

A Chronological History of the IAF

"A Look at Our Origins"

Beret E. Griffith and Jean Watts

The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) evolved from gatherings of Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) facilitators. Meetings began in 1989 to explore creating a loose-knit "association" of people using ICA Technology of Participation (ToP™) group facilitation methods in their professional activities. ToP facilitation methods are an integration of intellectual, social, and spirit processes developed by the ICA. The early meetings set the tone for highly participatory sessions that shared facilitation methods and techniques. Today, the IAF has grown from this initial group of ToP facilitators to an organization of 1200 facilitators from all fifty-one countries. The IAF incorporated in January of 1994.

The story begins in 1973 with the ICA, a private, not-for-profit program division of the Ecumenical Institute (EI). The ICA is concerned with the human factor in world development and is committed to helping people in groups and organizations around the world participate in creating their own future. Many ICA trainers, consultants, and facilitators were engaged in community development using EI/ICA methods in their work with groups and organizations in all sectors of society. People began to feel the need for support and collaboration in order to push the edges of the methods they were using. In the mid 1980's, a group of ICA facilitators met in Dallas, Texas and formed a local Change Master's Guild, to "Share Approaches that Work," a phrase coined by the ICA.

Twenty-seven ICA consultants and facilitators responded to a survey sent to ICA staff and ToP facilitators in October of 1987 asking them to an exploratory meeting to research and become familiar with innovative group facilitation methods. In November 1988, at a global ICA meeting in Mexico, the concept of creating an association was shared with colleagues from around the world. Their positive response gave the concept energy and direction and motivated the Change Masters Guild in Dallas to extend an invitation for interested people to gather and continue the discussion.

The Birth of an Association

THE CHANGE MASTERS MEETING

January 1989, Dallas, Texas

Twenty-seven people came to the first meeting. They bunked with old colleagues and friends or stayed at a hotel where rooms were a whopping \$49 per night. Sharing stories and experiences of how ICA ToP methods were being used was first on the agenda. Those attending discovered they shared a common interest in establishing credibility as facilitators; developing a means of interchange; bringing spirit methods into facilitation work; ensuring quality in facilitation; conducting focused research; looking at the components of organization transformation; and imagining the future of facilitation. People were beginning to envision the future of a group of facilitators meeting regularly.

ICA NETWORK GATHERING

December 1989, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In December of 1989, Vance Engleman, on his own initiative, extended an invitation to a second meeting to continue the dialogue in Pittsburgh. Sixty-seven facilitators met for a weekend. Two of the sixty-seven traveled from countries outside the USA just to attend this gathering, establishing it as an international group. The fee for the meeting was \$75.00 including all the meals. Open Space Technology was used as people met to dialogue around the following topics: Spirit Edge Research; Sharing Approaches and

Products that Work; Collaboration Options & Business Practices; and Facilitator Certification and Training. Celebrating on a river-boat set the stage for ongoing festivities at each of the subsequent meetings. Trust was built within the group and the desire to work collaboratively was growing. The group gave itself a name: The ICA Network (ICAN).

ICA NETWORK GATHERING **December 1990, New Orleans, Louisiana**

Jean Watts offered to host meeting three in New Orleans. Seventy-five facilitators met at the Dominican Conference Center and Loyola Law School. The theme of the gathering was "*The Organization as a Learning Community*." The intent was to provide another opportunity for interchange; share edges in the field of Organization Transformation; explore and establish collaborative partnerships, while having a good time. There were reports from the ICA Asian Organizational Transformation Network (OTN). Case studies of facilitation within large organizations in the private and public sectors were presented. This set the stage for the marketplace dynamic. Groups met to consider several topics in depth: Understanding Cultural Change in Organizations; Marketing Facilitation Skills; Publishing Strategies; and Facilitator Certification and Training. A Cajun Night on the Town provided wonderful eating and dancing. A workshop focusing on "Where do we go from here" created a sense that a new association of facilitators was emerging.

A MIDWEST WINTER ICA NETWORK GATHERING **December 1991, Minneapolis, Minnesota**

One hundred people arrived in Minneapolis for the fourth meeting held at the Wilder Conference Center in the winter woods outside the city. "*New Paradigms in Leadership: Ordinary People in Extraordinary Teams*" was the theme for the gathering. Many people arrived early for a pre-conference site visit to the Minnesota Department of Administration, hosted by Mirja Hanson, Sue Laxdal, Virginia Pierce, and Doris Conway-Rettig. The group was introduced to an award winning change project demonstrating commitment to institutional transformation and culture change.

