

An Exploration of Developing
Skilled Facilitation within
Transformational Practice
Development in Healthcare

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Margaret Kelly, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Health at the University of Technology Sydney. This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Facilitation is key to engaging people in transformational change and facilitators require considerable skill. However, a thorough understanding of the nature of facilitation and how people develop as facilitators remains elusive. This research investigated the experiences of practice development (PD) facilitators regarding their understanding of transformational facilitation and becoming skilled.

The research was situated within the Constructivist paradigm and used Naturalistic Inquiry as the guiding methodology. The study was a two-stage in-depth exploration of the topic. The first stage incorporated 15 interviews with PD facilitators in Australia/New Zealand to gain their understanding of transformational facilitation and their practice as a facilitator. The second stage allowed for deeper understanding, and elaboration, of the themes identified in stage 1. This stage explored transformational facilitation internationally through interviews with seven leading PD facilitators from four European countries.

Seven overlapping and interacting themes were identified that formed three distinct clusters. Within each theme there was evidence of a continuum of development. Inexperienced facilitators were at one end of the continuum with those who were highly skilled at the other end. The continuum reflected the increasing sophistication of facilitators' thinking and management of situations as they gained expertise.

Cluster 1: *Internal to the facilitator* identified elements that related to the way a facilitator thinks (***inside your own head***), the way they interact with groups, finding the right balance in facilitation to enable people to transform practice and to flourish (***walking a fine line***) and how they react to situations and manage their own reactions (***being me***).

Cluster 2: *External to the facilitator* related to facilitators' development. This cluster incorporated the significant learning that was gained from interactions with other facilitators (***a lens on facilitation***) and getting to grips with and using theories to underpin facilitation practice (***making sense of theory***).

Cluster 3: *Enacting transformational facilitation* conveyed how facilitators assimilated their learning and experiences to enable them to work effectively with people in diverse settings (***understanding people in context***) and become flexible in their practice (***being fluid***).

This doctoral study provides new insights regarding the nature of skilled facilitation and ways in which facilitators practice and develop themselves. The findings contribute new knowledge about the inner dialogue of facilitators and how they draw together all aspects of their practice to enable transformation in individuals, teams and healthcare cultures. These findings have implications for all facilitators, as well as facilitation practice and ways to support facilitator development.