



CHAPTER ONE

The Skilled Facilitator Approach

In this opening chapter, I briefly illustrate the need for facilitation, define group facilitation, and give an overview of the Skilled Facilitator approach. We also see the key elements and how they fit together to form a values-based systemic approach to facilitation.

THE NEED FOR GROUP FACILITATION

Groups are becoming the basic work unit of organizations. Increasingly, we turn to groups to bring together differing views, produce quality products and services, and coordinate complex work. In doing so, we expect groups to work effectively so that the product of their efforts is greater than the sum of the parts. Yet our experience with groups often leaves us feeling disappointed or frustrated. Consider these examples:

- A division manager, Michael, and his department heads meet regularly to solve divisionwide problems. Michael has specific recommendations in mind but is concerned that if he shares his views early on, the department heads won't share their true opinions or buy in to his recommendations. So Michael asks the department heads a series of questions about the problems, while withholding his own opinions. The department heads begin to feel that they are being quizzed and that Michael is looking for certain answers. Uncertain what

4 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

the answers are, the department heads grow careful, giving their views in vague terms so they do not commit to a position that might be at odds with their boss. Frustrated with what he considers inadequate response, Michael reacts by telling the group how the problems are to be solved. The department heads reluctantly agree, but they are not committed to the decisions, which end up being poorly implemented. After the meetings, the department heads discuss privately how Michael is not sharing decision-making authority as he had agreed. Down the hall, Michael confides to his assistant that he will be reluctant to give his department heads more say in decisions if they do not demonstrate clearer reasoning in these situations. No one ever discusses in the full group the concerns aired after each meeting.

- A board meets every other week to make policy decisions. Each time an issue comes up, members take sides and push their positions. They rarely share their reasons for taking a position, and no one asks. Each member believes that others are taking a position from questionable motives. Members leave the meetings frustrated and angry, sometimes even after winning a vote. Despite all the decisions they make, members feel the board has no unified direction.

- Members of an aspiring self-directed team believe that a couple of members, Cora and Dean, are not doing quality work. The members talk about this among themselves but never raise the issue directly with Cora and Dean because they are concerned that Cora and Dean will get embarrassed and defensive. Instead, the other team members choose to redo the work for the two. As the situation gets worse, the team members ask their leader, Leticia, to talk to Dean and Cora. She agrees and then finds herself in a conversation with them without any firsthand information about the situation, and with no other team members to respond to the pair's questions and concerns. Cora and Dean resent being talked to by Leticia without having the team members present. Little is resolved, the relationship between the two members and the rest of the team worsens, and the team's performance drops.

- A newly formed group comprising representatives from local business organizations, the police department, community groups, and the schools meet to try to figure out how to reduce crime in their community. All the members agree on the group's goals and are willing to devote time, energy, and money to solve the problem. Yet the group members' optimism quickly evaporates as they begin to blame each other for causing the problem.

- A top management team meets to solve a complicated problem that affects the entire organization. All are experienced, successful executives, and they quickly identify a solution and implement it. Just as they think they have solved the problem, it returns in another form, and the problem gets worse.

Groups do not have to function in ways that lead to ineffective performance, make it difficult for members to work together, and frustrate members. Groups can improve how they work.

This book is about helping work groups improve their effectiveness by using facilitative skills. It is about helping all types of work groups: top management teams, boards, committees, work teams, cross-functional teams, interorganizational groups, quality groups, task forces, and employee-management or union-management groups. Anyone who works with others needs facilitative skills.

Organizational consultants, internal and external, need facilitative skills when they contract with clients, diagnose problems, and recommend solutions. Leaders and managers need facilitative skills to explore stakeholders' interests and to craft solutions based on sound data that generate commitment.

Because organizations change constantly, the need for facilitative skills to support change is always increasing. This applies to a merger or acquisition, or downsizing, and to efforts to improve the quality of products and services, empower employees, develop a shared vision, develop a self-managing work team, create a learning organization, or develop an organizational culture that makes these changes possible.

Organizations typically use groups to plan and implement change, and groups typically need some form of facilitation. In addition, facilitative skills have become more important as organizations try to openly and constructively manage conflict arising from the change they try to create.

At the heart of improving group effectiveness lies the ability of group members to reflect on what they are doing, to create the conditions necessary to achieve their goals. Groups find it difficult to openly examine behavior on their own; they often need the help of a facilitator.

WHAT IS GROUP FACILITATION?