Two key-note speakers set the tone for the gathering. Antonia Schusta, a Group Executive from Household International spoke about her international in-house experience using ToP methods and Roger Harrison, a senior organization development consultant and writer in the arena of organization culture change shared his edge work on linking personal development with professional work and bringing heart into work. A special treat was celebrating the American Teacher Award given to Olive Ann Slotta, newly named Math Teacher of the Year, for her participatory, facilitative approach to teaching. Marketplace sessions included: Revitalizing Human Spirit in the Workplace; Case Studies in Catalyzing Team Synergy; Working with a Changing, Multi-cultural Workforce; and the Mission of the ICA Network Meeting. International dancing lessons, snow shoeing and regular walks in the snow offered a wonderful winter experience. In addition there were conversations on becoming "an official association." Possible names were even considered and the decision was made to officially submit request to the ICA Board of Directors to become a separate association affiliated with the ICA.

At a post-conference Advanced Facilitator Think Tank, twenty-five people began to develop facilitator competencies and an advanced facilitator training scheme, preparing the way for IAF work on Facilitator Certification and the IAF Think Tanks.

ICAN MEETING **January 1993, Phoenix Arizona**

ICA Phoenix hosted the fifth meeting – "*Creating A Culture of Participation*." A precedence for meeting on Martin Luther King weekend in January had been set. One hundred and forty people attended the meeting. ToP training courses were offered as pre-conference sessions and the ICA Organizational Transformation Research Team met for a day following the conference. Twenty-five sessions were held

and a sampling of sessions included: Facilitative Leadership in Russia; Beyond Methods: Insights from Native American Ways of Honoring and Inviting Participation; Facilitation as a Spiritual Practice; Deploying a Transformation Process; IBM Team Focus Demonstration; Transformational Leadership Lab (from India); and Exploring the Technology of Image Change. A conference notebook was given to participants that included session descriptions and some session handouts. The bookstore, Round Table sessions, Share-A-Method, and a Focused Market Interchange were added to the gathering.

Mirja Hanson lead a vision workshop on "What would we like to see this network do or be in 1-5 years?" Three fourths of the conference participants attended the visioning workshop. The Shared Vision included the following elements: Profession Enhancing Publication; Develop and Promote Edge Participative Facilitation Technologies; Coordinated Information Service for Marketing & Resources; Focused Strategic Collaborations; Facilitator Training & Mentoring; Network Expansion; Providing and Transferring ToP; ICA Network Association Standards; and ICA Network Association Practices. The momentum and commitment to become an official association had emerged. The threads of this initial vision for an association are seen in the present IAF Strategic Plan.

Launching the International Association of Facilitators - IAF

Planning for the New Association August, 1993, Chicago, Illinois

Between January and August of 1993 a conversation about launching a new association began to gain momentum. To get the ball rolling, Bob Vance wrote a white paper addressing the need for an. Cynthia Vance, Jim Troxel, Jean Watts, Carol Fleischman, Sue Laxdal, Sherwood Shankland, Beret Griffith, and George Packard met at the ICA training center in Chicago to develop a strategic plan for an independent association to be launched in January 1994 at the ICA Network Conference in Alexandria, Virginia. Pat Tuecke, Mirja Hanson, and Gary Forbes helped plan the meeting but were not able to attend.

ICA NETWORK CONFERENCE January 1994, Alexandria, Virginia

The IAF was incorporated and the association was founded at the sixth ICA Network Conference, "*Creating a Culture of Participation*," in Alexandria, Virginia in January 1994 with seventy-three charter members. One hundred and twenty people attended in spite of a major blizzard that prevented over fifty people from attending. The Alexandria conference planning team sent out the first Request for Proposals and twenty-one sessions were held within four tracks. ICA offered Pre-conference Training. Everyone was encouraged to sign up for e-mail and an e-mail training session was held. Global communication was established and the global virtual community began to regularly communicate. A great, wonderful, humorous celebration was held to herald the beginning of IAF. The craft room was launched and everyone made masks to wear at the celebration. A slide show with at least one photo of every conference participant was a hit and skits spoofed all of us in our roles as facilitators.

The Association Coordinating Team (ACT) was formed, dues were established and actually collected at the meeting. Kanbay Corporation became the first corporate sponsor. Planning for the organizational structure was done during sessions at the conference. Task Forces were named and people signed on to do the work of establishing the association. The newsletter was launched as *The Faciltator*, only to discover the name was already being used by a publication out of Dallas, Texas. The newsletter was quickly renamed *Facilitation News*.

