

Facilitating Breakthrough

How to Remove Obstacles, Bridge Differences, and Move Forward Together

A book excerpt from Mobius Friend, leading systems thinker, peace negotiator, and systems change facilitator, Adam Kahane

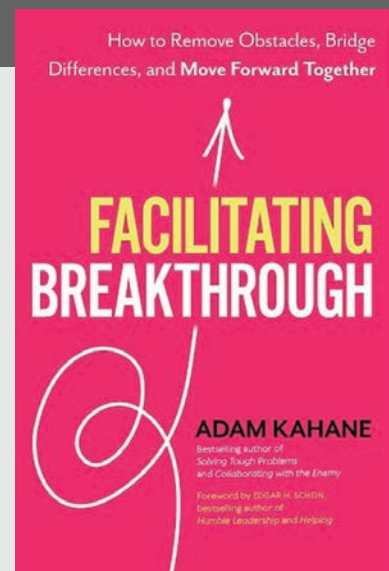
From the Foreword by Edgar H. Schein

“The stories that Kahane tells us make us realize how much third-party intervention has evolved. In the transformative facilitation model described in this book, we see elements of what we learned in the research on group dynamics and in my process consultation, Senge’s learning organization, Heifetz’s adaptive leadership, the open systems emphasis and spirit of inquiry that launched experiential learning in the early labs and is again being reaffirmed in Bushe and Marshak’s dialogic organization development, and most recently in Scharmer’s Theory U. This history of the field invites us to think of transformative facilitation as a far broader and deeper set of practices rather than a single formulaic facilitation method. What makes this book so powerful is that in a concise and beautifully presented model, Kahane brings all of this together.

The Kahane model moves us forward in a significant way from just describing a consultant’s interactive skills in dealing with clients to offering an in-depth overview of facilitation as the creation and management of new social systems and cultural islands that enable conflicting parties to get unconflicted, using both formal and informal methods as needed. Kahane provides us with key concepts that build on traditional polarities yet also offers a creative, fluid conceptual model of how to think about intervention in a more dynamic manner. Most of us who have consulted or coached would not even begin to be able to figure out how to work in some of the situations Kahane describes, much less know how to create the containers that enable this work in the first place.

I encourage you to find out in this book what this very courageous transformative facilitator has done to bring power, love, and justice together in real-world examples. ”

– Edgar H. Schein, Professor Emeritus, MIT Sloan School of Management
and pioneer in the field of organizational development



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Moving forward together is becoming less straightforward.

In many contexts, people face increasing complexity and decreasing control. They need to work with more people from across more divides. This is true both within organizations and in larger social systems.

In such situations, the most straightforward and commonplace ways of advancing—some people telling others what to do, or everyone just doing what they want to do—aren't adequate.

What is a better way?

One better way is through facilitating: helping a group collaborate across their differences to create change. The word *facilitate* means “to make easier,” and facilitation enables a group to work together more easily and effectively. But for diverse groups facing increasing complexity and decreasing control, the most common approaches to facilitating—bossy vertical directing from above and collegial horizontal accompanying from alongside—also aren't adequate. These common approaches often leave the participants frustrated and yearning for breakthrough.

This book describes an uncommon approach to facilitating such breakthrough: transformative facilitation. This approach focuses on removing the obstacles that stand in the way of people contributing and connecting equitably. More fundamentally, it focuses on removing the obstacles to love, power, and justice. It enables people to bring all of themselves to making a difference. It is a liberating way to make progress.

Transformative facilitation doesn't choose either the bossy vertical or the collegial horizontal approach: it cycles back and forth between them—not in a straight line—employing five pairs of outer moves and five inner shifts (discussed here and summarized at the end of the book). In doing this, it produces a third approach that delivers better results than either the vertical or horizontal one alone. Transformative facilitation is a structured and creative way to help diverse groups remove obstacles, bridge differences, and move forward together. Transformative facilitation enables breakthrough.