Group facilitation is a process in which a person whose selection is acceptable to all the members of the group, who is substantively neutral, and who has no substantive decision-making authority diagnoses and intervenes to help a group improve how it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, to increase the group's effectiveness.

The facilitator's main task is to help the group increase effectiveness by improving its process and structure. *Process* refers to how a group works together. It includes how members talk to each other, how they identify and solve problems, how they make decisions, and how they handle conflict. *Structure* refers to stable recurring group process, examples being group membership or group roles. In contrast, *content* refers to what a group is working on. The content of a group discussion might be whether to enter a new market, how to provide high-quality service to customers, or what each group member's responsibilities should be. Whenever a group meets, it is possible to observe both content and process. For example, in a discussion of how to provide high-quality service, suggestions about installing a customer hotline or giving

6 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

more authority to those with customer contact reflect content. However, members responding to only certain colleagues' ideas or failing to identify their assumptions are facets of the group's process.

Underlying the facilitator's main task is the fundamental assumption that ineffective group process and structure reduces a group's ability to solve problems and make decisions. Although research findings on the relationship between process and group effectiveness are mixed (Kaplan, 1979), the premise of this book is that by increasing the effectiveness of the group's process and structure the facilitator helps the group improve its performance and overall effectiveness. The facilitator does not intervene directly in the content of the group's discussions; to do so would require the facilitator to abandon neutrality and reduce the group's responsibility for solving its problems.

To ensure that the facilitator is trusted by all group members and that the group's autonomy is maintained, the facilitator should be acceptable to all members of the group; this person needs to be substantively neutral—that is, display no preference for any of the solutions the group considers—and not have substantive decision-making authority. In practice, the facilitator can meet these three criteria only if he or she is not a group member. A group member may be acceptable to other members and may not have substantive decision-making authority yet have a substantive interest in the group's issues. By definition, a group member cannot *formally* fill the role of facilitator. Still, **a group leader or member can use the principles and techniques I describe in this book to help a group.** Effective leaders regularly facilitate their groups as part of their leadership role.

To *intervene* means “to enter into an ongoing system” for the purpose of helping those in the system (Argyris, 1970, p. 15). The definition implies that the system, or group, functions autonomously—that is, the group is complete without a facilitator. Yet the group depends on a facilitator for help. Consequently, **to maintain the group's autonomy and to develop its long-term effectiveness, the facilitator's interventions should decrease the group's dependence on the facilitator.** Ideally, the facilitator accomplishes this by intervening in a way that teaches group members the skills of facilitation.

THE SKILLED FACILITATOR APPROACH

The Skilled Facilitator approach is one approach to facilitation. It is an approach I have been developing since 1980, when I began teaching facilitation skills to others. Facilitation approaches often represent a compilation of techniques and methods without an underlying theoretical framework. **The Skilled Facilitator approach is based on a theory of group facilitation that contains a set of core values and principles and a number of techniques and methods derived**

from the core values and principles. It integrates theory into practice to create a values-based, systemic approach to group facilitation. Exhibit 1.1 identifies the key elements of the Skilled Facilitator approach and their purpose.

The Group Effectiveness Model

To help groups become more effective, you need a model of group effectiveness as part of your approach. To be useful, the model needs to be more than descriptive; it has to do more than explain how groups typically function or develop, because many groups develop in a way that is dysfunctional. To be useful, the model needs to be normative; that is, it should tell you what an effective group looks like. **The group effectiveness model identifies the criteria for effective groups, identifies the elements that contribute to effectiveness and the relationships among them, and describes what these elements look like in practice.** The model enables you to identify when groups are having problems, identify the causes that generate the problems, and begin to identify where to intervene to address them. If you are creating new groups, the model helps identify the elements and relationships among them that must be in place to ensure an effective group.