A tradition of having the ACT meeting in the location of the next year's conference began in August of 1994 when the ACT team met for the first time in Denver, the site of the first annual IAF Conference. The Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT) became the first host sponsor of the conference and hosted the ACT meeting in their training space. Already Task Forces had accomplished an enormous amount of work. The required By-laws were complete; the IAF was incorporated in Minnesota; and a bank account

was opened in Illinois, where the volunteer treasurer lived. The Mission and Purpose Task Force had completed its task and disbanded. The Vision was revisited. Membership growth was projected at 100% growth annually through 1997. Facilitation News was published with contributions from twenty-four people in eighteen cities. An electronic IAF conference had been set up.

A lot happened in the first three years of the association and highlights from the first three conferences give a feel for the growth and development of the IAF in the early years.

THE FIRST IAF ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Art and Mastery of Facilitation

January 1995, Denver, Colorado

Two hundred and seventy-eight people showed up with over one hundred people registering the week before the conference. The Council of Energy Resource Tribes contributed an enormous amount of people time and in-kind support for the conference. In addition, ten people came in early to help the local team prepare. Pre-conference sessions were offered with an emphasis on hands-on training. The first sessions on Computer Supported Facilitation were held. There were forty-five sessions in three tracks. The first IAF General Membership meeting was held on Monday morning. David Lester, the Executive Director of CERT gave a closing keynote address "*in the Spirit of Martin Luther King...Advancing the Dream.*" The ACT and Task Forces met following the conference. Peggy Bushee Services in St. Paul, Minnesota was chosen to become the official IAF office.

SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Art and Mastery of Facilitation

January 1996, Dallas, Texas

Three hundred and eighty four people attended. Another East Coast snowstorm kept about fifty people stuck in the snow. Texas Instruments was the conference sponsor and CoVision and Ventana Corporation were the first two exhibitors. Association-wide participatory strategic planning was launched during the conference and all participants participated in developing the plan to carry the IAF through the year 2005. There were fifty-five sessions in four tracks. Five Think Tanks were launched and continued to expand and work throughout the year. One and two-day pre-conference workshops on Computer Supported Facilitation and four ICA Top Group Facilitation Methods were offered. The Conference Proceedings book of 250 pages was published. Professional help was engaged to help with registration. The conference on-site newsletter was born and named in Texas style, "The Facilitidillo." The Resource Room was expanded and included books and facilitation products for sale. A Celebration of Diversity event was held on Martin Luther King Day and was followed by the IAF Annual Meeting. Fifty people came to the ACT meeting following the conference. IAF Task Forces were shifted to reflect the changes in the organization.

During the year the IAF Web page was initiated and supported by Baylor University and Mark Fuller at the Hankammer School of Business. The Research and Publication Task Force lighted up virtual space with ongoing work to develop the IAF journal, *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal*. The first conference outside the USA was held in Holland in the fall of 1996. Links began to be made with local facilitator groups springing up around the world.

A Strategic Planning Congress was held at the mid-year ACT meeting in Oklahoma City. *Strategic Plan 2005* was developed. The Mission and Core Values were looked at again and revised. The plan included the Vision, Influencing Factors, and Strategic Directions. Work also began on a Conference Management Manual. The process of creating the strategic plan with input from the IAF membership was documented and every member received a copy of the document. In December of 1996 membership was at 657 people. Projections made in 1994 said 400 people in 1996. Expectations exceeded!

THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Discovery Along Wisdom Pathways: The Art and Mastery of Facilitation

January 1997, Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Department of Commerce sponsored the conference. Four tracks of roughly sixty sessions kept over four hundred people fully engaged and talk began about adding another day to the conference. Nearly one third of the conference participants attended pre- conference workshop and it felt like the conference actually began on Thursday. Eight Think Tanks filled up with people eager to engage in spirited dialogue around: Facilitation as a Profession; Facilitator Competencies; Computer-Supported Facilitation; Emerging Paradigm: Chaos Theory; Organization as Community; and Spirit in Organizations: Technologies of Meaning. Celebrating continued with a visit to the Gilcrease Museum and Native American Dancing.

During the year an IAF Europe/Africa Conference was held in London with seventy participants from England, Belgium, Netherlands, Scotland, South Africa, Kenya, and Israel. It was a great experience of collegiality with facilitators sharing and learning new techniques and models during seventeen concurrent sessions.

Membership projections of 800 members for 1997 were exceeded when 964 people signed on as IAF members during the year.

The IAF continues to grow and reinvent itself in response to the needs of the membership. Keep posted for articles on the continuing evolution of the IAF.

1998© , 2003©