

# **A BRIEF HISTORY OF AFN (AUSTRALASIAN FACILITATORS NETWORK )**

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## **FOREWORD** written by Joan Firkins

At the Alice Springs AFN Conference held in 2014, a request was made by Maor Bar-Ziv at the AFN General Assembly that “A Brief History of AFN” be written. This endeavour was agreed to, with Joan Firkins, Bob Dick, Dale Hunter, and Ed McKinley asked to initiate the process.

While AFN History is still emergent to the present time, the ‘Foreword; Timeline of AFN Conferences 1998-2018; Preamble; and Chapter One: Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region held in Melbourne, 1998’ are events which have already occurred or scheduled to occur in the near future, such as the AFN Conference to be held in or around Melbourne circa November 2018.

Please note the ‘Preamble and Chapter One: Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region held in Melbourne in 1998’ are based on recollections of those personally involved in both the lead up to the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in Australasia and the Conference of the group which came to be known as the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN). There may be others who were personally involved in the lead up to & participation in the Inaugural Australasian Facilitation Conference who have not yet provided their recollections who may also wish to do so, either on the AFN e-list moderated by Bob Dick or on the AFN web-site hosted by Mark Butz.

Therefore, please provide comments on “A Brief History of AFN” including Foreword, Preamble, Chapter One, and following Chapters with:

- \* courteous language;
- \* respect for a diversity of experiences and understandings, with responses beginning with words such as ‘I hear and honour your perspective, however...’ if you personally don’t align with any given fellow facilitator’s perspective;
- \* a faithful recording of your own experienced reality of past events as far as is possible from personal recollections, as this collation is intended to be an historical document, hopefully based on people who were ‘there’ particularly for the Preamble events &/or Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region held in Melbourne, October, 1998.
- \* please include your name in full the first time you make a contribution and if there are others with the same first please clarify with an initial as there may be a number of people with the same first name; this is likely to enable clarity, particularly if replying on the AFN web-site.

As Viv McWaters mentioned on 27/6/16:

‘Regarding perspective, I think they are important to include diverse, even contrary perspectives. History, like everything else, is viewed through our own points-of-view and we know that individuals experience the same events differently. A narrative that acknowledges this diversity, rather than searching for an unattainable ‘truth’, will provide the reader with insights into a world that they are now a part of’.

Importantly, later Chapters of “A Brief History of AFN” such as ‘Chapter 2: AFN evolves as a self-organising group’ will be ones in which all of the current 1000 or so subscribers will be likely to have personal recollections.

Additionally, I have chosen to be in the role of ‘narrator’ in the collation of “A Brief History of AFN” so as to link sections as needed. Narrator can generally be defined as ‘a person who narrates something, especially

a character who recounts the events of a novel or narrative poem'. I self-selected the role of 'narrator' given that I am also one of the initial characters involved in this AFN History since the events of the 'Preamble' to the present time so adopting the role of 'narrator' seems appropriate in this context.

Therefore, to distinguish Joan in the role of narrator from her role as one of the many contributors to "A Brief History of AFN" Joan's narration will be in present tense (for example, 'Joan writes') whereas Joan's contributions such as personal recollections to this co-written History of AFN will be written in past tense (for example, 'Joan wrote').

Further, I ask the AFN emailing list to address any comments and personal recollections to myself as narrator & collator of 'A Brief History of AFN': [firkinsjoan@gmail.com](mailto:firkinsjoan@gmail.com) and a copy (cc) to Bob as moderator extraordinaire of the AFN emailing list and a significant part of "A Brief History of AFN" writing team: [bd@bigpond.net.au](mailto:bd@bigpond.net.au)

### ***Acknowledgements***

Grateful thanks to all have been involved in the collation of this data since the request by Maor Bar-Ziv to write "A Brief History of AFN" was agreed to by those assembled at the Alice Springs AFN Conference Annual General Assembly, also known as Annual Business Meeting, in September, 2014; along with a request that Joan Firkins, Bob Dick, Dale Hunter and Ed McKinley be involved in supporting "A Brief History of AFN" project.

Especial thanks to writing, editing team, and colleagues on the journey over the time of writing in alphabetical order by surname: Kevin Balm; Mark Butz; Bob Dick; Joan Firkins; Dale Hunter; Ed McKinley; Viv McWaters.

I would also like to honour all contributors of "A Brief History of AFN" from the 'Foreword to Chapter 6' as it has been collated thus far, again in alphabetical order by surname:

Carmela Aziza; Kevin Balm; Bob Dick; Tuihana Bosch; (the late) Frank Bremner; Mark Butz; Ros Byrne; Belinda Coghlan; Cinnamon Evans; Julie Farthing; Joan Firkins; Cheryl Hopley; Michelle Howard; Dale Hunter; Deborah Lange; Cathryn Lloyd; Marie Martin; Simone Maus; Sharon McGann; Ed McKinley; Viv McWaters; Matt Moore; Peter Rennie; Helen Ritchie; Alan Rudner; Michelle Rush; Keith Ryall; Simon Simondo; Rick Sommerford; Mark Spain; John Telford; Carol Vale; and any other contributors who may have inadvertently been missed.

With heartfelt thanks to all of the wonderful AFN self-organising group and facilitation teaching & learning community for being here with concurrent thanks in advance to all those facilitators who will contribute to "A Brief History of AFN" in the future,

Joan Firkins

Updated Foreword written November 2017

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## **TIMELINE OF AFN CONFERENCES from 1998:**

AFN (Australasian Facilitators Network) Conference themes &/or streams with years and places held:

1998 Melbourne, Australia (Inaugural Facilitation Conference held in the Australasian region):

'Foundations, Applications, Culture and Future of Facilitation';

1999 Sydney, Australia: 'Explore the Art and Mastery of Facilitation';

2000 Auckland, New Zealand: 'Invoke & celebrate the spirit of Facilitation in New Zealand and Australia';

2001 Brisbane, Australia: 'Different Journeys';

2002 Melbourne, Australia: 'The Art & Mastery of Facilitation: Showcasing Excellence in Facilitation';

2003 Sydney, Australia: [5 Streams of Facilitation] 'Facilitation in the Social Context; New & Unusual Techniques; The Facilitator As Change Agent; Current & future uses of Facilitation; Inspiration through Facilitation';

2004 Wellington, New Zealand: 'Adventuring in Facilitation'.

Note: This may have been a stream or focus rather than the official theme, further documentation sincerely appreciated.

2005 Perth WA Australia: 'Facilitating on the Edge';

2006 Geelong Vic Australia: 'The Naked Facilitator';

2007 Adelaide South Australia: 'Showcasing the Purpose of Facilitation';

2008 Bathurst NSW Australia: 'Pushing the Boundaries: Facilitation Frontiers';

2009 Nelson, New Zealand: 'Te pitau whakarei - Creating a bow wave for Facilitation';

2010 Hobart Tas Australia: 'Resilience - Creativity - Growth';

2011 Fremantle WA Australia 'Facilitation exposed! Unwrapping the layers around group facilitation';

2012 Commonground, near Seymour Vic Australia: 'A Facilitators Feast';

2013 Sydney NSW Australia: 'Building Bridges with Facilitation';

2014 Alice Springs NT Australia: 'Walking together - the Heart of Facilitation';

2015 Byron-Ballina Beach NSW Australia: 'Facilitating Wholeness';

2016 Whaingaroa/Raglan, Aotearoa/New Zealand: 'Tuakana Teina' - referring to the concept of older siblings teaching and guiding younger siblings; also to those with more experience in a particular practice passing their knowledge and skills on to those with less;

2017 Stanwell Tops NSW Australia: 'Marelin Yarning All Ways' - Marelin, a Dharawal word meaning sacred; Yarning is about story-telling and/or communication; All Ways refers to global community;

2018 (21st AFN Conference) Bundoora, Melbourne Vic: 'Celebrating Diversity, Creativity & Wisdom';

2019 South Brisbane Qld Australia: 'What the world needs now (in facilitation)...'

Please Note: The Conferences of 2002 - 2010 inclusive were held with informal affiliation to the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) from the AFN Business Meeting held near the close of the AFN Brisbane 2001 Conference to AFN/IAF Hobart Conference Annual Business Meeting near the close of this Conference in 2010.

## **PREAMBLE: “A Brief History of AFN”**

In 1998 the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region was held in Melbourne, Australia. The seed money for this Conference was provided by the facilitation company 'Integra' with Kevin Balm as Principal.

Prior to this event, several gatherings of group facilitators were held across Australia under the banner of the Organisational Transformation Network (OTN) circa 1994-1997, also convened by Kevin Balm.

The following facilitators each attended OTN events & have written personal recollections of this time:

John Telford wrote:

'One of the first of these OTN gatherings was held at Dookie Agricultural College in 1994 - the focus was on identifying changes that were taking place in organisations - both macro & micro - identifying the impact that these changes were having on the organisation and then discussing how to respond to these.

It was attended by about 30 people, possibly 50% involved in conservation or landcare activities but others from a range of organisations. Some who attended that you [Joan adds: John Telford was referring here to myself as a fellow Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) colleague] would probably have known were Kevin Balm, Viv McWaters, Anne Yallop, Charles Jago, Maria Maguire, Philip Dowsett and two ICA colleagues from overseas - Judy Gilles (India) and Gail West (Taiwan).