A Clearly Defined Facilitative Role

To help groups, you need a clear definition of your facilitator role so that you and the groups you are helping have a common understanding about the kinds of behavior that are consistent and inconsistent with your facilitator role. This has become more difficult in recent years, as organizations now use the word *facilitator* to indicate many roles. Human resource experts, organization development consultants, trainers, coaches, and even managers have sometimes

Exhibit 1.1. The Skilled Facilitator Approach

- The group effectiveness model
- A clearly defined facilitative role
- Useful in a range of roles
- Explicit core values
- Ground rules for effective groups
- The diagnosis-intervention cycle
- Low-level inferences
- Exploring and changing how we think
- A process for agreeing on how to work together
- A systems approach

8 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

been renamed “facilitators.” **The Skilled Facilitator approach clearly defines the facilitator role as a substantively neutral person who is not a group member and who works for the entire group.**

The Skilled Facilitator approach distinguishes between two types of facilitation: basic and developmental. In the basic type, the facilitator helps a group solve a substantive problem by essentially lending the group his or her process skills. Once the facilitation is complete, the group has solved its substantive problem, but by design it has not learned how to improve its process. In the developmental type, the facilitator helps a group solve a substantive problem and learn to improve its process at the same time. Here the facilitator also serves as a teacher so the group can eventually become self-facilitating. Developmental facilitation requires significantly more time and facilitator skill, and it is more likely to create fundamental change.

Useful in a Range of Roles

Although I have described the Skilled Facilitator approach as having a substantively neutral third-party facilitator, the approach also recognizes that everyone needs to use facilitative skills even if not a neutral third party or not working in a group or team. So the Skilled Facilitator approach introduces roles in addition to facilitator:

- Facilitative consultant
- Facilitative coach
- Facilitative trainer
- Facilitative leader

All of these roles are based on the same underlying core values and principles as the role of facilitator. In addition, many of my clients have told me that they use the core values and principles outside the workplace, with their families and friends, and see positive results. The approach is broadly applicable because it is based on principles of effective human interaction. Consequently, if you use this approach across your roles in life, you are likely to be viewed by others as acting consistently and with integrity regardless of the situation.

Explicit Core Values

All approaches to facilitation are based on some core values. They are the foundation for an approach and serve as a guide. They enable you to craft new methods and techniques consistent with the core values and to continually reflect on how well you do in acting congruently with the values. But if you are to benefit most from the core values, they need to be explicit. **The Skilled Facilitator approach is based on an explicit set of four core values, and on principles that follow from them** (see Exhibit 1.2). The first three core values come from the work of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön.

Exhibit 1.2. Core Values of the Skilled Facilitator Approach

- Valid information
- Free and informed choice
- Internal commitment
- Compassion

Making core values explicit has several benefits. Because they form the governing ideas of skilled facilitation, rendering them explicit enables you to understand and evaluate them directly rather than having to infer them from the techniques I describe. As you read this book, you can assess whether the various methods and techniques I describe are in fact consistent with the core values. This will help you make an informed choice about whether you want to adopt this approach.

As facilitator, you need not only a set of methods and techniques but also understanding of how and why they work. As I describe the core values and the principles that follow from them, you can see the reasoning that underlies each technique and method of the Skilled Facilitator approach. Once you understand the reasoning, you can improvise and design new methods and techniques consistent with the core values. Without this understanding, you are like a novice baker, who must either follow the recipe as given or make changes without knowing what will happen.

Making the core values explicit also helps you work with groups. You can discuss your approach with potential clients, so that they can make more informed choices about whether to use you as their facilitator. If clients know the core values underlying your approach, they can help you improve your practice, identifying instances when they believe you are acting inconsistently with the values you espoused. Because the core values for facilitation are also the core values for effective group behavior, when you act consistently with the core values, not only do you act effectively as a facilitator, but you also model effective behavior for the group you are working with.

Ground Rules for Effective Groups

As you watch a group in action, you may intuitively know whether the members' conversation is productive even if you cannot identify exactly how they either contribute to or hinder the group's process. **Yet a facilitator needs to understand the specific kinds of behavior that improve a group's process. The Skilled Facilitator approach describes these behaviors in a set of ground rules for effective groups.** The ground rules make specific the abstract core values of facilitation and group effectiveness. Examples of the ground rules are to test assumptions and inferences, share all relevant information, and agree on what important words mean.

10 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

The ground rules serve several functions. First, they are a diagnostic tool. By understanding the ground rules, you can quickly identify dysfunctional group behavior, which is inconsistent with the ground rules, so that you can intervene on it. Second, the ground rules are a teaching tool for developing effective group norms. If a group understands the ground rules and commits to using them, the members set new expectations for how to interact with each other. This enables the group to share responsibility for improving process, often a goal of facilitation. Finally, the ground rules guide your behavior as facilitator.

The behavioral ground rules in the Skilled Facilitator approach differ from the more procedural ground rules (“start on time, end on time”; “turn off your pagers and cell phones”) that many groups and facilitators use. Procedural ground rules can be helpful, but they do not describe the specific behaviors that lead to effective group process.