This book is for anyone who wants to facilitate breakthrough, be it as a leader, manager, consultant, coach, chairperson, organizer, mediator, stakeholder, or friend. A facilitator isn't only an earnest, energetic professional in a windowless conference room or in a window in a video conference. It isn't only someone who runs training or strategic planning exercises. It isn't only a referee or timekeeper. It is anyone who helps people work together to transform their situation: in person or online, as a professional or amateur, in the role of team leader or team member, in an organization or community, with a small alliance or large movement, during one meeting or over an extended process. A facilitator is anyone who supports groups to collaborate to create change.

This book offers a broad and bold vision of the contribution that facilitation can make to helping people move forward together.

— an excerpt from the Preface



River Run by Jim McManus, Mobius featured artist

Conventional Vertical and Horizontal Facilitation Both Constrain Collaboration

Excerpts from Chapter 2

A facilitator helps a group, and the tension starts right there. The word *group* is both a singular and plural noun, and the task of the facilitator is to help both the singular group as a whole and the plural members of the group. This is the core tension underlying all facilitation.

Some facilitators deal with this tension by focusing primarily on the first part of this task: helping the group as a whole address the problematic situation that has motivated their collaboration. Other facilitators focus primarily on the second part: helping the diverse individual members of the group address the diverse aspects of the situation that they find problematic.

These two approaches, the vertical and the horizontal, are the most common and conventional approaches to facilitation. Both have their proponents and methodologies. Both can help a group collaborate to create change. But both also have limits and risks

Vertical facilitation is the most common approach to facilitation because verticality is the dominant organizing principle of most organizations and of other social systems. You know you're in a vertical system when you keep looking up to the boss to know what to do (the higher above the lower), and when fitting in and being a good team player or community member are of paramount importance (the larger

above the smaller). When you're part of such a system, you sometimes have the feeling of being held down or boxed in, and find that you're silencing yourself or compromising on things that are important to you. In these ways, verticality constrains contribution, connection, and equity.

Vertical facilitation is the default approach in most organizations in most sectors in most parts of the world. Most people in positions of authority depend on and default to verticality because they believe that it is the only feasible way to produce forward collective action (and also to protect and advance their own interests). When they are involved in a collaboration to create change, they employ their authority to push for the contribution, connection, and equity that the work requires—although not necessarily more than is required.

Unconventional Transformative Facilitation Breaks through Constraints

Excerpts from Chapter 3

The vertical and horizontal approaches are more than just opposite poles: they are complementary. This means that each of these approaches is incomplete without the other approach and that the downsides of each can be mitigated only through including the other. [Note: This model for understanding and working with polarities is based on Barry Johnson's body of theory and practice.] Facilitation can therefore only be transformative—can only break through the constraints of the vertical and horizontal—if the

In transformative facilitation, the facilitator cycles back and forth between the vertical and horizontal to unblock contribution, connection, and equity, and thereby to enable the group to move forward together.

facilitator chooses to employ both approaches. This is the more powerful, unconventional choice.

Cycling removes obstacles

Both vertical and horizontal facilitation focus on pushing through the structural obstacles to moving forward together, but transformative facilitation focuses on *removing* these obstacles. This approach to creating change has a long pedigree: in the 1940s, pioneering organizational development researcher Kurt Lewin posited that removing obstacles is more effective than increasing pressure:

Instead of simply applying pressure or forcing a change, Lewin's research supports identifying and addressing restraining forces as a foundation for successful planned change: "In the first case [of applying pressure], the process . . . would be accomplished by a state of relatively high tension, [while] in the second case [of addressing restraining forces] by a state of relatively low tension. Since increase of tension above a certain degree is likely to be paralleled by higher aggressiveness, higher emotionality, and lower constructiveness, it is clear that as a rule, the second method will be preferable to the [first]."

– Gilmore Crosby on why Lewin remains best practice (2020)

In transformative facilitation, the facilitator makes both vertical and horizontal moves to remove structural obstacles to contribution, connection, and equity.

Cycling back and forth between the vertical and horizontal is like rocking back and forth a boulder that is blocking a stream, in order to dislodge it and enable the stream to run with greater coherence and flow.

You can't push a stream to flow, but if you remove the blockages, it will flow by itself.