Judy shared details of the Transformation Leadership Lab they were using in India. Philip Dowsett shared a Sustainable Ecology model which is still probably relevant today'.

Frank Bremner wrote:

'I only attended one of the old OTN gatherings - it was the one at Mt. Hotham in 1995 which was immediately followed by the ICA mid-year gathering at Victor Harbor, South Australia.

For the Mt Hotham event, John Miesen and David Jago rented a Tarago SUV. In Melbourne we added on Kevin Balm...

The format for the gathering was the usual: We had some plenary sessions, and lots of small sessions on particular topics. I did a presentation, with lots of diagrams, about the Student Forum / Wedge Workshop I'd done with high school students.

There were a lot of people from Kevin's networks such as Viv McWaters - I also remember Sabina Douglas-Hill, who was preparing for a U.S. trip'.

Joan Firkins wrote:

'The 1995 Mt. Hotham OTN event was followed by an OTN gathering at Point Piper, Sydney in 1996 held in conjunction with an Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) mid year gathering, which I attended. A focus of this gathering was the potential that group facilitation has to enable organisational transformation'.

Mark Butz wrote:

'I attended the Point Piper OTN event in 1996. I was encouraged to attend by Kevin Balm, and this was my first encounter with a lot of people who are still in our facilitation community. I recall specifically meeting Michelle Rush (from 'across the ditch' - New Zealand)... and more will come to mind, no doubt'.

Kevin Balm wrote:

'The other significant point to make is that the OTN gatherings here mirrored gatherings in Asia, North America, Europe and other places across the globe - a movement of facilitation practitioners was coming into being, beginning with those whose facilitation foundations were ToP (Technology of Participation) a facilitation methodology which was developed in the field of community development from the work of the ICA across the globe.

In 1993-94 this movement in North America, initially driven primarily by facilitators involved with ICA in North America, courageously decided to form an official association and hold an inaugural conference held in 1995 in Denver, Colorado, USA. I attended that event and was inspired enough to consider a similar conference and network back in Australia. The idea was put to colleagues within Integra and the rest is... history (as indicated by the Timeline of AFN Conference themes & streams, places & years held shown above).'

Joan Firkins wrote:

'During 1997-1998 Kevin & members of 'Integra' at that time, for example Viv McWaters, widely visited, conversed & dialogued with many people involved with facilitation across Australia & New Zealand in an effort to garner support for the idea of a facilitation network in the Australasian region.

Some of the key individuals involved in facilitation at that time included Mark Butz (who became the AFN web host extraordinaire); Bob Dick (who became the moderator of the AFN e-list); Dale Hunter, one of the founders of the facilitation company Zenergy (who became a committed supporter of both AFN and IAF); and other facilitators who became stalwart supporters of AFN including Ed McKinley & the late great Glen Ochre (who co-founded Groupwork Institute and Commonground).

Of further note, during the 1990's, facilitation was beginning to be recognised as an emerging profession in contrast to my experiences of being involved with facilitation in its embryonic stages during the late 1970's and 1980's. Regarding these experiences, I was privileged to serendipitously discover a pioneering form of Technology of Participation (ToP) facilitation during my first year as a University student & teenager in South Australia while studying Sociology & Psychology as majors. Following this initial encounter with facilitation, I considered that facilitation was at least a decade ahead of my current studies and withdrew from University (to take it up again some 20 years later). I was then invited to & accepted work primarily on a volunteer basis in the field as a facilitator contributing to the development of ToP methodology with ICA (Institute of Cultural Affairs) across Australia & the United States during the late 1970's and 80's. I first met Kevin at an ICA General Assembly in Chicago, Illinois, in 1980, and in many ways Kevin & I have had a similar introduction to facilitation although Kevin's journey began in the state of Maharashtra, India, whereas my facilitation journey began in South Australia with the ICA team there.

I also remember receiving an invitation from Kevin to attend the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in 1998, though was unable to do so due to intense study commitments at that time while studying a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) degree, along with primary caregiver responsibilities for a young family. However, I feel that I have been part of the journey of the Australasian Facilitators Network since its inception.

In summary, it seems that something new in facilitation began to emerge during the 1990's leading up to the time of the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region held in 1998, of an eclectic group of facilitators across Australia and New Zealand that came to be known as the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN) & hence led to the beginning of another important episode for facilitation in the Australasian region, which is sometimes also referred to as Oceania.'

Please see more detail regarding names for this region in web-link copied below.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oceania>

\*Footnote to PREAMBLE of "A Brief History of AFN" \*

Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) has over 45 years experience in more than 30 nations as a facilitation, training and research organisation. Members of ICA were also principal founders of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) based in North America circa 1994.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### The Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region held in Melbourne, 1998

These gatherings, meetings and conversations contributed to the eventuality of the first Conference of the group which came to be known as the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN) in Melbourne, 1998 under the founding auspices of the facilitation company 'Integra' of which Kevin Balm was Principal at the time.

The streams which formed the theme of the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region in 1998 were 'Foundations; Applications; Culture & Future of Facilitation'.

Presenters providing context to this theme in order of presentation were Bob Dick; Dale Hunter; Ray Richmond; Kevin Balm.

Workshop presenters included: John Hutchinson; Brian Bainbridge; Kim Willing; Peter Box; Cam Nicholson; Warrick Cavill; Michelle Rush; Jo Vigliaturo; Glen Ochre; Robyn Hutchinson; Louise Klein; Gail Brody; Bruce Turner; Ray & Elaine Richmond; John & Elaine Telford; Susan Goss; Kevin Balm; Dale Hunter; Denise Langlands; Alan Campbell; Viv McWaters; Cathy McGowan; Jo Lange; Sandra Cutts; Keith Jackson; Andrew Huffer.

Belinda Coghlan, one of the Integra team who organised the first AFN Conference in 1998, provided this document of the 1998 AFN Conference Program:

<b>Facilitation Conference Program</b>	
<b>Sunday 4 Oct 1998</b>	
5.00pm Registration and Bazaar 7.00pm Opening Dinner	
<b>Monday 5 October</b>	
<b>Theme A: The Foundations of Facilitation</b>	<b>Theme B: The Applications of Facilitation</b>
8.30am-8.50am: Context by Bob Dick, Southern Cross Uni.	1.30pm-1.50pm: Context by Dale Hunter, Zenergy
Concurrent Sessions	
<b>9.00am-10.30am: Facilitation Tools &amp; Techniques</b>	<b>2.00pm-3.30pm: Specific Issue Applications</b>
<i>Open Space</i> - John Hutchinson, Brian Bainbridge	<i>Facilitating Policy Making</i> - Michelle Rush
<i>Playback</i> - Kim Willing	<i>Facilitating in a rural industry</i> - Jo Vigliaturo
<i>TOP Discussion Method</i> - Peter Box	<i>Working in the Koori Community - Lessons for non-aboriginal facilitators</i> - Glen Ochre
<i>Evaluating Facilitation</i> - Cam Nicholson	<i>Participation of the Whole School Community (Lewisham Public School)</i> - Robyn Hutchinson
<i>Facilitating Groups for Strategic Planning</i> - Warrick Cavill	
<b>10.30am-11.00am Morning Break</b>	
<b>3.30pm-4.00pm Afternoon Break</b>	
<b>11.00am-12.30pm: Group Process &amp; Dynamics</b>	<b>4.00pm-5.30pm: Whole System Applications</b>
<i>Human Dynamics</i> - Louise Klein	<i>The Wayside Chapel</i> - Ray & Elaine Richmond
<i>Distinctions in Facilitation</i> - Dale Hunter	<i>Aboriginal Reconciliation</i> - John & Elaine Telford
- Gail Brody	<i>Facilitating whole systems</i> - Kevin Balm
- Bruce Turner	
<b>12.30pm-1.30pm Lunch Break</b>	
<b>5.30pm-7.00pm Break</b>	
7.00pm Drinks and Celebration Dinner	

<b>Tuesday 6 October</b>	
<b>Theme C: The Culture of Facilitation</b>	<b>Theme D: The Future of Facilitation</b>
<b>8.30am-8.50am: Context by Ray Richmond, Wayside Chapel</b>	<b>1.30pm-1.50pm: Context by Kevin Balm, Integra/IAF</b>
<b>Concurrent Sessions</b>	
<b>9.00am-10.30am: Ethics and Competencies</b>	<b>2.00pm-3.30pm: Issues and Opportunities for Facilitation</b>
<i>Snakeview – The Ethics of Facilitation</i> - Susan Goss	<i>Facilitators - urban guerillas or real change agents?</i> – Denise Langlands and Alan Campbell
<i>Facilitator Competencies</i> – Viv McWaters	<i>Social Domain</i> - Sandra Cutts
<i>Subverting the Dominant Paradigm</i> – Cathy McGowan	<i>Rural Development</i> - Keith Jackson
<i>Examining Group Values</i> – Jo Lange	<i>Community Involvement in Government Decision Making</i> – Andrew Huffer
<b>10.30am-11.00am Morning Break</b>	<b>3.30pm-4.00pm Afternoon Break</b>
<b>Plenary Dialogue: 11.00 am -12.30pm</b>	<b>Closing Plenary: 4.00pm - 5.00pm</b>
<b>12.30pm-1.30pm Lunch Break</b>	<b>5.00pm Close</b>

Further, Bob Dick wrote:

'I can't add a lot, though I can comment on the formation and early role of the AFN.

