa Zubizarreta through a friend. I met Tom Atlee because of a book I co-edited, *The Change Handbook*. It is a collection of system-wide change practices, and the first edition didn't include DF. Tom was adamant that I learn about the process. Both Tom and I are long-time students of conversational practices that enable diverse, even conflicted groups to engage and reach useful outcomes. He insisted that Dynamic Facilitation was unique and that any compilation needed to include it. It took him a while to convince me, but I finally attended a workshop conducted by DF creator Jim Rough. Tom was right. DF brings some distinctive gifts to the mix of engagement practices. And Rosa contributed to Jim's great creation by articulating a principle-based foundation. Her first version of the user's guide that you now hold helped me to make sense of the process.

What attracts me most about DF is the transformative power of reflection that I experience at its heart. During that first workshop, I watched others and experienced myself changing as we each responded to the simple act of having our words and feeling played back to us. I discovered more compassion and tolerance for another's perspective as their story emerged. I became better equipped to tackle a challenging issue because I could relate to their humanity even when we held different opinions about a subject.

Useful for any complex situation, when conflict runs hot or bad blood exists, DF thrives. It succeeds by welcoming whatever shows up. It uses the insight of aikido, harnessing the other's energy and reflecting it back to the group. And that elicits authentic, heartfelt expressions from participants. DF brilliantly engages us in the art of reflection, of listen-

ing deeply, of witnessing each other. The Dynamic Facilitator acts as a mirror—repeating our words or describing our feelings. She helps us to hear each other and ourselves. She supports us in stepping into the fire of our passionately held beliefs and noticing larger possibilities taking shape among us. In doing so, DF helps us to get underneath ineffective expressions—shouting, whining, bullying—to the deeper longings buried in the angst. It clarifies the heart of our cries. Perhaps it helps someone to realize what they want to express for the first time. Feeling fully heard frees us to listen to others, to notice our differences and yet stay connected. Through that process, shared meaning coalesces. We discover a larger, more complex picture painted by our diverse views. That bigger picture is often an unexpected, coherent response that could not have arisen without deep expressions at the heart of our differences.

The remarkable result of Dynamic Facilitation: it consistently helps groups to arrive at broadly shared outcomes. No matter how conflicted, by taking participants deeply into what matters to them, this practice turns conflict into inspiration. Breakthrough solutions arise that draw from what is most essential to everyone involved. The process can be so gradual that only after the fact do the elegantly simple solutions that consistently surface seem revolutionary.

A skilled Dynamic Facilitator makes the process appear deceptively easy. It looks like she is simply calling on people and writing down what they say. Yet participants come away changed, with solutions that everyone likes. As with any good support service—room lighting, garbage pickup, electrical power—we only notice when it's not working. Otherwise, the process and the intense work done by the facilitator are virtually invisible. Rosa's user's guide lifts the covers on what's going on, what it takes to do it well, and why it works.

One final characteristic: Dynamic Facilitation is much more emergent than it may appear. At first glance, the process looks highly controlled because the facilitator is up front, calling on people and listening to them one at a time. And yet, with no agenda controlling the content, the facilitator simply supports the flow of what arises, welcoming the un-

expected, the disruptive. Through the questions she asks, the gifts of everyone moved to speak are honored. Participants hear, often for the first time, from those whom they might discount in other settings. As a result, what seems a contradiction—expressing individual desires when collective action is needed—becomes a pathway for coming together. Shared meaning and actions emerge.

So if you see yourself as an agent of change, drawing forth possibilities intrinsic in complex situations, you've come to the right place. I hope, like me, you find that this user's guide gives you both the theoretical and practical information you need to do Dynamic Facilitation.

Peggy Holman

Author, *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*
and Co-author, *The Change Handbook*

May 8, 2013