Transformative facilitation enables change in organizations

Early in my career as an independent consultant, my colleagues and I facilitated a two-year strategy project for a Fortune 50 logistics company. The company's established way of doing things was vertical: the CEO managed through giving forceful, detailed directives, which had produced the coordination and cohesion that enabled outstanding business success. But the COO thought that the company's situation was problematic in that globalization and digitization were changing the competitive landscape, and he wanted employees from across the organization to collaborate more horizontally to create innovative responses.

My team worked with the COO and his colleagues vertically to agree on a project scope, timeline, and process, and to charter a cross-level, cross-departmental team. The process we designed for the team was more horizontal, participative, and creative than they were used to. They immersed themselves in the changes in their market by spending time on the front line of the organization, going on learning journeys to leading organizations in other sectors, and constructing scenarios of possible futures. They participated in workshops that emphasized full participation by all team members and that included structured exercises to generate, develop, and test innovative options.

This transformative process enabled breakthrough by creating a space within which the company's culture of command and control, which assumed that the bosses knew best, was suspended. This enabled greater contribution by participants across different departments and from different levels in the hierarchy. The cross departmental project team cut across the siloed organization, where lines of communication ran up and down rather than side to side, so the process enabled greater connection. And the company had a steep hierarchy of privilege, with senior people having much greater compensation and agency, so the process also enabled more equitable contribution and connection. Transformative facilitation enabled this team to come up with and implement a set of initiatives to launch new service offerings and to streamline company operations.

Five Questions all Collaborations Must Address From Chapter 4

Every collaboration is different because the particulars of the problematic situation, the participants, and the process are different. But in all collaborations, the participants and facilitators need to work through the same five basic how-to questions about how they will move forward together:

1. **How do we see our situation?** In other words, what is actually happening here, around, among, and within us? This question is about the reality (including the reality within the group) that the group is working together to address. If we can't understand our reality, we can't be effective in transforming it.
2. **How do we define success?** What outcomes are we trying to produce through our efforts? This question is about where we are trying to get to through our collaboration. If we don't know what our finish line is, we can't know whether we're making progress.
3. **How will we get from here to there?** What is our route from where we are to where we want to be? This question is about the way we will move forward—the approach, process, methodology, and steps.
4. **How do we decide who does what?** What is our approach to coordinating and aligning our efforts? This question is about how we will organize ourselves to collaborate across our differences (without necessarily relying on our usual roles and hierarchies).
5. **How do we understand our role?** What is our responsibility in this situation? This question is about how we each position ourselves vis-à-vis our situation and our collaborative effort to address it.

These questions all arise right from the beginning of every collaboration, but they usually don't get answered all at once or once and for all. Facilitators and participants need to deal with them repeatedly and iteratively over the duration of the collaboration, whether that is days or decades.

How vertical and horizontal facilitation answer the five questions

Vertical facilitation is common and seductive because it offers straightforward and familiar answers to these five questions. In this approach, both the participants and the facilitator typically give the following five confident, superior, controlling answers about the work they are doing:

VERTICAL

1. "We have the right answer."
2. "We need to agree."
3. "We know the way."
4. "Our leaders decide."
5. "We must fix this."

In horizontal facilitation, by contrast, participants typically give the following five defiant, defensive, autonomous answers, and the facilitator supports this autonomy:

HORIZONTAL

1. "We each have our own answer."
2. "We each need to keep moving."
3. "We will each find our way as we go."
4. "We each decide for ourselves."
5. "We must each get our own house in order."

How transformative facilitation answers the five questions

The vertical and horizontal approaches answer the five collaboration questions in opposite ways. These pairs of statements constitute five polarities that are focused versions of the overall vertical–horizontal



River Run by Jim McManus, Mobius featured artist

polarity. In transformative facilitation, the facilitator makes five sets of moves that help the participants cycle back and forth between each pair of poles. This is how the group obtains the best of both approaches, avoids the worst, and moves forward together.