The Diagnosis-Intervention Cycle

The group effectiveness model, the core values, and the ground rules for effective groups are all tools for diagnosing behavior in a group. But you still need a way to implement these tools. Specifically, you have to know when to intervene, what kind of intervention to make, how to say it, when to say it, and to whom. To help put these tools into practice, I have developed a six-step process called the diagnosis-intervention cycle. **The cycle is a structured and simple way to think about what is happening in the group and then to intervene in a way that is consistent with the core values.** It serves to guide the facilitator into effective action.

Low-Level Inferences

As a facilitator, you are constantly trying to make sense of what is happening in a group. You watch members say and do things and then you make inferences about what their behavior means and how it is either helping or hindering the group’s process. An inference is a conclusion you reach about something that is unknown to you, on the basis of what you have observed. For example, if in a meeting you see someone silently folding his arms across his chest, you may infer that he disagrees with what has been said but is not saying so.

The kinds of inferences you make are critical because they guide what you say when you intervene, and affect how group members react to you. To be effective, you need to make inferences in a way that increases the chance of being accurate, that enables you to share your inferences with the group to see if they disagree, and that does not create defensive reactions in group members when you share your inferences.

The Skilled Facilitator approach accomplishes this by focusing on what I refer to as “low-level” inferences. Essentially, this means that facilitators diagnose

and intervene in groups by making the fewest and smallest inferential leaps necessary. Consider two facilitators with different approaches, working with the same group simultaneously and hearing this conversation:

TOM: I want to discuss the start time for the new project. Next week is too soon. We need to wait another month.

SUE: That's not going to work. We need to do it right away. We can't wait.

DON: I think you're both unrealistic. We will be lucky if we can start it in ninety days. I think we should wait until the next fiscal year.

A facilitator making a low-level inference might privately conclude, and then publicly point out, that members have stated their opinions but not explained the reasons for them, nor have they asked other members what leads them to see the situation differently. Observing the same behavior, a facilitator making a high-level inference might privately conclude that the members don't care about others' opinions or are trying to hide something. Making high-level inferences such as this creates a problem when we try to say what we privately think. High-level inferences are further removed from the data that we used to generate them and so may not be accurate. If the inference also contains a negative evaluation of others' motives, sharing the inference can contribute to the group members' responding defensively. **By learning to think and intervene using low-level inferences, we can increase the accuracy of our diagnosis, improve our ability to share our thinking with others, and reduce the chance of creating defensive reactions when we do so.** This ensures that our actions increase rather than decrease the group's effectiveness.

Exploring and Changing How We Think

Facilitation is difficult work because it is demanding—cognitively and emotionally. It is especially difficult when you find yourself in situations you consider potentially embarrassing or psychologically threatening. Research shows that if you are like almost everyone else, in these situations you use a set of core values and think in a way that seeks to unilaterally control the conversation, win the discussion, and minimize expression of negative feelings (Argyris and Schön, 1974). You think of yourself as knowing all you need to know about the situation while thinking others who disagree are uninformed; you think of yourself as being right and others as being wrong; and you think of yourself as having pure motives while others' motives are questionable. All of this leads you to act in ways that create the very results you are trying hard to avoid: misunderstanding, rising conflict, defensive reactions, and the strained relationships and lack of learning that accompany these results. To make matters worse, you are usually unaware of how your thinking leads

12 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

you to act ineffectively. Rather, if you're like most people you typically attribute the cause of these difficult conversations to how others are thinking and acting.

The same problem that reduces your effectiveness as a facilitator hurts the effectiveness of the group you are seeking to help. Like the facilitator, the group members are also unaware of how they create these problems for themselves.

The Skilled Facilitator approach helps you understand the conditions under which you act ineffectively, and understand how your own thinking leads you to act ineffectively in ways that you are normally unaware of. It offers tools for increasing your effectiveness, particularly in situations you find emotionally difficult. This involves changing not only your techniques but also how you think about or frame situations, and the core values that underlie your approach. This is difficult but rewarding work. By doing this work for yourself, you increase your effectiveness. Then you can help the group learn to reflect on and change the ways they think in difficult situations so that they can work effectively together.