It wasn't Kevin who approached me in 1998, it was Viv McWaters. So I assumed that it was Viv who organised the conference. But I don't think Viv and I had met before the 1998 conference. So Kevin may well have had a hand in Viv's approach. Until I read your email (Joan) I wasn't aware of the pre-1998 history.

Here's my recollection. Viv rang me, told me about the conference, and suggested or rather, urged that I attend. I was glad to do so. She suggested that I might also bring copies of some of my publications for display.

In the latter stages of the conference there was a session to talk about future developments. There was a strong move not to let things end when the conference did.

Some participants immediately began to talk about forming a committee to draft a constitution and elect some office bearers. I suggested that it might be useful to discuss matters further before committing to some specific way forward. To that end, I offered to set up an email list.

I thought Southern Cross Uni would be happy to let me do on their list server. And they were. Thus the AFN email list came into being.

I don't know how many people realised that the AFN from the beginning was a self-organising system. I suspect it was only when Dale and you (Joan) began to publicise that idea that many AFN members realised what we were.

In fact, if you had asked me in 1998 or 1999 how long I thought the AFN would exist in that self-organising form, I would have guessed a few years. Most social systems rapidly suffer from hardening of the arteries. I would have predicted that outcome for the AFN.

I remember having that conversation with others from time to time. I was resigned to that outcome, and assumed that when it happened I'd just move on.

Yet, instead, look what we've become. Without office bearers or constitution we've survived (and thrived, in my opinion) for more than 20 years. Each year, someone has offered to organise a conference, and has done so, and the conferences have become an important part of AFN governance -- a chance for some of us to get together face to face.

The networks have continued to strengthen. And there, too, I think the conferences (along with the AFN e-list) play an important part in linking the local networks.

It's probably worth mentioning, too, the website that Mark Butz set up. There are people who find the traffic on the AFN list more than they wish to deal with. The website allows them to tune in every so often to find out what is happening.'

Joan writes:

'In reference to Bob acknowledging the AFN web-site as a manifestation of the group which became known as the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN) during the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region in 1998, AFN has 3 continuing and remarkably enduring manifestations:

- i) the AFN e-list magnificently moderated by Bob Dick since AFN's inception;
- ii) the AFN annual Conferences beginning in 1998 and continuing in the present, with the next AFN Conference scheduled to be held in Melbourne area circa November 2018
- iii) AFN website hosted brilliantly by Mark Butz'.

Further, in relation to the naming of the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN) during the Inaugural Facilitation Conference held in the Australasian region, Kevin Balm wrote:

'... at the session during the first conference, when the decision to be the AFN was reached, one item of discussion was specifically about the name and relationship with the International Association of Facilitators (IAF). The name AFN was chosen to help establish the facilitation community in this part of the world, and with the acknowledgement of being part of a new global movement of facilitators. So, in essence we were saying (without being so explicit) that it wasn't an either/or scenario (of AFN/IAF) but a both/and'.

Joan writes:

'Since the time of the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region the relationship between IAF and AFN has become somewhat contentious, however, so will be the dedicated topic of 'Chapter 4: Compare and Contrast: Diverse Perspectives of AFN/IAF relationship from the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region 1998, to cessation of informal affiliation at the AFN/IAF Hobart Conference 2010.'

As an example of personal recollections of the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian Dale Hunter wrote:

'... One of the lasting memories I have was of meeting Glen Ochre when we both left a workshop early, at the same moment. The workshop was a lecture about ethics. Glen and I shared our belief that the topic was important, and shared our frustration that there was no facilitated discussion. We clicked and became friends.

I also recall a large foyer area where we could lay out our marketing material and books for sale, meeting Bob Dick and many other facilitators.

I was inspired to get more involved in the world wide networks (of facilitation)'

*Please send any photos of the Inaugural Facilitation Conference held in the Australasian region in Melbourne, 1998 to Mark Butz as host of the AFN web-site: [mark.butz@bigpond.com](mailto:mark.butz@bigpond.com)*

*Please remember to include the photographer &/or contributors name/s so that the photos may be credited.*

*This will provide the potential for an online "Illustrated Brief History of AFN" to form.*

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## **CHAPTER TWO, Part 1: AFN Evolves as a Self-Organising Group and Network, November, 2010**

*[Note: Chapter Two: AFN evolves as a Self Organising Group & Network has been broken up into three parts to indicate 3 diverse time periods of AFN contributions. Part 1 occurs in November, 2010; Part 2 occurs in 2012; Part 3 occurs in the Present (2017). Regards, Joan].*

By way of introduction to 'Chapter Two: AFN evolves as a Self Organising Group and Network, November 2010' Joan as narrator of 'A Brief History of AFN' writes:

'Bob Dick's influence has and continues to be, crucial here. I recall Bob relating how at the end of the first Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region that Bob attended in Melbourne, 1998, there was a session about the future of a facilitation network in the Australasian region.'

To provide further detail some of which has previously been recorded is reiterated by Bob:

'In the latter stages of the (Inaugural Australasian Facilitation) conference there was a session to talk about future developments. There was a strong move not to let things end when the conference did.

Some participants immediately began to talk about forming a committee to draft a constitution and elect some office bearers. I suggested that it might be useful to discuss matters further before committing to some specific way forward. To that end, I offered to set up an email list.

I thought Southern Cross Uni would be happy to let me do on their list server. And they were. Thus the AFN email list came into being.

I don't know how many people realised that the AFN from the beginning was a self-organising system. I suspect it was only when Dale and you (Joan) began to publicise that idea that many AFN members realised what we were.

In fact, if you had asked me in 1998 or 1999 how long I thought the AFN would exist in that self-organising form, I would have guessed a few years. Most social systems rapidly suffer from hardening of the arteries. I would have predicted that outcome for the AFN.

I remember having that conversation with others from time to time. I was resigned to that outcome, and assumed that when it happened I'd just move on.

Yet, instead, look what we've become. Without office bearers or constitution we've survived (and thrived, in my opinion) for more than 18 years. Each year, someone has offered to organise a conference, and has done so, and the conferences have become an important part of AFN governance -- a chance for some of us to get together face to face.

The networks have continued to strengthen...'

Joan continues:

"Towards becoming more aware and increase understandings of AFN evolving as a self-organising group the topic of Self Organising Groups & Networks (or SONG's if an acronym is preferred to describe this phenomenon) was introduced to the AFN emailing list by Dale Hunter in November 2010, immediately prior to the AFN/IAF Conference held in Hobart in 2010."

On 12/11/2010, at 8:40 AM, Dale Hunter wrote:

'Hi friends

I am leading a workshop at the conference exploring self organising groups, organisations and networks and finding out "Who's in charge?" This will be a facilitated exploration not a lecture.

Self Organising Groups and Networks (SONG's) are popping up everywhere especially enabled it seems by the Internet.

Self Organising Groups and Networks are growing and evolving, creative and resilient. They can be short term (swarming?) or long term like the AFN (12 years up to this point in time in 2010...)

What are the characteristics of self organising entities?

The Objectives of the AFN Hobart Conference Workshop that I am giving are:

1. Distinguish self organising entities.
2. Explore what Self Organising Groups and Networks mean for the future.
3. Explore the implications for our profession of facilitation.

The AFN, for example, has flourished as a Self Organising Group and Network for 12 years to this time, as AFN began in 1998. Since then, AFN has offered one Conference a year undertaken by volunteers within this vibrant e-group.

How and why do we function without membership fees, trustees or officers, legal entity, or even an ongoing bank account. What is the glue?

Also, what are the SWAT - (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats).

Would anyone on the list like to share their thoughts about the AFN or other such anarchic structures? We have a week or so before the AFN/IAF Hobart Conference to begin the exploration. Post your thoughts here or email me direct.

Regards from Dale'

Mark Spain wrote on 14/11/10:

'Hi Dale

To explore self organising groups you may also gain benefit from looking more deeply at the dynamics of power and systems.

If we are to become self-organising we will benefit from understanding the power dynamics of being in top, middle and bottom roles in systems and how systems drive behaviour.

For more, Barry Oshry's Power Lab and books and articles may be useful to consider. For example:

<http://www.powerandsystems.com/resources-a-thought-starters/articles.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA2y9HO3myU>

My wife, children and I also have the experience of designing and building a pole house together with two other families over 8 years on the edge of Australia and the Pacific Ocean. We have had both joy and tears in collaborating together as a self organising group. The adventure continues. It helps to have a common, meaningful goal larger than your own self interest.'

Cinnamon Evans wrote on 13/11/10:

'Dale,

You may already be familiar with the term 'autopoiesis' (from the Greek meaning 'autoproduction'), which describes the structure and process of self-organising systems.