1. *How Do We See Our Situation?*

The facilitator helps the participants work with this first question by helping them cycle between **advocating** and **inquiring**. Often both the participants and the facilitator start off a collaboration with the confident vertical perspective, “We have the right answer.” Each person thinks that “If only the others would agree with me, then the group would be able to move forward together more quickly and easily.” But when the group takes this position too far or for too long and starts to get stuck in rigid certainty, the facilitator needs to help participants *inquire* to move toward horizontal plurality. When participants are pounding the table, certain that they have the right answer, the facilitator can encourage them to add “In my opinion” to the beginning of their sentence, and if that is insufficient, to try “In my humble opinion.” This playful sentence stubs open the door to inquiry.

Then, when the participants take this horizontal “We each have our own answer” too far and for too long and start to get stuck in cacophony and indecision, the facilitator helps them *advocate* in order to move toward the clarity and decisiveness of vertical unity.

The facilitator moves back and forth between advocating and inquiring about what is happening

within the group and what the participants need to do about this; in doing so, the facilitator encourages the group to do the same in regard to what is going on in the problematic situation and what they need to do to address it. Through this cycling between advocating and inquiring, the group and the facilitator gradually and iteratively clarify their understanding of where they are and what this implies for what they need to do next.

2. *How Do We Define Success?*

The facilitator helps the participants work with the second question by helping them cycle between **concluding** and **advancing**. Often both the participants and the facilitator start off a collaboration with the vertical perspective, “We need to agree.” But when they take this position too far or for too long and start to get stuck in this demand for a conclusion, the facilitator needs to help them keep moving. One of my most important learnings as a facilitator has been that, in order to move forward together, agreement is not required as often or on as many matters as most people think.

Then, when the participants start to get stuck in the unfocused horizontal “We each just need to keep moving,” the facilitator needs to help them pause to work out what they can agree to focus on.

In doing this cycling, the facilitator is working with a key tool of facilitation: *the pace and timing of the process*—when the group needs to slow down or pause to reach an agreement or conclusion, when it needs to keep advancing even with no or only partial agreement,

and when it needs to declare that the collaboration must end. Through this cycling between concluding and advancing, the group and the facilitator gradually and iteratively clarify their understanding of where they want to get to.

3. *How Will We Get from Here to There?*

The facilitator helps the participants work with the third question by helping them cycle between **mapping** and **discovering**. Often both the participants and the facilitator start off a collaboration with the assured vertical perspective, “We know the way.” But when they take this position too far or for too long and start to get stubbornly stuck, the facilitator needs to help participants experiment to test their understanding and to *discover* new options.

Later, when the participants start to get stuck in the horizontal “We will each just find our way as we go,” the facilitator helps them *map* out a common way forward.

Sometimes the facilitator needs to persist with the planned process for the work of the group and the group needs to persist with its planned course of action to address the problematic situation. Sometimes they both need to pivot to deal with what is actually happening, which is different from what they had planned. Through this cycling between mapping and discovering, the group and the facilitator gradually and iteratively clarify their way forward.

4. *How Do We Decide Who Does What?*

The facilitator helps the participants work with the fourth question by helping them cycle between **directing** (like the director of an orchestra or band) and **accompanying** (like an accompanist playing piano or drums). Often both the participants and the facilitator start off a collaboration with the unambiguous vertical perspective, “Our leaders decide.” But when they take this position too far or for too long and start to get stuck in ineffective bossiness, the facilitator needs to help all participants take responsibility for their own actions.

Then, when the participants start to get stuck in the misaligned horizontal “We each need to decide for ourselves,” the facilitator helps them align their actions.

Working with polarities

1. How do we see our situation – cycling between advocating and inquiring
2. How do we define success – cycling between concluding and advancing
3. How will we get from here to there – cycling between mapping and discovering
4. How do we decide who does what – cycling between directing and accompanying
5. How do we understand our role – cycling between standing outside and standing inside

Sometimes the facilitator needs to *direct from the front of the group*, and the group needs to be directive in addressing the problematic situation. Sometimes the facilitator needs to *accompany from alongside the group*, and the group needs to do the same from alongside the situation. Through this cycling between directing and accompanying, the group and the facilitator gradually and iteratively clarify how they are coordinating their work.