A Process for Agreeing on How to Work Together

Facilitation involves developing a relationship with a group—a psychological contract in which the group gives you permission to help them because they consider you an expert and trustworthy facilitator. Building this relationship is critical because it is the foundation on which you use your facilitator's knowledge and skills; without the foundation, you lose the essential connection with the group that makes your facilitation possible and powerful. To build this relationship, you need a clear understanding and agreement with the group about your role as facilitator and about how you will work with the group to help it accomplish its objectives. I have found that many of the facilitation problems my colleagues and I face stemmed from lack of agreement with the group about how to work together.

The Skilled Facilitator approach describes a process for developing this agreement that enables the facilitator and the group to make an informed and free choice about working together. The process begins when someone first contacts the facilitator about working with the group and continues with a discussion with group members. It identifies who should be involved at each stage of the process, the specific questions to ask, and the type of information to share about your approach to facilitation. The process also describes the issues on which you and the group have to decide if you are to develop an effective working agreement: the objectives of the facilitation, the facilitator's role, and the ground rules to be used. By employing this process, you act consistently with your facilitator role and increase the likelihood of helping the group achieve its goals.

A Systems Approach

Facilitators often tell me stories of how, despite their best efforts to help a group in a difficult situation, the situation gets worse. Each time the facilitator does something to improve things, the situation either deteriorates immediately or temporarily improves before getting even worse. One reason this occurs is that the facilitator is not thinking and acting systemically. In recent years, the field of systems thinking has been receiving the popular attention it deserves, in part through the work of Peter Senge (1990) and his colleagues. The Skilled Facilitator approach uses a systems approach to facilitation. It recognizes that a group is a social system—a collection of parts interacting with each other to function as a whole—and that groups generate their own system dynamics, such as deteriorating trust or continued dependence on the leader. As a facilitator, you enter into this system when you help a group. The challenge is to enter the system—complete with its functional and dysfunctional dynamics—and help the group become more effective without becoming influenced by the system to act ineffectively yourself. **The Skilled Facilitator approach recognizes that any action you take affects the group in multiple ways and has short-term and long-term consequences, some of which may not be obvious. The approach helps you understand how your behavior as facilitator interacts with the group's dynamics to increase or decrease the group's effectiveness.**

For example, a facilitator who privately pulls aside a team member who, she believes, is dominating the group, may in the short run seem to improve the team's discussion. But this action may also have several unintended negative consequences. The pulled-aside member may feel that the facilitator is not representing the team's opinion and may see the facilitator as biased against him, thereby reducing her credibility with that member. Even if the facilitator is reflecting the other team members' opinions, the team may come increasingly to depend on her to deal with its issues, thereby reducing rather than increasing the team's ability to function.

Using a systems approach to facilitation has many implications, a number of which are central to understanding the Skilled Facilitator approach. One key implication is treating the entire group as the client rather than only the formal group leader or the member who contacted you. This increases the chance of having the trust and credibility of the entire group, which is essential in serving as an effective facilitator.

A second implication is that effective facilitator behavior and effective group member behavior are the same thing. Taking into account that the facilitator is substantively neutral and not a group member, the Skilled Facilitator approach does not have different sets of rules for the facilitator and group members. Just as you use the core values and ground rules to guide your own behavior, you use them to teach group members how they can act effectively. Consequently,

14 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

when you act consistently with the core values and ground rules, you serve as a model for the group. The more that group members learn about how you work, the better they understand how to create effective group process. Ultimately, as group members model effective facilitator behavior, they become self-facilitating.

A third key implication is that to be effective, your system of facilitation needs to be internally consistent. This means that how you diagnose and intervene in a group and how you develop agreement with the group all need to be based on a congruent set of principles. Many facilitators develop their approach by borrowing methods and techniques from a variety of other approaches. There is nothing inherently wrong with this; but if the methods and techniques are based on conflicting values or principles, they can undermine the facilitator's effectiveness as well as that of the groups they work with. For example, a facilitator who states that her client is the entire group and yet automatically agrees to individual requests by the group's leader may soon find herself in the middle of a conflict between the group and its leader, rather than helping to facilitate the entire group. By thinking and acting systemically, you increase your long-term ability to help groups.

THE EXPERIENCE OF FACILITATION

Facilitation is challenging work that calls forth a range of emotions. Part of this work involves helping group members deal productively with their emotions while they are addressing difficult issues. But it is equally important to deal with your own emotions as facilitator. **Because your emotions and how you deal with them profoundly determine your effectiveness, the Skilled Facilitator approach involves understanding how you as a facilitator feel during facilitation and using these feelings productively.**

These feelings are about yourself and the group you are working with. For example, you may feel excited after a group calls with a new request to do interesting and important work. Your excitement may turn to worry or anxiety, though, as you wonder whether you are skilled enough to really help the group.

