Facilitating out of the four walls ceiling

The ecology of the facilitation environment

Nadia MacArthur

Our clients trust us to facilitate them with their developmental processes, this is a privilege which comes with a responsibility. I often wonder if I am giving my clients the best I can possibly offer or if there is something better that I am overlooking. In my network of facilitators we often discuss how we can enhance the facilitation environment and methodologies. There seems to be a sense of competition in wanting to offer something new, profound and high impact. Pre-Covid I worked in A locations, with the sentiment that a great location should enhance the training/facilitation experience. I have facilitated in hotels, conference centres, event halls, former churches, and other extravagant locations with their equally extravagant catering.

Till the beginning of this year my main client was an agency for which I facilitated international corporates in the Netherlands. Simultaneously I sought knowledge in Buddhism, circular economy, threefold economy, environmental awareness and community building. The two worlds (corporate and spiritual/theoretical ??) collided. So much so that I decided to end my collaboration with the agency. I needed to detox from the corporate world and sought refuge in nature. As I did, the situation felt contradictory. I experienced nature as the ultimate location for rejuvenation and healing, while at the same time I assumed that I needed to do my client work within four walls and a ceiling.

Nature-led facilitation

I gradually formed what I now call nature led facilitation. With a few of my most innovative clients I started experimenting. We would meet in nature and work on the same work topics as we would normally do, but without the white board, premium coffee, catering or any other comforting facilities. Initially, as a facilitator, this way of working felt threatening. I struggled with not having a fixed, predictable and solid physical/built (?) environment to work with. Facilitation in nature is unpredictable.

Facilitation in nature is without fail rewarded by the added aspects of synchronicity and emergence. The client's theme is often illustrated by a movement or change within the natural surroundings. The struggling client noticing a beetle on its back. A nuthatch hugging a tree, creating a childhood memory and a fresh

impulse. The shriek of a buzzard during a breakthrough moment, right on cue. Butterflies landing and fluttering on an arm during the closure of a session, as if applauding the bravery of the client's words. During the facilitation we search for stones, rocks and twigs as props to the scenery of the client's topic of investigation. With these natural props I can systemically guide the process in the under-stream.

*The Monnikenberg estate (on the outskirts of Hilversum in the north of the Netherlands) is part of a listed monastery for the sisters Augustinessen of Saint Monica

When given the choice of in- or out- doors my, clients now only want to work outside in nature, there is a lot of excitement in advance of the unknown synchronicity.

Being a nature-led facilitator

Besides the knowledge in the classical sense, what do we need to be a nature-led facilitator?

Based on my experience, characteristics include:

- Knowledge of the location or area
- Acceptance of all weather conditions (invest in good outdoor clothing)
- Awareness of the slightest of changes in natural surroundings which could enhance the facilitation session
- Letting go of wanting to control the natural environment or the situation
- Willingness to encounter nature, to understand one's own nature and the nature of the client
- Welcoming in the vulnerability of standing on equal footing with the client. The situation for the facilitator is just as unpredictable

COP 26 and nature-led facilitation?

In the light of the COP26 climate summit I wonder if nature-led facilitation could have assisted in the change? What if all corporations, besides investing in the implementation of new policies, would invest in their leadership and decision makers by giving them access to a nature-led facilitator? A facilitator who assists in the organisational and developmental topics we are accustomed to, in the unpredictability of nature. A facilitator who can illustrate circular economy by using the examples of growth and decay in the changing of the seasons. Facilitator and client both working fully with their intelligence and senses as opposed to two sets of minds between the four walls and a ceiling. I wonder what impact this could have in these transitional times where our egos are being challenged and where action is needed in our eco system?

Some inspirations

During my transition to working in nature, I was inspired by the following books.

- Building the Bridge As You Walk On It: A Guide for Leading Change by Robert E. Quinn
- Soulcraft - The Shamanic Journey to Nature and Your Soul's True Purpose by Bill Plotkin
- Women Who Run With The Wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estes
- Photography and footage: The Monnikenberg*, in Hilversum, where I work with nature-led facilitation.

*The Monnikenberg estate (on the outskirts of Hilversum in the north of the Netherlands) is part of a listed monastery for the sisters Augustinessen of Saint Monica.

References

Estes, C.P., 2008. Women who run with the wolves: Contacting the power of the wild woman. Random House

Plotkin, B. and Grgach, R., 2017. Soulcraft. Tantor Media, Incorporated.

Quinn, R.E., 2004. Building the bridge as you walk on it: A guide for leading change (Vol. 204). John Wiley & Sons.

About Nadia

I am a Dutch/Surinam organisational development consultant with a UK background. I live and work in the Netherlands. Previously I worked in corporate communications and change management assignments.

Three years ago I chose to become an independent consultant. I train, coach and facilitate (international) corporates in the Netherlands. Pre-Covid I travelled up and down the country to facilitate sessions. During the Covid pandemic I did the majority of work online and now I work in nature (locally) when possible, preferably in a supervision format. I believe that impactful change can be achieved in nature for wholehearted personal and societal recovery and development.

I am an applicant of the ASD International (anthroposophical organisation) and I am working on a community building project in my local area.

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A note about AMED

Sadly, so far, nobody has expressed a willingness to take over from the outgoing AMED Council. So in the circumstances, the EGM on 26 May is likely to confirm that AMED will finally cease to operate as an educational charity by the end of 2022 at the latest.

AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, www.amed.org.uk. We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of ***knowledge***, ***innovation*** and ***networking*** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. www.amed.org.uk, or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: amedoffice@amed.org.uk, T: 0300 365 1247