Liberating Structures Workshop

We invite you to leave your coats and bags outside the lab in our coat rack area and choose a seat anywhere.
You will need a notepad and a pen.

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Impromptu Networking

Rapidly share challenges and expectations, building new connections
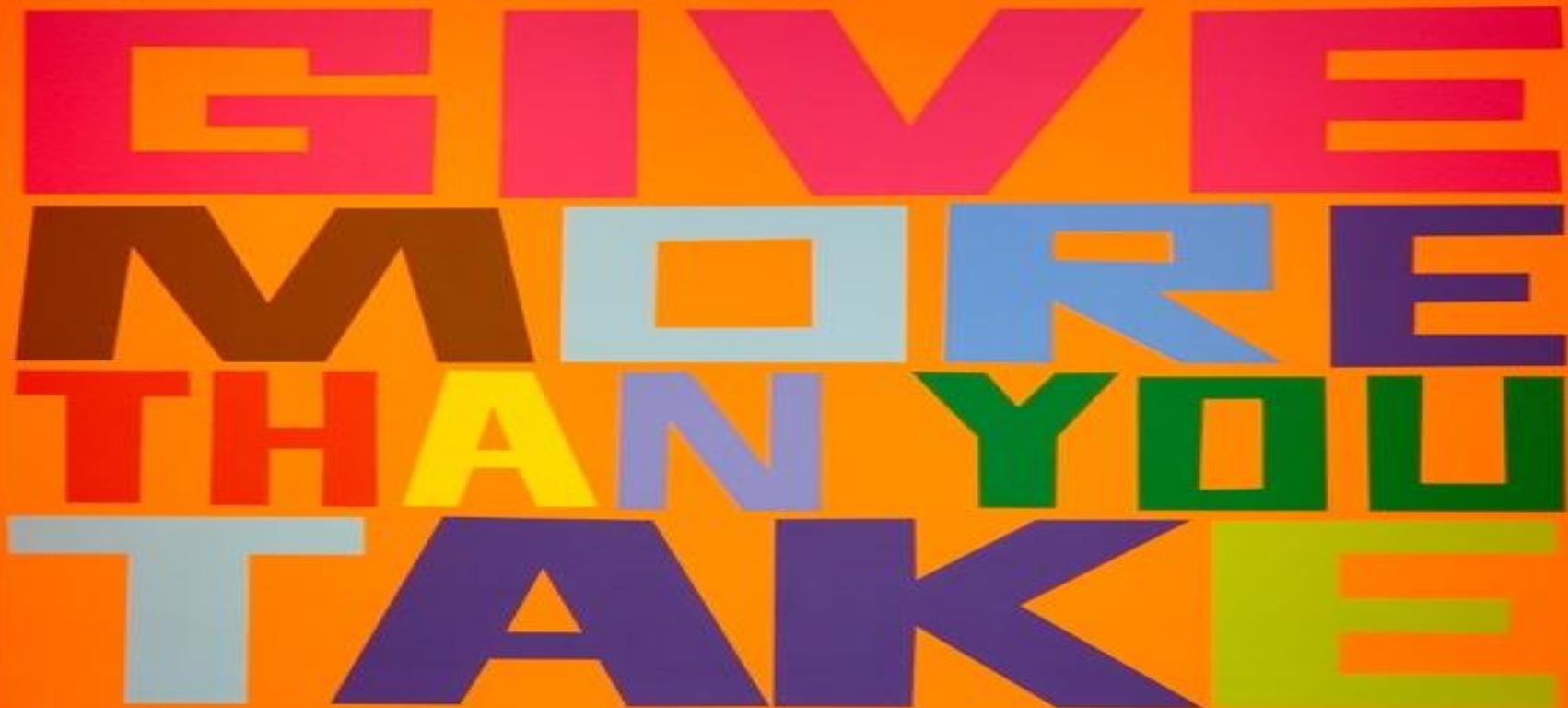
What did you notice?

What was liberated?