An internet search provides many definitions of autopoiesis (and associated systems theory), for example ...

the process whereby an organization produces itself. An autopoietic organization is an <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/autonomy.html> autonomous and self-maintaining unity which contains component-producing processes. The components, through their interaction, generate recursively the same network of processes which produced them. An autopoietic system is operationally closed and structurally state determined with no apparent inputs and outputs. A cell, an organism, and perhaps a corporation are examples of autopoietic systems. See <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/ALLOPOIESIS.html> allopoiesis. (F. Varela)

Literally, self-production. The property of <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/SYSTEMs.html> systems whose components (1) participate recursively in the same <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/NETWORK.html> network of productions that produced them, and (2) realize the

<<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/NETWORK.html>> network of productions as a  
<<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/UNITY.html>> unity in the space in which the components exist (after Varela) (see <<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/RECURSION.html>> recursion). Autopoiesis is a process whereby a system produces its own <<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/ORGANIZATIO.html>> organization and maintains and constitutes itself in a space. E.g., a biological cell, a living organism and to some extent a society as a <<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/WHOLE.html>> whole.  
(<<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/Kripp.html>> krippendorff)

I am reassured by the observation that autopoietic systems appear at all scales (atom, cell, organism, population, universe), which would seem to lend this type of organisation a great deal of validity!

It is interesting to reflect on the role of facilitator in a self-organising group. An autopoietic system cannot be externally choreographed, it must be organised from within, so what does that mean for the positioning of the facilitator in relation to the group? Are we always within the group even when we are 'external'? Or does having an 'external' facilitator mean the group is no longer autopoietic?

The principle of self-organising systems can be illustrated in a group setting using 'the Systems Game' (I have also heard this game called 'Equilibrium'). If you are not familiar with this game I would be happy to explain how it is played in a group.'

Julie Farthing wrote on 13/11/10:

'Hi Dale

I am fairly new to this group but from what I have seen, these things provide the glue that keeps the AFN together:

- 1) diversity of ideas, backgrounds and interests
- 2) challenge - everyone seems incredibly keen to do a great job in their work, and are always looking for ways to improve
- 3) professionalism and respect between members, even in volatile discussions
- 4) an inbuilt organic regulation mechanism that promotes democracy (I guess this means that no-one dominates) - this is fascinating to see in action
- 5) the understanding that emotion is a big part of what we all do, and that members feel empowered to express'.

Matt Moore wrote on 15/11/10:

'Hi,

There's actually been quite a lot written on this topic:

- Ralph Stacey & Co on complex responsive processes
- Etienne Wenger on communities of practice (esp. the recent book with Nancy White & John D Smith)
- Patti Anklam's book on NetWork
- Bonnie Nardi's intensional networks
- Cognitive Edge / Dave Snowden on complexity
- Mark Earls on herds
- And then there's Harrison Owen, Juanita Brown, etc.

My take is that all groups are self-organising to a greater or lesser degree (and conversely all groups have hierarchical components). I don't think that self-organising groups are inherently better than hierarchical structures (as is sometimes claimed). They are generally more resilient (because that self-organising networks tend to have more peer-to-peer connections) but that means higher transaction costs\* (in a Coase's sense of that phrase).

They are also dependent on the enthusiasm of participants and their sense of mutual obligation to each other to a greater degree than hierarchies (which rely on more obedience to the centre). If that enthusiasm wanes or that sense of mutual obligation is weak then things tend to fall apart quite quickly...

\*If you've ever tried to get a group of people to agree on a restaurant for the evening then you'll know what I mean.'

Dale responded:

'Hi Matt & friends,

Thank you for the resources suggestions, Matt. They are appreciated. I have checked out the ones new to me, online. They are all interesting - mainly focussing on technology or psychology/complexity etc.

Re choosing the restaurant for a bunch of facilitators - we always do this exercise at our Zenergy Stage 1 programme. It is fun and actually can be easy if people are proactive, make suggestions with reasons, listen to one another and have commitment to reach agreement - just like any group making a decision.

I liked David Snowden's three basic rules or principles of knowledge exchange on his wikipedia entry:

"Knowledge can only be volunteered; it can't be conscripted."

"People always know more than they can tell, and can tell more than they can write."

"People only know what they need to know when they need to know it."

I have a copy of the book by Etienne Wenger, Nancy White, John Smith, "Digital Habitats: Stewarding technologies for communities" and it focuses on online technology for communities of practice. I have also met Nancy at International Association of Facilitators (IAF) Conferences in USA and attended her workshop there. I will bring a copy of this book to the AFN/IAF Hobart Conference next week and also Harrison Owens book "Wave Rider".

The AFN - with annual Australia/New Zealand face to face conferences and regionally based networks which meet face to face as well as online groups such as this - is a hybrid form that has flourished now for 12 years or more without any formal organisation, membership, fees or hierarchy.

It is this hybrid form of Self Organising Groups & Networks that interests me and that we will explore at the Hobart conference workshop. This way we can learn more about ourselves and how we like to operate together as group facilitators.'

Matt Moore responded on 18/11/10:

'Dale,

The interesting thing about technology & self-organising groups is that it's made a lot of this stuff more visible. Historically governments have treated citizens either as an undifferentiated mass or else specific blocks (trade unions, business owners); companies have treated consumers as "atomised" individual wallets; and organisations have treated employees as roles in a hierarchy. The unarguable "thereness" of online communities and networks makes these assumptions less tenable. Of course, technology also allows new forms of communication, coordination and cooperation (as well new forms of conflict and idiocy).

It's also important to note that self-organising groups are as old as human history, they weren't invented with Facebook.

Dave Snowden's work (and that of the network of people around him - including a fair few on this list) is actually quite important. Dave's 3 principles have been expanded here:

[http://www.cognitive-edge.com/blogs/dave/2008/10/rendering\\_knowledge.php](http://www.cognitive-edge.com/blogs/dave/2008/10/rendering_knowledge.php)

## **CHAPTER TWO, Part 2: AFN evolves as a Self Organising Group & Network, 2012**

Joan writes:

'Towards further outlining of the culture of AFN as a self-organising group & community of practice, Carmela Aziza asks the question to the AFN discussion forum in mid- 2012 "What makes AFN emailing list successful?"

Please also see below various testimonials to the enduring success and vibrancy of AFN.'

Carmela Aziza wrote to the AFN emailing list on 31/5/12 with the question "What makes AFN emailing list successful?":

'Dear AFN'ers,

A fellow consultant wants to set up a social networking site for their training graduates. They hope that their graduates will actively participate.

I shared to her my experience so far with AFN - and told her that I think the AFN e-group is an example of a successful online discussion group or e-group. She is interested to know how AFN works and what makes it work.

I told her that the reasons for AFN success are:

1. the mails are directly received through emails which is very convenient - there is no need to type in username and password (like in Facebook and LinkedIn)
2. the group is able to ask questions related to our professional needs, issues, challenges and members spend time answering these questions which really help the members
3. the AFN has annual conferences which keeps the group connected and strengthens the the ties of members
4. I also observed there are fewer people who opt to unsubscribe than those who join the group. So each year more people join than quit this e-group.
5. the AFN e-group provides a venue to also advertise trainings, seminars, and other relevant activities.
6. There is an administrator who is efficiently tracking the contributions and also moderating - when needed and checking that members are contributing only those that are relevant for the AFN. No other advertisements allowed.
7. Many members have been around for a long time and know each other personally - so the ties are not superficial...

What do you think are other reasons why AFN works? I may be wrong with what I think are success factors for AFN e-group.

Kindly also comment on points 1 to 7 above. Would love to read your insights on success factors for the AFN e-group.

Carms'

Alan Rudner wrote in response on 31/5/12:

'I think generosity and lack of judgement contribute to AFN success.'

Carmela responded on 31/5/12:

'Dear Allan,

I agree that members of AFN who share their insights, experiences, tips, solutions to problems - are very generous...

Would you mean with "lack of judgement" that we do not judge what others are contributing/sharing? Rather we share our thoughts, ideas and discuss. \*We\* may differ in opinions but we do not take it personally. There is room for various perspectives...'

On 01/06/2012, Viv McWaters wrote:

'Interesting question. I think the AFN list survives, and thrives, because of what it isn't.

It isn't membership based. There's no-one in charge (apart from Bob's light-touch moderation \*waves\* hi Bob :-). There's no fees, paywalls, logins, subscriptions etc.

In other words, it's self organising - and in an over-organised world, something like the AFN is a breath of fresh air. I can't speak for others, but my experience has been to take responsibility for my own participation in the list.

And most importantly for me, it is a status-free list. No-one, newbie or experienced, is any better or worse than anyone else. We all bring our experiences, perspectives, and ideas. And all are honoured. On the rare occasions when that doesn't happen, people on the list tend to self regulate...'

On 1/6/12 Ed McKinley added a succinct response to Carmela's question "What makes AFN e-list successful?"

'Bob Dick'.

Ros Byrne wrote on 2/6/12:

'I agree with Ed, Viv and others that the skilful 'light-touch' moderation that Bob models for us is crucially important for the success of this group.'

Joan wrote on 4/6/12:

'Hi all,

What each of you have said in response to this question about what makes the AFN e-group successful resonates with me including Viv's comments which affirm the self-organising nature of this e-group.

My sense is this also relates to a conversation a little while ago led by Peter Rennie about 'advanced social systems' in that it seems to take a more than usual amount of generosity and maturity to maintain a self-organising group without acquiring a 'pyramidal' structure, however appropriate these more hierarchical structures maybe in certain situations and however important it is to have choices open to different styles of groups.

Another aspect or pillar of the AFN e-group's success, I believe, is the opportunity to meet face-to-face on an annual basis at AFN Conferences and I am very much looking forward to attending the next excellent AFN Conference (at Commonground near Seymour, Victoria, Australia) in November, 2012.'

Simon Simondo wrote on 6/6/12:

'Hi there, thanks to everyone contributing to this thread.