5. *How Do We Understand Our Role?*

The facilitator helps the participants work with this last question by helping them cycle between **standing outside the problematic situation** and **standing inside it**. Often both the participants and the facilitator start off a collaboration with the objective vertical perspective, “We must fix this.” But when they take this position too far or for too long and start to get stuck in cold remoteness, the facilitator needs to help participants consider *how they are part of the problem* and therefore have the leverage to be part of the solution.

Then, when the participants start to get stuck in the self-centered and myopic horizontal “We must



As the facilitator works with each of the five collaboration questions, they need to pay attention and shift in a specific way:

1. To cycle between advocating and inquiring, the facilitator needs to *open up*: to pay attention to what is happening and what is needed in the situation and in the group. (This first shift is foundational for the four others.)
2. To cycle between concluding and advancing, the facilitator needs to *discern*: to pay attention to when the group needs to slow down to agree, when to keep moving forward without or with only partial agreement, and when to stop and end.
3. To cycle between mapping and discovering, the facilitator needs to *adapt*: to pay attention to when to persist in following a planned route and when to pivot to try a new one.
4. To cycle between directing and accompanying, the facilitator needs to *serve*: to pay attention to when the group needs firm instruction and when it needs relaxed support.
5. To cycle between standing outside and standing inside, the facilitator needs to *partner*: to pay attention to when to focus on being apart from the group and the situation and when to focus on being part of it.

Nocturne by Jim McManus, Mobius featured artist

each put our own house in order,” the facilitator helps them *stand outside the situation* to get a clearer, more nonpartisan and neutral perspective on what is happening.

Sometimes the facilitator also needs to stand outside to get a clearer perspective on what is happening and sometimes to stand inside it to recognize the ways in which they are also part of the problem and therefore have the leverage to be part of the solution. Through this cycling between standing outside and inside, the group and the facilitator gradually and iteratively clarify their roles and responsibilities.

Every group that is collaborating needs to work through the five basic questions, not just once at the beginning of the collaboration, but multiple times, iteratively, as the collaboration unfolds.

The Facilitator Knows What Move to Make Next by Paying Attention

Excerpts from Chapter 5

Sports psychologist Tim Gallwey says, “In every human endeavor there are two arenas of engagement: the outer and the inner. The outer game is played on an external arena to overcome external obstacles to reach an external goal. The inner game takes place within the mind of the player.”

In the outer game of transformative facilitation, the facilitator makes the ten moves (e.g. advocate or inquire). In the inner game of transformative facilitation, the facilitator makes five attentional shifts within themselves (see sidebar). These shifts enable the facilitator to know, at each moment, what move they need to make.

Paying attention requires dealing with distraction

Paying attention in these five ways is partly rational and partly intuitive. For example, when I am opening, I am listening to and analyzing the words participants are using, and also responding to subtle shifts in their visible gestures or invisible energies. When I am facilitating, I am not only or always listening to what people are saying; I am using all my senses to grasp what is going on in the group and what I need to do. ■

In the introduction to his book, Kahane writes about a conversation he had over dinner with Francisco de Roux, the former head of the Jesuit order in Colombia and a renowned peacemaker. In the story below, de Roux was reflecting on the workshop Kahane had facilitated that day with various leaders in Colombia who have major political, ideological and cultural differences. Kahane recounts:

By the end of this first, long day, the participants had begun to relax and to hope that they could do something worthwhile together. One of them said he had been amazed “to see the lion lie down with the lamb.” Then, when we all got up to go to dinner, de Roux rushed up to me, overflowing with excitement. “Now I see what you are doing!” he said. “You are removing the obstacles to the expression of the mystery!”

I knew de Roux was telling me something that was important to him—in Catholic theology, “the mystery” refers to the incomprehensible and unknowable mystery of God—but I didn’t understand what he thought this meant for what we had been doing in the workshop. Over dinner we talked for a long time and he patiently tried to give me a secular explanation: “Everything is a manifestation of the mystery. But you cannot predict or provoke or program it: it just emerges. Our key problem is that we obstruct this emergence, especially when our fears cause us to wall ourselves off.”

