ROGER SCHWARZ

THE SKILLED FACILITATOR

THIRD EDITION

A Comprehensive Resource for
CONSULTANTS, FACILITATORS,
COACHES, and TRAINERS

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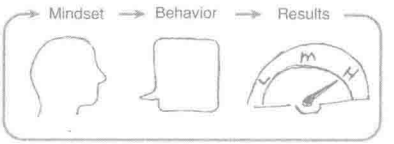
The Skilled Facilitator

A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Coaches, and Trainers

Third Edition



Roger Schwarz

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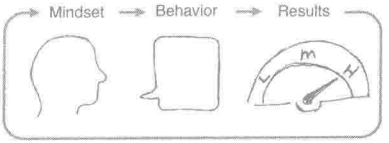

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Since I wrote the first edition of *The Skilled Facilitator* in 1994, it has become a standard reference in the field. Many readers have told me that the book has fundamentally changed how they help the groups they work with. They return to it again and again when faced with challenging or new situations. I am gratified that many people in different roles across many fields have found the book so valuable. I hope you will be among them.

WHAT *THE SKILLED FACILITATOR* IS ABOUT

The Skilled Facilitator is about how you can help groups become more effective, whether you're a consultant, facilitator, coach, trainer, or mediator. When I wrote the first edition, facilitative skills were something you called on a facilitator for. Now these skills are recognized as a core competency for anyone working with groups.

The book describes one approach to facilitation—the Skilled Facilitator approach. It's a relatively comprehensive and integrated approach, so you can learn it and use it as you work with groups. The approach is based on research and theory that I cite throughout the book.

The Skilled Facilitator approach has several key features. It's based on a set of core values and assumptions—what I call mindset—and principles. Whether

you're serving as a facilitator, consultant, coach, trainer, or mediator, you can always figure out what to do in a particular situation by turning to the core values, assumptions, and principles to guide your behavior.

The Skilled Facilitator approach integrates theory and practice. Throughout the book, I answer three questions: "What do I do? How do I do it? Why do I do it that way?" By answering the first question, you understand what specific tool, technique, or method to use in any particular situation. This gives you a general idea of how to respond in any situation. By answering the second question, you understand exactly what to say in that situation. Answering these first two questions is necessary, but not sufficient. By answering the third question, you understand the theory and principles that make all the tools, techniques, methods, and your specific behaviors work. When you know the answers to these three questions, you no longer have to use the tools and methods exactly as you learned them—you can modify them and design your own tools and methods to help a group, no matter what situation you're in.

The Skilled Facilitator approach is a systems approach for helping groups. All the parts of the approach fit together and reinforce each other because they are all based on the same set of core values, assumptions, and principles. The logic of the approach is transparent, and you can share it with the groups you're helping. This makes the approach more powerful and practical.

In the Skilled Facilitator approach, the mindset and behaviors that you use to help a group are the same mindset and behaviors that the group can use to improve its effectiveness. There isn't a secret set of principles, techniques, or methods for you and another set for the group. When you act effectively, you're modeling effective behavior for the group. This makes it much easier for you to help the group increase its effectiveness. Recently, I wrote *Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams* for the groups and teams you are helping. The book uses the very same approach (including the same models and behaviors) that I describe here to help teams develop the mindset, skill set, and team design to create better results. If you find *The Skilled Facilitator* useful and want to help teams learn how they can apply it in their leadership roles, *Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams* will show them how.

At the heart of the Skilled Facilitator approach is the premise that how you think is how you facilitate (or consult, coach, train, or mediate). Research shows that in challenging situations almost all of us use a mindset that leads us to behave in ways that reduce our ability to help the groups we're hired to help. The Skilled Facilitator approach teaches you how to rigorously reflect on your own thinking and feeling so that you can more consistently operate from a productive mindset. This will enable you and the groups you help to get three results: better performance, stronger working relationships, and individual well-being.