What was structured?
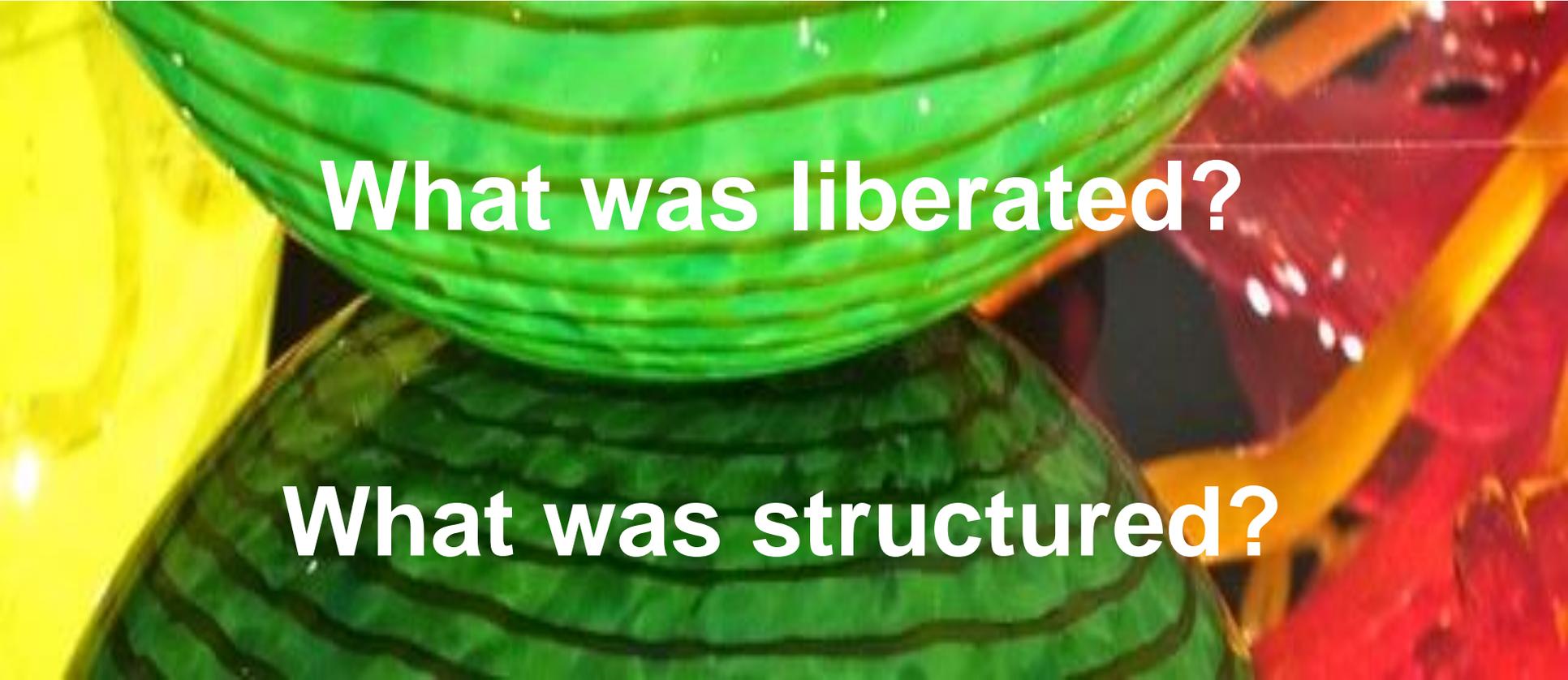
Amplify Freedom AND Responsibility

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Specify minimum constraints and let go of over-control.
- Use the power of invitation.
- Privilege fast experiments over playing it safe.
- Track progress rigorously and feed back results to all.
- Invite the frontline to create local performance metrics.
- Celebrate mistakes as sources of progress.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Unleash people without structure such as a clear purpose or minimum specifications.
- Let rules and procedures stifle initiative.
- Ignore the value of people understanding how their work affects one another.
- Keep frontline staff in the dark about performance data.

Conventional micro-structures

PRESENTATION   MANAGED DISCUSSION   STATUS UPDATE   BRAINSTORMING   OPEN DISCUSSION

OVER-controlled   under-CONTROLLED

Attributes of Liberating Structures

1. **Expert-less:** requires only a few minutes to introduce; novices can succeed after a first experience

2. **Results-focused**: likely to generate better-than-expected purposeful results

3. **Rapid cycling**: fast iterative rounds are very productive

4. **Seriously fun:** boosts joy, freedom & responsibility

5. **Inclusive:** together, everyone is invited to shape next steps

6. **Multi-scale**: works for everyday solutions, projects, strategy, movements

7. **Self-spreading**: simple to copy without formal training

8. **Modular:** the parts can be combined & recombined endlessly

Bold Hypothesis

1. **Small changes** in your pattern of interaction can make a **BIG difference** in your innovativeness

2. The capability to **notice your pattern** and **match a microstructure to the challenge** at hand will boost your innovation productivity

3. Shifting the pattern at any one level can spread quickly to other **levels—patterns can be fractal** (i.e., self-similar at multiple scales)

Today's Principles!

