

# Dynamic Facilitation

*Magic exists. There is a way to help people achieve creative breakthroughs.*

—Carissa Lloyd

## Gridlock Between Elementary School Parents

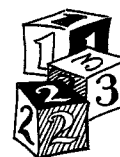
Parents at an elementary school had been struggling to address educational issues through the district's established governance systems. At times, the school community found itself in an adversarial gridlock with two sides arguing back and forth. After a particularly challenging experience, a parent group decided to seek a sustained culture of trust and respect through a series of dynamically facilitated meetings.

Over the course of a year, three weekend meetings of 10 to 12 randomly selected parents and faculty members generated unanimous conclusions about issues like communication among parents and teachers, and the need for ongoing dialogue about the philosophy of education and values unique to the school.

Unanimous choices and insights from these meetings, plus the ongoing dialogue they create, now inform how the school operates. Rather than telling faculty and staff what they should be doing, parents are involved, taking actions and sparking outcomes unimagined before the process began. More parents are involved in productive ways. The school principal, a wary participant at the beginning, now recognizes the value that the Center for Wise Democracy's dynamically facilitated "Wisdom Council" process brings to school governance and how these big-issue conversations build community.

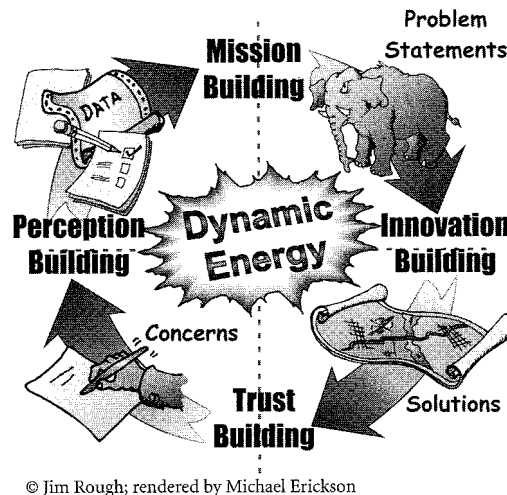
## The Basics

The best way for a group of people to reach a decision is for them to have a creative conversation with a win/win breakthrough at the end. Then everyone is unanimous about the decision, moti-



vated to implement it, and excited about one another. Most meetings eliminate this possibility. They aim for “decision making,” in which logical, orderly progress is achieved. People are encouraged to hold back their passion, stick to the agenda, and try to reach preset goals. This orientation to “managing change” in meetings is good for smaller issues, but it won’t work for big, messy, or impossible-seeming issues. Crises are a regular result.

Dynamic Facilitation (figure 1) is an emergent approach to facilitating that helps people address difficult issues creatively and collaboratively, where “shifts” and breakthroughs are the natural result. It is a principled way to elicit a heartfelt, creative quality of thinking known as “choice creating” that generates increased trust, shared understandings, and the spirit of community. In this “self-organizing” environment, breakthroughs become likely. Individual uniqueness and passion, normally seen as liabilities, are valued as assets in the group.



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Figure 1. The Dynamic Facilitation Process

The dynamic facilitator assures this “self-organizing,” edge-of-chaos quality of thinking by avoiding the usual forms of control, like holding people to the agenda or setting guidelines of behavior. Instead, she follows the energy of the participants. She stands in front of a group and helps them determine an issue they all really care about, whether it is solvable or not. Then she helps them to be authentic, speak from the heart and say what is really on their minds. She frames each comment as a new item of data, a concern, solution, or a new statement of the problem. Each comment is then fully heard by group members as one more piece to the puzzle that they all are solving together.

The dynamic facilitator plays an active role, while others can just be themselves. The group diverges and converges around the topics they have identified. The dynamic facilitator captures this story and helps the group notice where they are shifting and progressing. Dynamic Facilitation is well suited to address emotional issues, complex messes, and impossible issues. Because a

dynamic facilitator is holding a container of self-organizing energy for people, they naturally think systemically and holistically, seeking the “real” underlying issues and causes. Often their primary discovery is a new understanding of the problem, which comes with a feeling of “empowerment” and the capacity to solve it.