Further to Joan's mention "...by Peter Rennie about 'advanced social systems' in that it seems to take a more than usual amount of generosity and maturity to maintain a self-organising group without acquiring a 'pyramidal' structure..."

I am much taken with the work of Barbara Fredrickson and Marcial Losada, which rather elegantly points to the necessity of a high proportion (>3:1) of Positivity to Negativity as a reliable indicator of organisational and team effectiveness (continued below )

(see similar work by John Gottman and others re: relationships somewhat higher >5:1).

These P/N metrics can be sensed at a gut level, and the P or N behaviours observed but

not always named. Simply naming them tends to mitigate the N effects and enhance the P. More here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Losada\\_line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Losada_line)

Also Gottman's latest book 'Trust'.

So even making this here a topic of discussion has a halo P effect, an amplification of the flourishing typical of high performing teams. Great!

Carmela wrote on 7/6/12:

'Dear fellow AFN'ers,

I have summarised responses in a pdf. Please request offline to e-list".

### What makes the AFN e-group and others successful?

Elements	How this contributed to the success of AFN e-group...
<b>Convenience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mails are directly received through emails which is very convenient – there is no need to type in username and password (like in Facebook and linkedin)</li> <li>• There's no fees, paywalls, logins, subscriptions etc.</li> <li>• There's no meetings, no themes, no agendas, no rules (apart from a few to do with the form of the list – plain text, no attachments etc. which I think reduces the amount of 'noise'.)</li> </ul>
<b>Membership: Status, Size and Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It isn't membership based.</li> <li>• No one is saying if you can or can't be a member.</li> <li>• It is a status-free list. No-one, newbie or experienced, is any better or worse than anyone else. We all bring our experiences, perspectives, and ideas. And all are honored. On the rare occasions when that doesn't happen, people on the list tend to self regulate.</li> <li>• A large enough cohort to get enough postings to keep alive – a few hundred of people (though of course there are always a smaller group of very regular posters, but a larger group of rare or irregular posters to keep it fresh).</li> </ul>
<b>Motivation for organizing e-group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AFN did not form by co-incidence, and through the demands or benefits of technology, i.e. computers and emails and mobile phones, this group keeps at a helpful distance</li> </ul>
<b>Support for professional needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group is able to ask questions related to our professional needs, issues, challenges and members spend time answering these questions which really help the members</li> <li>• A specific professional focus for enough of the postings to be of practical value to most users.</li> </ul>
<b>Sustained Relationships (on and off the e-group)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AFN has annual conferences which keeps the group connected and strengthens the ties of members: (opportunity to meet face-to-face on an annual basis at AFN Conferences)</li> <li>• Many members have been around for a long time and know each other personally – so the ties are not superficial...</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant Advertising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AFN e-group provides a venue to also advertise trainings, seminars, and other relevant activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Light moderation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an administrator who is efficiently tracking the contributions and also moderating – when needed and checking that members are contributing only those that are relevant for the AFN. No other advertisements allowed.</li> <li>• There's no one in charge apart from Bob's skillful 'light-touch' moderation that Bob models for us is crucially important for the success of this group.</li> </ul>

Elements	How this contributed to the success of AFN e-group...
<b>Self-organization and Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-organizing nature of this e-group: 'advanced social systems' in that it seems to take a more than usual amount of generosity and maturity to maintain a self-organizing group without acquiring a 'pyramidal' structure, however appropriate these more hierarchical structures maybe in certain situations and however important it is to have choices open to different styles of groups.</li> <li>• It's self organizing – and in an over-organized world, something like the AFN is a breath of fresh air. I can't speak for others, but my experience has been to take responsibility for my own participation in the list. At times, it's annoyed me so I've taken a break, even opted right out; often I delete digests unread opting for serendipity to play out when I do dive in. At other times I have been ever-so-grateful for the community, friendship, advice and challenge that the list provides.</li> <li>• Since we speak to such a large group when we post, this may invite us to be considerate to how our messages will be received. The size and the structure of the group may invite a more cautious approach. This may lead to the group lasting longer and flourishing.</li> <li>• <u>An open and respectful culture, generosity and lack of judgment</u></li> </ul>
<b>Reinforcing results/ indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer people who opt to unsubscribe than those who join the group. So each year more people join than quit this e-group. And it grew slowly, with only a handful of people on the list all those years ago, embracing of active participants and lurkers alike.</li> <li>• A high proportion (&gt;3:1) of Positivity to Negativity (<a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Losada_line">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Losada_line</a>)</li> <li>• Making this here a topic of discussion has a halo P effect, an amplification of the flourishing typical of high performing teams.</li> </ul>

**David Mathes also wrote that:**

When any group or relationship forms there are 3 ways things could go.

1. There can be more drama and conflict
2. There can be a sort of stand off where the contact becomes quite withdrawn
3. There can be some continued learning and the group continues with a sense of achievement and purpose.

**Cynthia Mahoney also shared the following:**

As you'd expect there seem to be pros and cons with the different platforms.

*Grateful thanks to Carmela Aziza for forwarding this pdf to Joan off-line to e-list in June, 2012 (2 of 3 pages copied above).*



## **CHAPTER TWO, Part 3:**

### **AFN evolves as a Self Organising Group and Network; Present time, 2016**

Joan Firkins as narrator of "A Brief History of AFN" writes:

'Further turning to the world wide web in regard to self-organising groups, this entry entitled "What is a self-organising group" written by Lori Kane seems important to contribute in some detail:

Lori Kane: <http://www.collectiveself.com> circa June, 2016, wrote:

"... For me, a self-organising group is a collective whose members are surprised and delighted by what they become and do together. These collectives create themselves and contain members who become increasingly aware that the group is giving them more than they could imagine and plan as individuals. I study self-aware self-organising groups: groups in which members recognise that the group itself is something special.

These collectives come fully into existence the moment group members recognise any of the following things:

- \* They get more from the group's spontaneity than they do from their individual planning,
- \* They generate energy together and are more creative, adaptive, resilient, and fearless thanks to the group,
- \* They find their lives and work more rewarding, impactful and fun (most days) because of the group,
- \* They are accomplishing more than they as individuals imagined or planned thanks to the group,
- \* They see the group itself as leader and teacher; group members demonstrate learning and leadership moving around within the group and some call the group leaderless (and some) leaderful saying (both) 'We don't need a leader' (and) 'We are all leaders'.
- \* They are grateful and feel (fortunate) to be part of the group...
- \* The collective becomes self-aware - through its group members and nearby others - that it is something unique, special, and important...

... Self-organising groups appear to form around the eternal, that is, around things that persist across human experience, such as love, friendship, joy, fellowship (for example, in shared experiences & work) and these groups can therefore themselves be very long lasting.

Within them, self-organising work groups naturally form to get specific work-of-the-moment done... Responding to the needs of the moment, those who most urgently feel the need come together, anticipate the need on behalf of the group, and then do the work that needs to get done...'

Lori Kane: <http://www.collectiveself.com>

Joan adds to give a pertinent example of self-organising work groups seen in AFN:

'An example of a self-organising work group within AFN can be seen to be an AFN Conference organising team and indeed those who even now are contributing to the co-writing of "A Brief History of the AFN..."

For further detail please see: <http://www.collectiveself.com/research/self-organizing-groups2/leadership-and-self-organizing-groups/what-is-a-self-organizing-group/>

Joan continues:

'Additionally, in regard to Self-organisation, Wikipedia states:

'Self-organization is a process where some form of overall order or coordination arises out of the local interactions between smaller component parts of an initially disordered system. The process of self-organization can be spontaneous, and it is not necessarily controlled by any auxiliary agent outside of the system. It is often triggered by random fluctuations that are amplified by positive feedback. The resulting organization is wholly decentralized or distributed over all the components of the system. As such, the organization is typically robust and able to survive and, even, self-repair substantial damage or

perturbations. Chaos theory discusses self-organization in terms of islands of predictability in a sea of chaotic unpredictability. Self-organization occurs in a variety of physical, chemical, biological, robotic, social, and cognitive systems...

#### Networks

...Self-organization is an important component for a successful ability to establish networking whenever needed. Such mechanisms are also referred to as Self-organizing networks. Intensified work in the latter half of the first decade of the 21st century was mainly due to interest from the wireless communications industry. It is driven by the plug and play paradigm, and that wireless networks need to be relatively simpler to manage than they used to be.

Only certain kinds of networks are self-organizing. The best known examples are small-world networks and scale-free networks. These emerge from bottom-up interactions, and appear to be limitless in size. In contrast, there are top-down hierarchical networks, which are not self-organizing. These are typical of organizations, and have severe size limits...

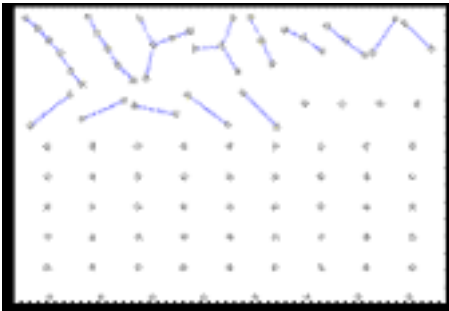
In many natural systems, self-organization results from repeated phase shifts in their underlying network of connections. Such phase shifts alter the balance between internal processes (e.g. selection and variation). They give rise to the phenomenon of dual-phase evolution."