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WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

Most people who need to use facilitation skills aren't facilitators. If you need facilitation skills to help groups that you're not a member of, I wrote this book for you. *The Skilled Facilitator* will help you work more effectively with groups so that they can better achieve their results. You'll find this book useful if you work in any of these roles:

- You're a **facilitator** who helps work groups: boards, top leadership teams, management teams, work teams, task forces, committees, labor-management groups, interorganizational committees, or community groups. This includes facilitators who specialize in Lean, Six Sigma, or other process improvement approaches.
- You're a **consultant** who works with groups as you provide expertise in any content area, such as strategy, marketing, operations, process improvement, or any other area.
- You're an **organization development consultant** who needs facilitative skills to help groups and organizations manage change.
- You're an **HR consultant** who serves as a business partner to the leadership teams you support and are often involved in difficult conversations regarding employee performance or behavior.
- You're a **coach** working with teams, groups, or individuals.
- You're a **trainer** who facilitates discussion as part of your training.
- You're a **mediator** who wants to develop your facilitative skills or work with groups.
- You're a **faculty member** who, as a practical scholar, teaches courses on groups or teams, facilitation, consultation, coaching, organization development, or conflict management, in the fields of management, health care, engineering, public administration, planning, psychology, social work, education, public health, or in other applied fields.

If you're the leader or member of a team, I've written another book for you: *Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams*. It uses the same approach that I describe in this book, but it's designed for your specific role. If someone has suggested you read *The Skilled Facilitator,* you might find *Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams* a better fit for your needs.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

I have organized *The Skilled Facilitator* into four parts. Here are brief descriptions of the chapters within them.

Part One: The Foundation

In Part One, I lay the foundation for using facilitative skills.

Chapter 1, "The Skilled Facilitator Approach." In this chapter, I give an overview of the Skilled Facilitator approach, including what it will help you accomplish and the questions I answer throughout the book.

Chapter 2, "The Facilitator and Other Facilitative Roles." How do I figure out what role to use when working with a group? What do I do if I need to play more than one role? In this chapter, I describe how you can use the Skilled Facilitator approach in any role you serve: consultant, facilitator, coach, trainer, or mediator. I describe each role, explain when to serve in each one, and discuss how to serve in multiple roles when working with groups.

Chapter 3, "How You Think Is How You Facilitate: How Unilateral Control Undermines Your Ability to Help Groups." The most challenging part of facilitating, consulting, coaching, or training is being able to work from a productive mindset. This chapter describes how almost all of us operate from an unproductive mindset—unilateral control—when we're faced with challenging group situations. I describe how unilateral control leads you to think and behave in ways that reduce your effectiveness and your ability to help groups.

Chapter 4, "Facilitating with the Mutual Learning Approach." The mutual learning approach is the foundation of the Skilled Facilitator approach. In this chapter, I describe how the mutual learning mindset enables you to think and act in ways that help you and the groups you're working with get results that aren't possible with a unilateral control approach. I describe the specific values, assumptions, and behaviors that make up the mutual learning approach.

Chapter 5, "Eight Behaviors for Mutual Learning." This chapter describes the eight behaviors that put the mutual learning mindset into action and how you can use them to increase your effectiveness and to help groups increase their effectiveness. I explain how each behavior contributes to better results and when and how you use each one.

Chapter 6, "Designing and Developing Effective Groups." If you're helping groups get better results, it's important to understand what it takes for groups to get those results. Building on the mutual learning approach, this chapter provides a model of group effectiveness that explains how to design new groups to be effective and how to help existing groups improve their results.

Part Two: Diagnosing and Intervening with Groups

In Part Two, I describe how to observe a group, figure out what is happening that is limiting the group's effectiveness, and intervene to help the group become more effective.

Chapter 7, "Diagnosing and Intervening with Groups." How do I figure out what's happening in a group that's reducing its effectiveness? What do I say to the group when I figure it out? In this chapter, I introduce the mutual learning cycle that you can use to answer these questions and to diagnose and intervene effectively with a group.

Chapter 8, "How to Diagnose Groups." There are so many things to pay attention to in a group; how do I decide what to look for? In this chapter, I show you how to use the mutual learning cycle to look for the important things occurring in a group, figure out what they mean, and decide whether to intervene with the group.

Chapter 9, "How to Intervene with Groups." After I decide to say something to the group, what exactly should I say, who should I say it to, and when should I say it? In this chapter, I show you how to intervene so you can determine if the group is seeing what you're seeing and decide together what, if anything, the group or you should do differently.

Chapter 10, "Diagnosing and Intervening on the Mutual Learning Behaviors." In this chapter, I give verbatim examples of how to intervene when group members are not using each of the eight mutual learning behaviors.