Conclusions are always unanimous. This often happens when everyone “co-senses” what is needed in the situation. Breakthrough insights, shifts of attitude, new levels of trust, enhanced individual capabilities, and a new sense of “we” help make these “co-sensings” possible.

Dynamic Facilitation opens new doors of possibility for large-system change, as was experienced among parents, faculty, and administrators in the school community mentioned earlier. The school’s process was part of a new social invention called the Center for Wise Democracy’s (CWD) “Wisdom Council,”<sup>1</sup> which uses Dynamic Facilitation to spark a shared, bottom-up vision among all members of a large system of people. The CWD Wisdom Council process is now being used in government agencies, cities, and other organizations to involve everyone in identifying and addressing difficult issues and reaching thoughtful, unanimous conclusions. This new process offers the prospect of engaging all citizens of a city, state, or nation in dialogue to create a unanimous voice of “We the People.” As one parent said from his experience in a CWD Wisdom Council session at the school, “Democracy can work.”



## Table of Uses

Typical Setting	Brief Description	Project Length	Number of Participants/ Key Events
Large system of people, like a government agency or city. A CWD “Wisdom Council” uses Dynamic Facilitation to create a whole-system dialogue.	A randomly selected group is dynamically facilitated to choose issues and address them creatively.	This is an ongoing process, with a new random group every quarter or so.	6–12 participants meet quarterly for 2 half days or longer. They present their results in large group meetings and to everyone in the organization.
Team meetings of employees	Identify and creatively address key issues resulting in employee empowerment, better decisions, and an orientation to quality.	1 hour per week, ongoing	Teams of 6–24 people. Employees address the most important issues, reach unanimous conclusions, share these with management, and take action.
Conflict resolution session for employees and supervisor	A work group has many grievances. A dynamic facilitator helps all to address and resolve their frustrations.	4, 2-hour sessions over 1 month	Involves the entire work group and sometimes others. By the final meeting, the group has achieved a new level of trust and capability.

Typical Setting	Brief Description	Project Length	Number of Participants/ Key Events
Senior or executive leadership strategy sessions	Executives build trust as they create a shared vision and workable strategy. They walk away with actions, plus knowing all the views and how they fit together.	2 half-day meetings, quarterly	Involves leaders and sets a creative backdrop for all operations, like a regular “time-out.”

Table of Uses. Continued



## About the Authors

*Jim Rough* (jim@dynamicfacilitation.com) is a consultant, author, speaker, and social innovator. He originated *Dynamic Facilitation*, on which he has been presenting public and private seminars since 1990. Jim also originated the CWD Wisdom Council, a new large-system change approach now being implemented in government agencies, schools, and communities. He is author of *Society's Breakthrough! Releasing the Essential Wisdom and Virtue of All the People*.

*DeAnna Martin* (deanna@dynamicfacilitation.com) is a dynamic facilitator, educator, and director of the Center for Wise Democracy. She was formerly the director of a statewide nonprofit, Washington Ceasefire; a consultant for public agencies such as Washington's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Port of Seattle; and a program director with nonprofits including the American Diabetes Association and Youth Volunteer Corps. She specializes in conflict resolution, leadership development, communications, training and facilitation, and community organizing.



## Where to Go for More Information

### REFERENCES

- Rough, Jim. *Society's Breakthrough! Releasing Essential Wisdom and Virtue in All the People*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2002.
- Zubizarreta, Rosa, and Jim Rough. *A Manual & Reader for Dynamic Facilitation and the Choice-Creating Process: Evoking Practical Group Creativity and Transformation through Generative Dialogue*. Port Townsend, WA: Jim Rough and Associates, 2002.

### ORGANIZATION

Dynamic Facilitation—[www.DynamicFacilitation.com](http://www.DynamicFacilitation.com)

*Note: The steps of the Center for Wise Democracy's Wisdom Council are different from the Ancient Wisdom Council process noted on page 195 in chapter 13, "Ancient Wisdom Council."*

1. For more information on the Center for Wise Democracy's Wisdom Council, visit [www.wisedemocracy.org](http://www.wisedemocracy.org).