Reference: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-organization>

In regard to dual-phase evolution mentioned above:

Dual phase evolution (DPE) is a process that drives self-organization within complex adaptive systems. It arises in response to phase changes within the network of connections formed by a system's components. DPE occurs in a wide range of physical, biological and social systems.

Dual-phase evolution - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Dual phase evolution (DPE) is a process that drives self-organization within complex adaptive systems. It arises in response to phase changes within the network of connections formed by a system's components. DPE occurs in a wide range of physical, biological and social systems.

Dual-phase evolution - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual-phase\\_evolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual-phase_evolution)

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **'Who would have thought? AFN 1000 email addresses...'**

On 10 Jun 2016, Bob Dick, long-time moderator of the AFN emailing list wrote:

'Dear colleagues,

Another AFN subscription was processed a couple of minutes ago. The AFN listserv subscriber count then ticked over to 1000 for the first time.

In other words, there are now 1000 email addresses on the AFN list subscriber file.

That doesn't quite mean that there are 1000 people in the AFN. Probably 900 or thereabouts. I would guess that about 100 people (I haven't counted them) have more than one email address. And the "1000" is an artifact of most of us having 10 fingers. If we had 12 fingers instead of 10, I wouldn't be sending this until we had 1728 (in decimal notation) email addresses subscribed.

Still, it did seem to be worth a comment -- relevant, perhaps, to Joan's sterling work with the AFN history.

Cheers — Bob'

On 10th June, 2016, Viv McWaters wrote:

'Hi Bob

Thanks for marking this achievement. Who would have thought?

I still remember the session that Sheelagh Purdon facilitated at the very first AFN conference in 1998 where the idea of a network using a discussion list was mooted, and you Bob, agreed to host it.

Thanks for your continuing efforts that just keeps the AFN humming along.'

On 11th June, 2016, Cathryn Lloyd wrote:

'Couldn't agree more - thank you Bob for maintaining the list and thank you all who are part of it.

It is a wonderful network and I feel very fortunate to be part of it.'

Dale Hunter wrote on 11/6/16 in regard to the marking of AFN 1000 email addresses: 'Yeh.'

Simone Maus responded: 'Fantastic! I like celebrations.'

Kevin Balm wrote on 15/6/16:

... 'An unspoken aim of convening the first Facilitation Conference (in the Australasian region) was to give form to the community of facilitators in this part of the world and to relate it globally. To this end I called an open session on day two of this Conference where those present discussed and decided to be the AFN.

It warms my heart to learn that the AFN list has 1000 subscribers and that the conferences continue to attract around 100 people...'

Sharon McGann wrote on 24/6/16:

'Here's a toast to Bob and to all of us in AFN - this lovely expression of individuality and common cause. I feel very connected to you all even though I haven't posted for ages, so here's a toast to (nearly) 1000 efforts to facilitate a more connected world...'

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## **CHAPTER 4, Part 1:**

### **Compare & Contrast; Diverse perspectives of AFN/IAF relationship from Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region, 1998, to cessation of informal affiliation at AFN/IAF Hobart Conference 2010**

On the topic of diverse perspectives of AFN/IAF relationship from 1998-2010 Kevin Balm wrote on 17 June, 2016:

...' This topic is engaging me more deeply than I had set out to be.

I want to unequivocally say there is no question of a hot spot or sticking point regarding the intent and reality of the early relationship between AFN and IAF. Whatever has evolved down the historical track and however that evolved, there is no confusion in my mind now as to what my aspiration was then and the strategy adopted to realise it. To reiterate something I said at the opening of the 1998 conference and at other times, the idea to give form and visibility to the community of facilitators in our part of the world took shape while I was attending the first IAF conference (which by the way was 1995 as my coffee mug from the conference attests). That idea was enthusiastically supported first by my Integra colleagues and later by our discussions with people such as Dale in New Zealand and others in Sydney.

Secondly, at the session during the first conference, when the decision to be the AFN was reached, one item of discussion was specifically about the name and relationship with the IAF. The name AFN was chosen to help establish the facilitation community in this part of the world, and with the acknowledgement of being part of a new global movement of facilitators. So, in essence we were saying (without being so explicit) that it wasn't an either/or scenario but a both/and.

I'm not intending to continue to "bat" via emails for how the early relationship between IAF and AFN came to be, but it is this version I will continue to tell as a key player in the beginnings of both. The last many years I have endured a troubled corner of my heart over the separation that has occurred, and I'm not advocating to reopen the matter now. I just accept that what was once is not so now...'

Joan Firkins writes:

'In regard to the relationship between AFN & IAF from the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region 1998 to cessation of informal affiliation between AFN/IAF at the Hobart Facilitation Conference 2010 and to honour the diversity of apparent perspectives it is my understanding that there can be seen to be at least two poles of perspectives and then another which links both perspectives emphasising Kevin's statement that:

The name AFN was chosen (during the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region in Melbourne in 1998) to help establish the facilitation community in this part of the world, and with the acknowledgement of being part of a new global movement of facilitators. So, in essence we were saying (without being so explicit) that it wasn't an either/or scenario but a both/and.

One pole of perspective seems to be something like this:

Joan wrote on 13 June, 2016:

...' I believe AFN can be seen to have been independent from IAF at Inauguration, although informally affiliated with IAF between 2001-2010, both IAF and AFN continue to be distinct groups involved with facilitation'.

And the other pole of perspective may be something like what Dale presents, that is:

Dale Hunter wrote on 14 June, 2016:

...'My recollection is: The AFN was affiliated with the IAF from the first Conference in 1998'.

Joan wrote in response:

'Dale, reiterating that I hear and honour your perspective, it seems important to add it is my perception that there are at least these two diverse poles of perspectives on the AFN/IAF relationship including what this relationship between IAF & AFN was and/or may have been at the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in Melbourne, 1998. Also, there is possibly many perspectives somewhere in between these 'poles' of perspectives.

Collating history can often be a contentious topic, because we are all individuals with our own perspectives of events.

Although I haven't studied History as an academic topic recently, I do remember many assignments in Year 12 (long time ago now ;-)) doing Modern American History that persistently began with 'Compare and Contrast differing perspectives, for example, those recorded as private recollections in journals or newspaper opinion articles along with publicly recorded information of the same historical event, for example, the 'Boston Tea Party'.

To follow the 'Boston Tea Party' analogy further (for what it is worth) this historical event that had many diverse perspectives and personal recollections can be seen to have led to the publicly recorded formation of the first Continental Congress and an acknowledged escalation of the American War of Independence from Great Britain.

For example: <http://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-boston-tea-party>

'It was the British reaction to the Boston Tea Party, not the event itself, that rallied Americans.

Many Americans shared Washington's sentiment and viewed the Boston Tea Party as an act of vandalism by radicals rather than a heroic patriotic undertaking. There was less division among the colonists, however, about their opposition to the measures passed by the British government in 1774 to punish Boston. The legislation closed the port of Boston until damages were paid, annulled colonial self-government in Massachusetts and expanded the Quartering Act. Colonists referred to the measures as the "Intolerable Acts," and they led to the formation of the first Continental Congress'.

So, my understanding of collating history is that it includes both:

- i) individual perspectives of events from personal recollections and opinion articles, for example in emails, as we are in the process of and,
- ii) more concrete data contained within documents such as Conference pamphlets, Conference Programs, recorded minutes, et al.

In summary, both personal recollections and factual data are important in the process of collating any written history as we are currently aiming to do.

Further, in regard to more concrete data relevant to the Inaugural Facilitation Conference held in October, 1998, in Melbourne:

- i) the Conference Pamphlet that Belinda Coghlan has forwarded and I have attached in Chapter One in relation to the program of the Inaugural Conference 1998 states the title as "Facilitation Conference Program" mentioning neither IAF or AFN.
- ii) also, in regard to "affiliation" this can be defined as: "officially join or connect to an organisation" where 'officially' can be inferred to assume there was some at least slightly formal agreement between groups rather than between any given individuals as to this affiliation.

My understanding this "officially" join or connect, that is affiliate, did not occur until the 2001 Conference Business Meeting held near the closure of the 'Different Journeys' Conference held in Brisbane 2001 which involved AFN & 3 other organisations (also notably not recording mention of IAF). Please see Bob's note about the 2001 Conference:

Bob wrote on 14 June, 2016:

You may already know that the 2001 conference in Brisbane involved four associations: AFN (Australasian Facilitators Network); ALARPM (Action Learning, Action Research, and Process Management Association, now ALARA); IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation); and SCIAR (Southern Cross Institute of Action Research... SCIAR no longer exists...

Joan continues:

'Not sure where to from here, however, possibly the persistent history assignment question 'Compare and contrast personal perspectives & recollections along with publicly recorded information of (an historical event)' may also be relevant.

Dale wrote to give more detail of the perspective that IAF and AFN were (at least) associated since the Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region until 2010:

"I was approached by Kevin Balm in his capacity as IAF Regional Representative of the IAF, when he visited NZ in 1997. He talked about setting up a regional network of facilitators in Australia and New Zealand and having a conference in 1998. My understanding was that the AFN Conference was an IAF regional conference. The 1998 Melbourne Conference was given an IAF update by Kevin and when I became the IAF Representative for Australasia in 2001-2003, Kevin made it clear that I needed to report to the AFN Conference on IAF activities. This happened at the opening sessions... In the IAF Vice Chair International role, I attended and reported to the IAF on the development of facilitator networks and conferences worldwide e.g., Singapore, Taiwan, South Africa, Latin America, Europe as well as USA...

