Politics of co-creation seminar - April 8th, 2022

Unpacking interconnections: Democratic models and the politics of facilitation

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Agenda for the day

Brief intro of who is in the room (5-10min)

Recap of the texts - slides (20min)
1) Kirk, P., & Broussine, M. (2000). The politics of facilitation. Journal of Workplace Learning, 12(1), 13–22.
doi:10.1108/13665620010309756 - On understanding facilitation as a political practice (12 pages)
2) Fishkin, James S. (2011). When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation. Oxford, 2011. Oxford Scholarship
Online - pg. 65, 76-85 (11 pages)

Discussion
Open exchange guided by pointers for discussion:
- What defines facilitation as political? Can it be not political at all?
- How could facilitation foster political equality, participation and deliberation?
- Are theories of facilitation within the democratic context needed? Why?
- What are good examples of facilitation that resonate with the readings?

Idea of the session

- Is there a connection between facilitation and democratic theories?
- Is this something that we need to unpack?
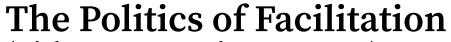- Are there notions, assumptions that are of common knowledge but not explored enough?

Ground rules

- Feel free to unmute whenever you have something to say
- No need to have your video on if you don't feel like it.
- The discussion is meant to be open, and all contributions are valid, do jump in!
- Do you have examples from your own practice? Share with us.
- How did you connect the two readings? What were your takeaways? Let us know.

‼️ → this symbol means there might be some connections among papers!

The Politics of Facilitation
(Kirk, P. & Broussine, M., 2000)

Topic: Developing political awareness in facilitation

What is Facilitation?

↓   ↓

Aim
To establish and hold an environment within which learning is created

Task
To enable the group to create learning and to be aware of the processes of doing so

↓

Not neutral
- As facilitators enter and intervene in organisations, they become **part of the political system** in which they operate.
- Facilitators as **enablers** by increasing political awareness of dynamics, fostering critical examination and pursue of change

Three propositions

1) Organisations are political   2) Facilitation is political   3) Facilitators are political
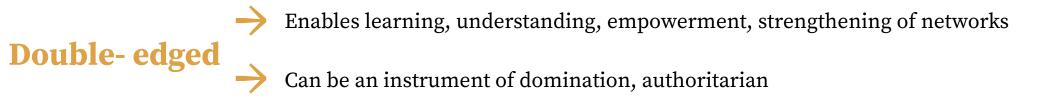
Three propositions

1) Organisations are political

2) Facilitation is political

↓

3) Facilitators are political

↓

Relevant for today's discussion. Let's dig deeper into these claims!

FACILITATION IS POLITICAL

- Often **a taboo**, not addressed thoroughly or at all
- On top of skills, approaches, styles and techniques, it is important to **understand and work in a committed way with social and political complexity**
- Importance of **power and dependency** → facilitation meant to enable learning in a comfortable way
- Not meant to disempower → limiting or reducing **agency**
- **Value-heavy** role: safe, trustable, realiable, not threathening

Double- edged

→ Enables learning, understanding, empowerment, strengthening of networks

→ Can be an instrument of domination, authoritarian

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↓

Overlooked aspect as participants are often assumed to take the role of the unknower and passive recipient (as in Freire's banking model).

↓

Highly political aspect as freedom to reflection, opinion and part taking into own experiences allows for the development of new perceptions of the world and of themselves.

"Will our intervention be seen as another manifestation of the organisation's system of domination?"

"Will we be expected to create and hold a learning environment within which new and different power relationships within the organisation may be developed?"

↓

The position taken by the facilitator will greatly influence in whether the "end goal" is achieved or not.

FACILITATORS ARE POLITICAL

- Facilitation requiress introspection, as awareness informs choice → **political forces** at play within systems **become visible**
- Affected by own views → **"our practice can never be theory-free, because it is always guided by an image of what we are trying to do"**
- Tricky gap between principles (the talk) and our practice (the walk)

Four positions of awareness → To enable us to consider and revise continuously our efficacy, political engagement and our ethics in our work with groups and organisations.

Four positions of awareness

Partial awareness

(closed)

- Unaware of interpretive lenses
- Denial of potential for abuse of power
- Unaware of group pressures
- Unaware of influence of the client

Immobilised awareness

- Fear of getting it wrong
- Fear of making difficult interventions
- Fear of breaking past patterns
- Fear of disagreement

Manipulative awareness

- Manipulated alliances
- Secret agendas
- Image manipulation

Partial awareness

(open)

- Acknowledge partial awareness
- Reflective practice
- Reflexivity/awareness of theories in use
- Maintaining the task and the role
- Exercising care

Conclusion

- Facilitators are encouraged to work with the political issues at play in the learning group and to explore possibilities to enable change
- Need for creating spaces in which to give voice and work with political issues
- Discussing the politics of participatory instances helps to make the topic less of a taboo and see power relations clearly

Awareness

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Active engagement with the process of knowing enough about what is going on in order to intervene appropriately.

Role

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Always tensions between those who wish to preserve the system and those who wish to change it. Never neutral.

When the People Speak
(Fishkin, J., 2011)

Topic: Competing visions within democratic theories, exploring their ups and downs

Four democratic theories

Democratic theories

Basic principles	Competitive democracy	Elite deliberation	Participatory democracy	Deliberative democracy
Political equality	+	?	+	+
Participation	?	?	+	?
Deliberation	?	+	?	+
Non-tyranny	+	+	?	?

Four democratic theories

Democratic theories

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Participation	?	?	+	?
Deliberation	?	+	?	+
Non-tyranny	+	+	?	?

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

- Does not require that all decisions be made directly by the people
- The idea is to shift the mix so that direct consultation is frequent and consequential
- People to be consulted ALSO about substance, not just decisions (e.g what policies, instead of yes or no to those)
- A combination of political equality and participation → if some are left out, the "public" voice is distorted
- The spread of participation feared as a possible expression of dangerous factions

Why should one support participatory democracy?

→ Participation as a proxy for mass consent

→ Educative function. People learn to be citizens by doing → more efficacy, more informed about public issues

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↓

- Important to consider small vs large scale in interactions
- Most compelling for face-to-face variants
‼️ - **"How much efforts to open up local control and decentralization might create spaces for face-to-face democracy within a larger polity"?**

↓

‼️ - Materials to facilitate decision-making
- ...however, little dispute about their efficiency in informing people
- The educational effect of participation at large scale is small

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"If an educative effect is the effect that is desired, then aiming at deliberation directly —or at institutional designs that have a necessary deliberative component—may be more to the point".

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

- Combines deliberation by the people themselves with political equality
- This taking place mostly on the face-to-face scale
- Role of technology to bring people together and "erase" geography

‼️ **How can the people deliberate themselves?**

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Microcosmic deliberation

→ Modest scale → ordinary citizens, representative groups → also a limitation

→ Political equality through random sampling

→ Deliberation through exchange of reasons and arguments ‼️

Why should they have recommending force?

→ Considered judgement = made in circumstances where most common excuses and explanations for making a mistake do not obtain → **people presumed to have ability, opportunity and desire to reach a correct decision**

→ Good given conditions for good deliberation: **information, balance, diversity in viewpoints, conscientiousness, and equal consideration.**

→ Problems arise depending on the design of the deliberative process → with the right one, they can be avoided !!

Open discussion

- Thoughts on the readings? What stood out the most?
- What were your impressions?
- Is there a (missing) connection between the two?

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Some questions to discuss:

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