

# The 9 Disciplines of a Facilitator: Leading Groups by Transforming Yourself

By Jon C. Jenkins and Maureen R. Jenkins

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Reviewed by Glyn Thomas

Over the last five years I have been fortunate to complete some doctoral research focusing on the way that facilitators are trained and developed. During this time, I have been immersed in facilitation literature, and in my opinion there is an over-abundance of books promising amazing results. A critical read of the literature suggests there are too many authors claiming to have found the new silver bullet destined to solve all facilitation challenges. The new book by Jon and Maureen Jenkins, *The 9 Disciplines of a Facilitator: Leading Groups by Transforming Yourself*, is nothing like these books and is the most refreshing book on facilitation that I have read in the last five years.

Jenkins and Jenkins argue that the effectiveness of a facilitative leader is determined less by the skills, techniques, or processes used and more through self-mastery. It is their contention that our effectiveness as facilitators is tied to our ability to master the way we relate to and understand others, ourselves, and the world. Of course, the idea that, as facilitators, who we are being for the group may be as important as the things we do with a group, is not an entirely new concept. In 1983 Carl Roger’s *Freedom to Learn for the 80’s*, and in 1989 *The interpersonal relationship in the facilitation of learning* described the importance of relationships and authenticity in person-centred teaching and counseling. Hunter, Bailey and Taylor in *The art of facilitation (1995)*, and *The essence of facilitation: Being in action in groups (1999)* described the importance of the facilitator’s presence. More recently Ghais in *Extreme facilitation: Guiding groups through controversy and complexity (2005)* described authenticity, confidence, presence and trustworthiness as essential personal qualities underpinning good facilitation. However, what Jenkins and Jenkins provide is a solid conceptual framework for defining, understanding and developing the internal disciplines required to facilitate effectively.

After an introduction, which provides an overview of the nine disciplines and the way they relate to each other, the book has two parts: part one has four chapters, which explain the context of facilitative leadership; and part two has nine chapters – one for each of the disciplines. Jenkins and Jenkins’ conceptual framework, shown in Figure 1, presents three

developmental paths which each involve three of the disciplines. The development paths focus on the facilitative leader’s internal relationships with *others*, inward relationships with *self*, and internal relationships with *life* itself. These developmental paths are presented as continuums with one discipline at either end in tension with one another, and the middle discipline encompassing “the art of standing in tension between the other two” (p. 3).

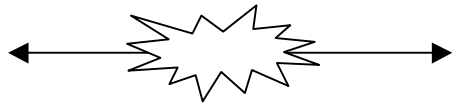
<b>Developmental Path</b>			
<i>Regarding Others</i>	Detachment	Focus	Engagement
<i>Regarding Myself</i>	Interior Council	Sense of Wonder	Intentionality
<i>Regarding Life</i>	Awareness	Presence	Action

Figure 1: The nine disciplines of a facilitator (Jenkins and Jenkins, 2006, p. 4)

The development path that I found most interesting and challenging was the path ‘Regarding Myself.’ The *Interior Council* discipline involves learning to pay attention to, and choosing from, the most productive ‘voices’ that tend to fill our heads, especially in challenging facilitation situations. The discipline of *Intentionality* encourages the facilitative leader to develop the capacity to manage his or her own desires and make free choices. The *Sense of Wonder* discipline concerns being open to the miraculous and “cultivating awe in day-to-day experience” (p. 195). I found this development path most relevant to my current journey of developing my self-awareness. Sadly, I have far too many examples of times when I have been ineffective as a facilitator because of how I was reacting to, or dealing with internal issues that were triggered

## Book Review

by something going on in the group at the time. The ‘regarding myself’ development path addresses these sort of issues and will give hope to any other facilitators still falling short of the improbable, and unlikely, target of ‘facilitation perfection.’

The ‘Regarding others’ development path describes the tension between the discipline of *Detachment* from “things, ideas, need for control, power, and recognition” (p. 5) and the *Engagement* discipline which involves the development of the capacity to care and commit. In the middle of this tension is the discipline of *Focus*, which concerns the capacity to choose autonomy and commitment simultaneously. The third and final development path explores the three disciplines of *Awareness*, *Action* and *Presence*. This development path is concerned with “the way you relate to inventing your life” (p. 8) and the discipline of *Presence* occurs when an individual is able maintain a profound understanding of what is going on life whilst also acting with courage, creativity and conviction.

A positive feature of the book is that each of the discipline chapters provides a suitable balance of theoretical and practical information. A reference list for each chapter, provided at the end of the book, allows the interested reader to follow up other sources of interest. Each chapter includes numerous stories and anecdotes to illustrate the points being made about the discipline concerned. There is also within each chapter a list of practical exercises, which readers can utilize to work on their own mastery of the discipline concerned. I also liked the fact that Jenkins and Jenkins give readers ‘permission’ to customize the way they use the book and apply the information to their lives. They suggest readers prioritize the disciplines that require the most work and then start on the most critical ones first. Fortunately there is not a fixed sequence of development which must be followed, giving the reader freedom to follow their own interests as they see fit.

Each discipline chapter follows a set format (see p. 10 of the book for full details) of: describing the discipline, discussing issues, outlining four levels of the discipline, followed by exercises for practice. I must admit that I found the depiction

of four levels within each discipline a bit tedious after a while. It just seem seemed too convenient and formulaic that each discipline had four levels. I did not see why it was necessary to always describe four levels and whilst this creates consistency between chapters, it felt a little contrived.

The book is written for facilitative leaders and particularly those working within the business sector. In this respect some readers may find the title a little misleading because it does not directly distinguish other roles such as: facilitator, facilitative consultant, facilitative coach, and facilitative trainer (see Schwarz, 2002, *The skilled facilitator: A comprehensive resource for consultants, facilitators, managers, trainers, and coaches* for more details). However, for me personally, I had no trouble applying the material in the book to my educational context.

I was encouraged that Jenkins and Jenkins suggest readers take one to three months working on a discipline at a time, which I think is realistic and reflects accurately the true journey-like nature of learning to be a facilitator. The book would be a useful text in a facilitation training course, or as a self-help book for anyone involved in facilitation. The book would also be a useful resource for a peer support group of facilitators meeting together to reflect on, and improve, their practice.

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