I found this conversation fascinating but baffling. I said, “I am not aware that I am doing what you say I am doing.” He shrugged and said, “Maybe that’s for the best.”

De Roux’s cryptic comments intrigued me. I understood that the mystery is intrinsically, well, mysterious—not in the sense of a mystery that is solved at the end of an Agatha Christie novel, but in the sense of something that is important but cannot be seen or grasped. Maybe, I thought, it was some sort of felt but invisible force, like gravity, that, if we could remove the obstacles, would pull us forward—like a mountain stream that, if we could remove the boulders that have tumbled in

and are blocking and dispersing the water, would run freely downhill in a strong, coherent flow.

The practice of removing obstacles

De Roux’s observation enabled me to see my longtime work as a facilitator in a new light. Most facilitators, including me up to this point, talk about their work in terms of getting participants to do things. But now I realized that in fact most of the people I work with want to or think they need to collaborate, in spite of or because of their differences. And when they succeed in doing so, they are overjoyed. The essence of what I am now calling transformative facilitation is therefore not getting participants to work together but helping them remove the obstacles to doing so. You can’t push a stream to flow, but if you remove the blockages, it will flow by itself. This realization transformed my understanding of facilitation.

What I found particularly intriguing in de Roux’s observation was not his esoteric reference to the mystery but his pragmatic focus on removing obstacles to its expression. After dinner, I went back to my room and made a list of all of the actions our facilitation team had taken over the months leading up to this first workshop (our facilitation work had started as soon as we had begun the project and engaged the participants ten months earlier) and during that first day that I could now interpret as aimed at removing obstacles to these leaders collaborating to transform the region.

The approach we took in Colombia unblocked the three essential ingredients to moving forward together: contribution, connection, and equity.”

In conversation with Adam Kahane

Helping People Work Together to Overcome Complex Challenges

Adam Kahane is a leading systems thinker and peace negotiator. He has spent more than more than thirty years facilitating breakthrough with leadership teams of companies, governments, foundations, churches, educational institutions, political parties, and nonprofit organizations. He has also facilitated diverse teams of leaders from across larger social systems at the local, state, national, and global levels, including executives and politicians, generals and guerrillas, civil servants and trade unionists, artists and activists – sometimes over hours or days, and other times over months or years.

His work helps people face the most critical challenges of our time: climate change, racial equity, democratic governance, Indigenous rights, health, food, energy, water, education, justice, and security. He has helped people bridge divides in, among other places, the US, Canada, Colombia, Haiti, Northern Ireland, Israel, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Thailand.

He is a director of Reos Partners, an international social enterprise that helps people work together to address their most important and intractable issues.



Q What was the impetus for writing your new book, *Facilitating Breakthrough*?

There are fewer and fewer things that can be done unilaterally, by force or alone. Therefore, the world needs more and better collaboration, especially in the context of issues that are increasingly complex and hard to control.

This difficulty of control can arise from both positive and negative developments. The riots in Brixton in the 1980s, for example, could be viewed positively in that compared with previous generations, the people who were rioting would have once thought they just had to

put up with a situation that was not acceptable. The difficulty of control arises from increasing complexity and interconnection, but also increasing voice. These days there are other elements like the lack of a common media landscape. Also, I worry that in the US and the UK especially, we see increasing levels of polarization, fragmentation, and demonization. (There is a difference between: "I disagree with you. You're wrong." and "You're evil. You're the devil, and I can't work with the devil because that's beyond the pale.")

The logic behind my new book is that collaboration is becoming both more necessary and more difficult,

and therefore we need better ways to do it, better facilitation. This book is my attempt at explaining what better facilitation entails. A facilitator is anybody who helps people collaborate to effect change.

Q In what way does *Facilitating Breakthrough* build on your earlier books?

In my previous work I focused on power and love – this book brings in the missing element of justice. I also talk about these forces in terms of contribution (power), connection (love) and equity (justice).

Secondly, this book introduces the concept of vertical versus horizontal facilitation. I haven't seen facilitation conceptualized like this before.