Viv McWaters responded:

'Hi Joan (& others)

Thanks for your email and the work you are doing to document the history of the AFN - as a 'sometimes' social historian I believe this is important work. And also, as someone who has written a social history where the protagonists are still alive, I understand how memory can be an unreliable witness. Our brains fill in the parts that are missing to make a coherent whole.

Having said that, here's my recollections about the first AFN Conference and the relationship with the IAF: Kevin Balm attended a conference, or maybe more than one, in the US convened by the newly-formed IAF (my understanding, a spin off from the ICA - may be wrong on that though) and returned to share his experiences with myself and Peter Box. At the time, the three of us were working together under the Integra banner, and based in Melbourne. We lamented the lack of such an event locally and decided to convene the first facilitator conference under the Integra banner. I don't recall the 'official' relationship with the IAF, but it was certainly intended to be a local version of an IAF event. I don't recall any funding or anything else from the IAF except ideas that we adopted from the conferences that Kevin had attended. The AFN didn't exist before the first facilitation conference (held in the Australasian region in Melbourne, 1998).

I was subsequently a member of the IAF for a number of years until they went in directions that conflicted with my personal values, and I ceased being a member - but that's a personal choice, and nothing to do with the IAF/AFN relationship.

The only other thing I recall was a meeting at the end of the inaugural conference (facilitated by Sheelagh Purdon ) to talk about the future and that's where the idea of a Australia/NZ network was born (network being an important distinction from an organisation). Bob Dick agreed to moderate a list-serve and we thought it might continue for a bit, maybe someone would step up to organise another conference - and here we are in 2016!

Regarding perspective, I think they are important to include diverse, even contrary perspectives. History, like everything else, is viewed through our own points-of-view and we know that individuals experience the same events differently. A narrative that acknowledges this diversity, rather than searching for an unattainable 'truth', will provide the reader with insights into a world that they are now a part of'.

Kevin wrote further:

Hi Joan,

'I too affirm your valuable contribution in recording the history of the AFN. It is and will continue to be an important part of the evolving story of the global community of facilitators. I am especially pleased to see this project transitioning from data collection to writing... I would add that for me the first conference was seen as an excellent vehicle for bringing together several sub-communities of facilitators. Thankfully, reaching out to test this idea encountered many like-minded people. An unspoken aim of convening the first conference was to give form to the community of facilitators in this part of the world and to relate it globally. To this end I called an open session on day two where those present discussed and decided to be the AFN. It warms my heart to learn that the AFN list has 1000 subscribers and that the conferences continue to attract around 100 people. I continue to identify as a "facilitator" and the "community" even while I am no longer an active participant in any of the manifestations of the community.

The importance of documenting and disseminating this history was brought home to me recently when I attended the dinner at the IAF conference in Melbourne. At the dinner, the then IAF Oceania representative mentioned the ATO's role in supporting facilitation as evidenced by the many people whose facilitation development ATO was investing in. While this is clearly a fact and should be part of the historical story, had (the IAF Oceania representative) had an understanding of the full chronological history, he would know of the vast numbers of people engaged in facilitation roles in the Environment and Agriculture related departments across Australia and New Zealand since the late 80's. To my mind, their numbers gave us the critical mass. I don't know the segments that the current 1000 subscribers comprise, but would hope these sectors are still well represented.

This is way more than I intended to say when I decided to reply. Clearly facilitation, AFN and especially the people involved are a big part of my story...'

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## **CHAPTER 4, Part 2:**

### **Diverse perspectives of AFN/IAF relationship from Inaugural Facilitation Conference in the Australasian region from cessation of informal affiliation at AFN/IAF Hobart Conference 2010 to Present time:**

Joan wrote:

'Dear AFN'ers,

Sometimes poetic verse is an appropriate way to summarise a series of events.

To this effect, "The Lesson of the Butterfly" by Paulo Coelho which Michelle Howard kindly sent earlier in 2016 to the AFN emailing list seems eloquent.

"The Lesson of the Butterfly" was sent by Michelle to the AFN emailing list in relation to a question to AFN about growth & change and facilitators role in this process:

**"The Lesson of the Butterfly** by Paulo Coelho

A man spent hours watching a butterfly struggling to emerge from its cocoon. It managed to make a small hole, but its body was too large to get through it. After a long struggle, it appeared to be exhausted and remained absolutely still.

The man decided to help the butterfly and, with a pair of scissors, he cut open the cocoon, thus releasing the butterfly. However, the butterfly's body was very small and wrinkled and its wings were all crumpled.

The man continued to watch, hoping that, at any moment, the butterfly would open its wings and fly away. Nothing happened; in fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its brief life dragging around its shrunken body and shrivelled wings, incapable of flight.

What the man - out of kindness and his eagerness to help - had failed to understand was that the tight cocoon and the efforts that the butterfly had to make in order to squeeze out of that tiny hole were nature's way of training the butterfly and of strengthening its wings."

*In conclusion of 'A Brief History of AFN' at this present time, I would like to personally thank AFN'ers for listening and thank all who have contributed &/or responded thus far.*

*Also, I would add acknowledgement to the IAF Board & IAF Representatives for instituting the cessation of informal affiliation between AFN & IAF at the AFN/IAF Hobart Facilitation Conference in 2010.*

*This decisive action, I firmly believe, enabled AFN to struggle to survive and in the process, strengthen our butterfly wings and continue to thrive as a self organising group & network and valued teaching & learning facilitation community into the future.*

*Salutations to all of the AFN self organising group & network and valued teaching & learning facilitation community,*

*Joan Firkins*

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### **Chapter 4, Part 3:**

Peter Rennie wrote on 21 July, 2016 after Joan had posted Chapter 4, Part 2 of "A Brief History of AFN" featuring "The Lesson of the Butterfly" by Paulo Coelho:

'Joan, thank you for including Michelle Howard's thoughtful offering of this story (in "A Brief History of AFN).

I confess 'out of kindness and eagerness to help' (sometimes out of a need to be helpful) I have stunted a few butterflies.

And yet it is only part of the story. . . . Stevie Smith's "Not Waving but Drowning" comes to mind.

Nobody heard him, the dead man,

But still he lay moaning:

I was much further out than you thought

And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking

And now he's dead

It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,

They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always

(Still the dead one lay moaning)

I was much too far out all my life

And not waving but drowning.

.....

I have another confession. . . . I have allowed people to drown when I thought they were waving. . . . .

Oh dear. . . to act or not to act . . . or to seek the opinions of others . . .

From a flawed consultant.

With warmth Peter.'

On 21 July, 2016, Carmela Ariza wrote in response:

'Two beautiful stories.

Each teaching a lesson.

Thanks.'

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### Emerging AFN Conference traditions & symbols:

The AFN Conference Genie became an important tradition of the AFN story which began at the 2005 AFN Perth Conference by an elder Roberta Mead, who tragically lost her life only a few months after the close of the 2005 AFN Conference.

In a paraphrase of Roberta's words, the AFN Conference Genie is said to have 'all the magic you need to create a great AFN Conference'.

The AFN Conference shawl is another important symbol of an elder, Glen Ochre, who sadly passed on not long before the 2014 Alice Springs AFN Conference.

The shawl was gifted to the AFN community by another elder, Dale Hunter, in remembrance of Glen Ochre who borrowed Dale's vibrant shawl from one early AFN Conference to another.



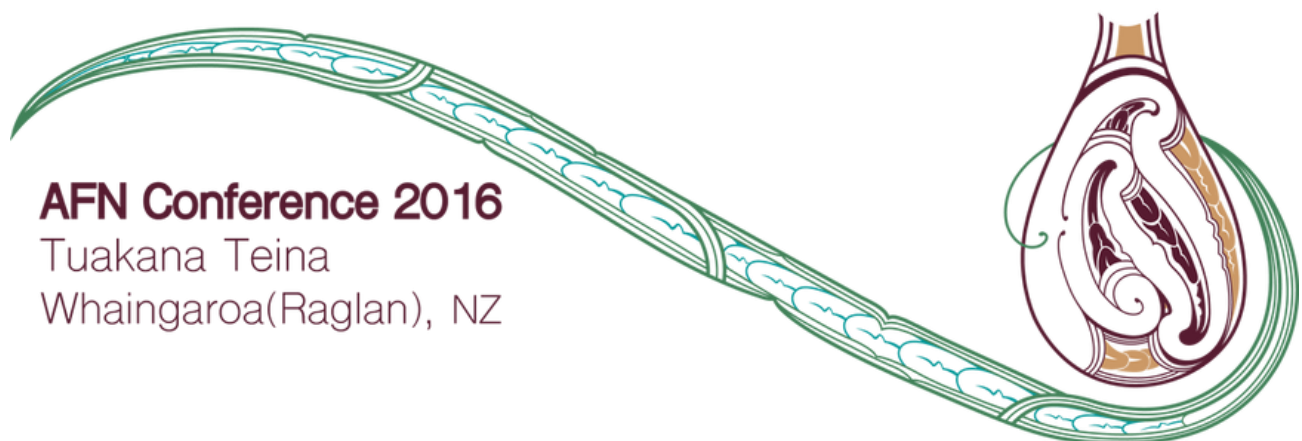
Regarding the Genie in relation to the AFN Conference in Whaingaroa, Aotearoa, Helen Ritchie wrote on 3rd January, 2016:

"On the AFN website, thanks to Mark Butz, you can see photos of the Genie travelling on its way to Aotearoa (following handover at the 2015 AFN Ballina Beach Conference) and arriving in its new environment. Cut and paste this link to your browser":

[http://markbutz.com/afn/AFN\\_Conference\\_2016\\_Whaingaroa\\_Genie.html](http://markbutz.com/afn/AFN_Conference_2016_Whaingaroa_Genie.html)

Description: AFN 2016 Whaingaroa/Raglan Conference Logo

The logo represents the AFN conference (represented in the shape reminiscent of the AFN genie) providing a space for younger generations or beginners to be nurtured and cared for by those with more experience, so that all can grow and contribute to our world. To the left, waves extend from the coast of Whaingaroa towards Australia, calling and providing a pathway for people, with their knowledge and experience, to cross the sea between our two countries and meet together.