Chapter 11, "Using Mutual Learning to Improve Other Processes and Techniques." This chapter shows you how to use the Skilled Facilitator approach to help a group improve how it uses any process or technique, such as Lean and Six Sigma processes, performance management processes, strategic planning, or problem solving.

Chapter 12, "Diagnosing and Intervening on Emotions—The Group's and Yours." What do I do when people start to get emotional? What do I do when I start to get emotional? In this chapter, I explain how you and the group members generate your emotions, and how you can help group members and yourself express emotion so it makes the conversation and problem solving more productive.

Part Three: Agreeing to Work Together

In Part Three, I describe how to reach an agreement to work with a group; how to decide whether to work with a partner, and if so, how; and how to work internally in your organization.

Chapter 13, "Contracting: Deciding Whether and How to Work with a Group." The agreement you develop with a group about how you will work together creates the foundation for your helping relationship. Poor contracting generates problems throughout the relationship. In this chapter, I describe a detailed five-stage process you can use to ensure that you and the group develop a healthy working relationship that meets both of your needs.

Chapter 14, "Working with a Partner." Working with a partner can be more valuable to a group—if you and your partner can work well together. In this chapter, I describe the potential advantages and disadvantages of working with a partner, how to decide whether to work with a partner, and ways to divide and coordinate your work effectively.

Chapter 15, "Serving in a Facilitative Role in Your Own Organization." If you're an internal facilitator, consultant, or coach, you face different challenges than your external counterparts. In this chapter, I describe how your internal facilitative role develops, the potential advantages and disadvantages of the internal role, and specific strategies you can use to be effective in your role, including contracting with your manager.

Part Four: Working with Technology

In Part Four, I describe how to work virtually with groups.

Chapter 16, "Using Virtual Meetings." Increasingly, groups are meeting in virtual spaces rather than face-to-face. In this chapter, I describe when to use virtual meetings, how to decide among different virtual meeting technologies, identify the special challenges of virtual meetings, and explain how to effectively address the challenges.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

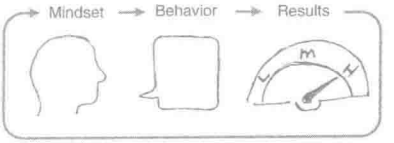
This book offers several features that will help you navigate and learn the Skilled Facilitator approach:

- Key principles of the Skilled Facilitator approach are in **boldface** type, and key terms are in *italics* type.
- A book cannot substitute for the skill-building practice of a workshop (which is why we offer The Skilled Facilitator Intensive Workshop). Still, throughout the book I give verbatim examples that show you how to put the principles into practice. This includes real cases of how group members act ineffectively and how you can intervene in such cases.
- I share my own stories and my colleagues' stories to illustrate how to apply the Skilled Facilitator approach—and how not to apply it. There are examples of my own ineffective facilitation; I have learned from them and assume you will, too. In all the examples and stories, I have disguised the name and type of the organization, as well as the names of individual members. I have sometimes created a composite of several stories to quickly illustrate a point.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT IN THE THIRD EDITION

If you've read the second edition, you may be wondering how this edition is different. There are a number of significant differences:

- I focus more on the consultant, coaching, and trainer roles. In this edition, I explain throughout the book how you would approach a situation differently depending on your facilitative role.
- There is a new chapter on using virtual meetings.
- All of the models are completely revised. The unilateral control approach and mutual learning approach have new core values and assumptions, behaviors, and results. The Team Effectiveness Model has new core values and results.
- The mutual learning approach and the Team Effectiveness Model are completely integrated. The mutual learning approach is completed embedded in the Team Effectiveness Model.



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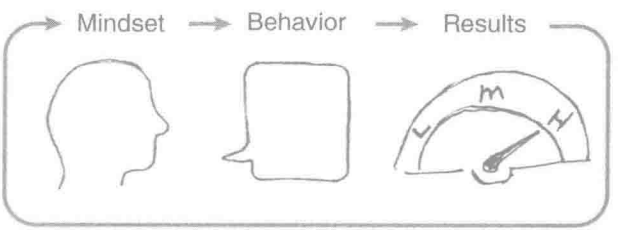
PART ONE

THE FOUNDATION



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