But the main thing I want to emphasize from the outset, is that the book focuses on the role of the facilitator. Previously I wrote about collaboration and the general subject of solving tough problems and working together across diverse teams, including people from different organizations. In this book, I focus on the facilitator's role. I define that in a bigger and broader way than it is normally understood. Bigger in the sense that the book is intended to offer a practical guide, a handbook, for *anyone* who finds themselves trying to help people work together to effect change. Facilitation is bigger than a specific professional title that few of us carry. Broader in that the reality is much more time is spent preparing and following up – in cajoling and supporting members of a group, than it is being in the room with everyone engaged in what we traditionally think of as the facilitation part.

Q Does the book codify a new approach or are you describing an existing approach in a new way?

Transformative facilitation isn't a new approach. It's just a new way of explaining the type of approaches that work. In my earlier book *Transformative Scenario Planning* (2012), I set out a specific methodology for collaborating to shape the future. This book explains a foundational approach that facilitators can apply to *any* collaborative methodology – be

Transformative facilitation enables change within and beyond organizations

While the main case study in the book focuses on peace work and nation building in Colombia, transformative facilitation applies wherever people have come together to work on a complex change together. Kahane writes:

“I have told the story of facilitating the extraordinary process in Colombia because it illustrates this approach in bright colors. I have also told it because this is where I started to understand the essence of transformative facilitation: removing obstacles to contribution, connection, and equity.

But transformative facilitation is powerful in many settings.

At Reos we have used this approach to help all kinds of groups work together on all kinds of challenges all over the world: retail company managers in Mexico making a plan to enter new markets, university administrators in the US redesigning their emergency financial aid system, First Nations leaders in Canada finding new strategies for improving population health, community members in the Netherlands implementing low-carbon energy systems, businesspeople in Thailand creating systems to reduce corruption, and food companies, farmers, and nongovernmental organizations around the world creating more sustainable food supply chains.

Transformative facilitation is a widely applicable approach to helping people collaborate to create change.”

it Appreciative Inquiry, Emergent Strategy, Open Space Technology, Theory U and so forth. I provide a language and a framework for something that many, if not all, skilled practitioners already do. My book simply offers a new framework for an existing practice.

A few weeks ago, I got an email from a man in his eighties who had been doing leadership training and facilitation for a long time. He told me I had described things he had done but that he had never tied together before. I was very happy to receive that email. That was exactly what I was trying to do. A more pertinent example comes from working with a group of managers in the Netherlands many years ago. When I talked to them about power and love being about attending to the team as a whole and to the individual members of the team (which is the central idea behind vertical and horizontal facilitation), they said: *Well, this is completely obvious. That's what we do all day every day. That's all you're doing in management.* I thought this was a wonderful point – that a good manager is constantly attending both to the group as a singular noun and the group as a plural noun.

Can you tell us more about why you added justice to the equation of power and love?

I've spoken a lot about the about Martin Luther King Jr.'s phrase, "power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic."

Justice was a missing aspect. People want to contribute (power). They want to connect (love). And they want their contribution and connection to be equitable, to be fair (justice). People have different definitions of what fair is, but these are the three imperatives for teamwork, management, and leadership today. I'm just raising their profile by referring to them as Power, Love and Justice.

Adding justice to the power and love equation is not a minor point. It is what gives all this work a directionality – it says we're not just trying to connect and contribute, there's something positive we're trying to achieve. In the most general sense of the word, what we are trying to achieve is a more just, fair, and equitable world.

Why is facilitation increasingly imperative in the workplace?

Well, before we even get to the long list of complex organizational challenges, there's a fundamental, ongoing issue alive in most workplaces.

Decades ago, I had the chance to meet the influential editor and writer Harriet Rubin. She said something to me that really stuck in my mind. It always surprised her that people insisted on being free when they walked down the street, but seem contented to be bossed around the moment they got to the office. That's a lot less true today than it was then. To deal with this dynamic, the team leader, the manager, "the boss" needs to look after the whole *and* the individual parts – employing vertical and horizontal moves, if they really want people to be engaged and contribute.