Throughout the facilitation, various events trigger your own reactions. You may feel satisfied, having helped a group work through a particularly difficult problem, or proud to see the group using some of the skills they have learned from you. Yet, when your work goes so smoothly that the group doesn't recognize your contribution, you may feel unappreciated. When the group is feeling confused and uncertain how to proceed in their task, you may be feeling the same way about the facilitation. If your actions do not help the group as well as you would like, you may feel ashamed because your work doesn't meet your own standards. You may be frustrated by a group's inability to manage conflict

even if you have been asked to help the members because they are having problems managing conflict. You may feel sad watching a group act in a way that creates the very consequences the members are trying to avoid, feel happy that you can identify this dynamic in the group, and feel hopeful seeing that the group's pain is creating motivation for change.

I have experienced each of these feelings as a facilitator. They are part of the internal work of facilitation. If I can presume that readers of this book attribute to me some expert level of knowledge and skill as a facilitator, then for some readers my disclosure may come as a relief. You yourself may be thinking, *If he wrote a book on facilitation and has these feelings himself, then what I feel must be normal also.* Or my disclosure may raise your anxiety if you are thinking something like, *If he is skilled enough to write this book about facilitation and still has these feelings, how long am I going to have to deal with these feelings?* One answer lies not so much in whether you or I have these feelings but rather in our awareness of them in ourselves and in others, and our ability to manage these feelings productively—what some refer to as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Although there are many ways to improve my facilitation skills that do not focus on dealing with my emotions, my use of any of these skills becomes more powerful if I am attuned to my feelings and to others and deal with them productively.

When I discuss these feelings with colleagues, I find that although the specific situations that trigger our emotions and our specific responses may vary, our own feelings are a significant part of our work as facilitators.

In this book, I do not address all of the issues related to the emotions you may experience in facilitation. But I do identify some of those you are likely to experience in certain situations, and I offer an approach for effectively dealing with your emotions. I hope this serves as both a guide to what you might encounter, recognizing that people may have varying reactions to the same situation, and as a support, so that when you experience these feelings you will know you are not alone and that it comes with the territory.

Through facilitating groups, you can also come to know yourself by reflecting on how you react to certain situations, understanding the sources of your feelings, and learning how to work with your feelings productively. In doing so, you not only help yourself but in turn increase your ability to help the groups with which you work—the people who face the same issues.

MAKING THE SKILLED FACILITATOR APPROACH YOUR OWN

Part of learning this approach is integrating it with your own style—making it your own. Throughout the book, as you read examples of what I would say in various situations, sometimes you may think that the words are natural and

16 THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

make sense; other times, you may think *This sounds awkward; I can't imagine myself saying those words*. You are likely to have the same experience as you begin to practice using this approach with groups. This awkward feeling is a common one, stemming partly from learning a new approach.

But it can also stem from trying to force-fit my style to yours. You can't be me (and I don't assume you would want to). When I was first learning how to use the core values in facilitation, I tried hard to imitate Chris Argyris, from whom I learned the core values in graduate school at Harvard. As deeply as I respected Chris—and still do—our styles are different; I could not intervene exactly as he did and still sound like me. (My colleague Dick McMahon would sometimes remind me of this by calling me “little Chris.”) It was not until I found my own voice that the approach became mine. I assume the same is true for you. **Learning to use the core values and principles is a journey; part of the journey is finding your own voice.** Welcome to the journey.

SUMMARY

The Skilled Facilitator approach is one approach to facilitation. Based on a set of core values and using a systems thinking approach, it enables you to clearly define your facilitator role and develop explicit agreement with a group about how you will work together. Together, the core values, the group effectiveness model, the ground rules, and the diagnosis-intervention cycle help you identify functional and dysfunctional aspects of the group and intervene to help the group increase its effectiveness. The approach enables you to explore and change how you think, to improve your ability to facilitate difficult situations. It also helps groups explore and change their thinking, to help them create fundamental change. The core values, principles, and methods of the Skilled Facilitator approach are equally applicable to facilitative leaders, consultants, coaches, and trainers.

As I said earlier, one of the elements of the Skilled Facilitator approach is the group effectiveness model. Chapter Two describes the model and shows how you can use it to help a group identify problems and address them.