Joan invites other stories about the AFN Conference Genie and Shawl.

Rick Sommerford wrote following AFN Conference on October 22, 2017:

'The Genie is out of the bottle by the way, and it took a young child to set it free. This was both painful and generative for the future of the AFN and emblematic I thought, of the crossroad we found in the place of Stanwell Tops (AFN Conference 2017)'.

Ed McKinley wrote on 23/10/ 2017:

'Reading about the fate of the genie makes me wonder if we could borrow from cricket: They have the ashes, maybe we could have the 'smashes' and keep the genie with us in the woven bag.'

Joan Firkins added on 23/10/17:

'My hope is that the (magic of) Genie is alive in a woven bag or in the aether, where... any hope may live and a child of any age remembers'.

Joan writes:

'In further summary of Chapter 5, as AFN continues to evolve as a self-organising group & network, other traditions and symbols have potential to emerge over time'.

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## CHAPTER 6: Indigenous-Informed Facilitation Practice

'Tuihana Bosch, Michelle Rush & Helen Ritchie supported by Carol Vale expressed the need for 'Indigenous-Informed Facilitation Practice' at the 2014 AFN Conference in Alice Springs, and this challenge has been taken up at each of the following AFN Conferences at Ballina Beach, Australia 2015; Whaingaroa/Raglan, Aotearoa/New Zealand 2016; and Stanwell Tops south of Sydney, Australia 2017.

At the AFN General Assembly held during AFN Stanwell Tops Conference, October 2017, with notes recorded by Marie Martin:

"Indigenous Informed Practice: The work initiated in Alice Springs has resonated through the last three years and into this conference. There is further work that can be done, including to support the organising committee to ensure a cultural component is maintained in future conferences..."

### "How can the AFN develop an indigenous-informed practice?"

This was the challenge laid down by Carol Vale, an Indigenous facilitator, at the AFN conference in 2014 in Alice Springs.

It began a series of discussions out of which a set of questions was developed. These questions were introduced at the 2016 AFN conference held at Whaingaroa, New Zealand, and published in time for the 2017 AFN conference held on the traditional lands of the Dharawal people at Stanwell Tops in New South Wales, Australia.

They are provided at [http://www.markbutz.com/afn/3219\\_AFN\\_brochure\\_fin.pdf](http://www.markbutz.com/afn/3219_AFN_brochure_fin.pdf) for the benefit of all facilitators working with and between cultures in Australia and New Zealand.

### ***Towards an indigenous-informed facilitation practice: Questions we can ask ourselves as facilitators working with and between cultures.***



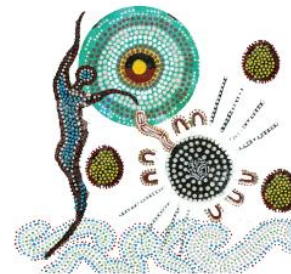
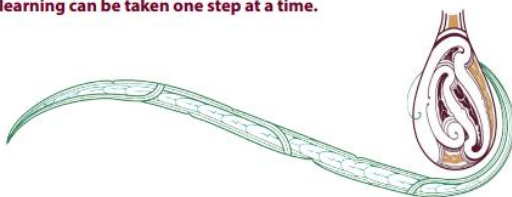
It is recognised that an 'Indigenous-informed practice' will mean different things to different people and the term may or may not sit well with you. Whether or not there are Indigenous people in the groups we are working with, these questions are intended as a prompt to think about how to honour and respect the environment we are working in, the history of cultures and people in that place over time, and in this context, how we want to act in our role as facilitators.

Whatever the circumstances of your facilitation, the hope is that among these questions you will find some useful food for thought. The invitation is for you to pick up what you want from this, to assist you on your own journey.

This is not intended as a prescriptive list. All of the answers are not required in order to make a start: rather the questions are here to provide a reflection tool to seed our thought processes.

It is not always straightforward to find answers to questions like these, and it may not be an easy journey – challenges also provide the opportunity to reflect and re-commit to continuing the exploration.

**With open hearts and open minds, the journey of learning can be taken one step at a time.**



**AFN Conference 2017**  
Marelin Yarning All Ways  
Stanwell Tops, New South Wales  
[afn.net.au](http://afn.net.au)

### **Towards an indigenous-informed facilitation practice:**

**Questions we can ask ourselves as facilitators working with and between cultures.**

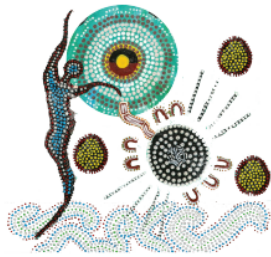
These questions arose from a challenge that was laid down by Carol Vale, an Indigenous facilitator at the Australasian Facilitators' Network (AFN) conference in 2014 in Alice Springs:

*"How can the AFN develop an indigenous-informed practice?"*

A group of participants met under a tree in the Olive Pink Botanic Gardens to ponder this challenge, to gather up and reflect on the relevant content of conference sessions and to consider a way forward.

This led on to a series of Skype conversations throughout 2015 and the drafting of these questions that we facilitators might ask ourselves when preparing to work inter-culturally in Australia or New Zealand.





## Towards an indigenous-informed facilitation practice:

Questions we can ask ourselves as facilitators working with and between cultures.

### Preparation

- How am I with stepping into the unknown? How can I prepare myself to be open to change?
- How can I build relationships early on with the local people so that I will be able to ask what will be appropriate?
- Who are the local Indigenous people? Who are their elders?
- How do the local Indigenous people feel about the topic I will be facilitating?
- What knowledge might they bring?
- Is there an option for Indigenous facilitation or co-facilitation (Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators working together)? What can be REALLY created together? How open am I to this?

### Purpose

- What is my intention? What are the intentions of local Indigenous people?
- What needs of theirs can be met? How can I find out?

### Time

- What time needs to be factored in to allow for this to work for Indigenous people, and for the necessary conversations to take place before, during and after this event?
- How prepared am I to change my plan based on what I find out? What am I prepared to give up?
- What is my responsibility to deliver, and how does this sit with the timeframes of the Indigenous people? What are my real time constraints and deadlines? Who set them? Why? What happens if I don't meet them?

### Process

- What can I bring into my design and facilitation that will encourage this group to participate? What might prevent, or make it uncomfortable to participate?
- How can I allow time for relationships, connections and story-telling to unfold?
- What would I want to share about myself and my background, and what would be the right way to do this?
- How can I allow space and flexibility in the process, and find out how people would like it to work today, so that they can achieve what they would like to?
- Would it be useful to spend time caucusing (Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants working separately)? Or for people to break into groups that make sense to this culture?

### Space

- Where is the right space? Where is a safe space? Will we need separate space so that men and women, or old and young, or other cultural groupings, will be able to speak freely?
- What visual cues, symbols, objects or sounds would create a welcoming space that acknowledges Indigenous culture meaningfully and brings it into the space?
- What connections can be made in this space to the land, its features and its spirit?

### Language, History and Protocol

- What are the original names for places I will be in or referring to, and what is the correct pronunciation for places, people and words I will say?
- What is the appropriate way to open and close? Whose voice should be heard first, and last? How can we acknowledge country/ the land, its significant features, original inhabitants and spirit? What other protocols or practices are important?
- What do I know of the history in this place and how can it be acknowledged? What other context is important? What do I want to honour; what do I not want to perpetuate?

### Deep Listening

- Is there anything that will get in the way of my listening/ hearing?
- Will I be patient enough to wait for the answers?

### Awakeness/ Awareness

- How have I attempted to learn about and make sense of history and culture in the context of this land, and my own personal journey and professional identity? How aware am I of my own privilege? How well do I know the deep river of assumptions and information that flows beneath my practices and work? Whose 'normal' does this event or process reflect?
- What strengths do I bring and what can I offer? What power and resources do I hold at this time and how can they be shared? What is my responsibility at this time?
- What can I give, before I ask for anything? How can I show appreciation?
- How do I respond to making mistakes and being corrected? Am I able to acknowledge challenges as they arise and still stay with the journey?
- What is my commitment to learning about the culture and language of groups I work with, so I can bring this into my practice authentically and respectfully?
- How important is this work to me? How strong is my commitment?



Joan writes:

'In summary, Indigenous Informed Facilitation Practice is hoped to continue to resonate well into the future'.