Harriet's idea also ties to the point that you have certain rights at work – there needs to be this notion of equity and fairness. When we witnessed Derek Chauvin press his knee into the neck of George Floyd, this was the most grotesque example of inequity or injustice. Without wishing to be inflammatory, in most organizations, someone somewhere is suffocating the needs and contributions of subordinates – whether they mean to or not. We are so accustomed to the lack of equity and fairness in hierarchical organizations, where someone plays the role of the boss, that we fail to realize this.

It's a particular issue with visionary founders who focus on the good of the whole and undermine the needs of the parts. A long time ago I realized that when you are a part of a team, there's only one or maybe two people for whom the good of the whole and their own interests are identical. Those people are the facilitator and the boss. For everybody else, their interests hopefully overlap with the interest of the whole, but they have the interest of their department, their job, their family, and themselves. When the visionary leader or the facilitator say, *let's all leave our agendas at the door*, they are prioritizing their *own* interests above the interests of the members of the team. And then we wonder how we get stuck with the status quo!

A healthy system requires attending to all three elements – Power, Love and Justice, to the interplay between a sense of agency, of unity and equity. This, in turn, requires facilitation.

Q In your book you describe five pairs of moves a facilitator can make to cycle between vertical and horizontal forms of facilitation. In your experience are some moves more challenging than others?

Not necessarily, no. Several of them are well-known. For example, *advocating and inquiring* – Peter Senge used exactly those words in *The Fifth Discipline*. I think *mapping and discovering* can be very challenging in many organizations where you are supposed to know things in advance of doing them. The pair that interests me the most is *standing outside versus standing inside*, because it's the one closest to identity, asking *where am I, as a facilitator, with respect to the system. Am I a part of, or outside the group? Do I need to shift perspective for the situation to change?*

But really, all ten moves are well-known already, in one way or another. The difficulty is not the individual elements. It's like having a vocabulary of ten words or a recipe with ten ingredients. The challenge is that there's no formulaic order. You can't know in advance which you have to use or how much. You have a recipe that says you have these ten things, but I can't tell you the proportions or the sequence to introduce them. So, the challenge is not in the individual moves, but in paying attention to what's happening in the moment in a way that allows you to know which move to use next. That's the really hard part.

Bill O'Brien, the CEO of Hanover Insurance was my former business partner. He had a big influence on me before he passed away. He once said, "The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor." That insight has been re-quoted many times, often in support of various esoteric practices, but what he was really talking about was much more basic stuff. In my case, the truth is I need a good night's sleep. That and I try hard not to be distracted when I work. That's it. Ensuring those two conditions is where I place all my attention.

We all have different gifts. My strength is lucidity and clarity. It's nothing to be proud of — I got it from my father. You can't take credit for a gift. But you must learn not to waste it. There are other gifts I just don't have. For example, I have become more aware than I used to be of the emotional dimensions of trauma in the environments in which I work. I am more empathetic and sensitive to that than I used to be.

Q Is it possible there's an alchemical magic to facilitation – that just like de Roux said (see page 23), you don't need to know what it is that you seem to know how to do – once you build the right container, one that can hold the ten moves?

That's a very important point. Our work is about healing. That's been my point whenever I discuss the conflict, disconnection, and fragmentation I have seen throughout my life's work.

In an earlier book, I told a story that captures this beautifully. A woman once told me that her husband had been swimming in a lake when he was run over by a motorboat.

The propeller cut a very deep gash in his thigh. They rushed him to the hospital where the surgeon cleaned the wound and then said something along the lines of: *There's nothing more I can do. I must send you home. Your job is to keep the wound clean. The two sides of the wound – they want to be one, they want to be whole. I cannot sew this together, but they will reach toward one another when they are ready.* This idea that the two sides always want to be whole, they just need to heal, is at the heart of our work. Our job, as facilitators, is to keep the wound clean, to remove the obstacles. ■

Adam Kahane was in conversation with Nathalie Hourihan, a writer, researcher and organizational behavior knowledge expert, who serves as Mobius Chief Knowledge Officer, and Editor of The Mobius Strip.

Transformative facilitation isn't a new approach. It's just a new way of explaining the type of approaches that work.