Min Specs we will obey as we move toward our purpose

1. **Must not make LS a top-down program or compel anyone to use it**

2. **Must connect minds and bodies as we are learning— no sleep-inducing PPT**

3. **Rather than telling people what they are learning or how they should practice, we must invite self-discovery**

4. **Must talk less and do more**

5. **Must stop waiting for "permission"**

6. **Must clarify purpose before starting a new activity**

LIBERATING STRUCTURES

1 **Impromptu Networking**	**2** **Appreciative Interview**	**3** **Nine Whys +** **1-2-4-All** *+ 9 word Purpose Statement*
4 **Min Specs**	**5** **Troika Consulting**	**6** **What, So What, Now What**

a) Features the most versatile LS, suitable for routine meetings, projects, and strategy

b) Two 90-minute blocks with 3-5 microstructures featured in each segment

c) Reflection, design, and theory *bursts* are included in each segment

Liberating Principles

What is Possible When Liberating Structures Are Part of Everyday Interactions

How we behave when we decide that we belong together

Include and Unleash Everyone	**Amplify Freedom AND Responsibility**	**Learn by Failing Forward**	**Engage in Seriously-Playful Curiosity**	**Practice Deep Respect for People & Local Solutions**	**Never Start without a Clear Purpose**
	Build Trust as you Go	**Practice Self-Discovery within a Group**	**Emphasize Curiosities**	**Invite Creative Destruction to Enable Innovation**	**Emphasize Possibilities: Believe Before you See**

Appreciative Interviews

Discover & Build on the Root Causes of Success

- Appreciative *Critical Incident* Interview
  - When have you made progress when working on an important challenge you faced?
  - Is a story coming to mind?

Appreciative Interviewing Tips

Discover and build on the root causes of success

- Sit **face-to-face** and **knee-to-knee** for the interview
- Ask about the **context**
  - When, Where, Who, How
- **DO NOT** share your own experience
- Collect **details** of the journey:
  - Status quo, barriers, action, reversals, powerful discoveries
- Try to find a **moment** that sums up the drama and the deeper **meaning**
- Take time to **explore** root issues and the conditions or assets made the success possible.

Appreciative Interviews

Discover and build on the root causes of success

Find a partner, someone you don't know well.

- Tell a story about time when you made progress with others in handling a difficult challenge.

Give the story you collect a name if you are inspired

Include and Unleash Everyone

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Invite everyone touched by a challenge to share possible solutions or invent new approaches together.

- Actively reach across levels, beyond the usual suspects.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Appoint a few to design an "elegant solution" and then tell all others to implement it after the fact.

- Confront resistance with hours of PPT presentations. Force buy-in. Separate deciders from doers.

9 Whys

Make the purpose of your work clear

A powerful purpose attracts participation and has two essential attributes:	Ask Yourself:
- A personal touchstone for you as an individual - Fundamental justification for the existence of your work to the larger community	- Why is the work you are doing important? - Why are the people you serve important to you? - You may refer back to the appreciative interview.

Strong & Weak Purposes

Strong

- Speaks of an abiding and important activity within a healthy society
- Is a purpose for every individual and for the community as a whole
- Is never exhausted, even as participants' understanding evolves
- Gives meaning to every step along the way

Weak

- A platitude, full of sentiment but without real power
- A conventional mission statement, marketing slogan or tag line
- Can be achieved or made irrelevant. Meaningful to only a subset of all parties
- Requires a lot of explanation

Examples

- **American Heart Association** exists to build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

- **Nordstrom** works relentlessly to give the customer the most compelling experience possible.

- **The Smithsonian** exists to increase and diffuse knowledge.

- **PBS** exists to create content that educates, informs, and inspires.

- **IKEA** exists to create a better everyday life by offering a wide range of well-designed home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.

- **Liberating Structures** exist to unleash everyone to work at the top of their intelligence.

- **Alberta CoLab** exists to create new paths forward on difficult challenges.

- **Alberta CoLab** exists to empower public servants to create innovative policy options.

9 Word Purpose

|	
Name	LS exists to
Verb	unleash
Outcome	everyone
Focus	to work at the top of their intelligence

Your team/unit exists to:

1. Verb

2. Outcome

3. Focus

9 Whys

- Make a legible list of tangible things you do in your everyday core work. (1 min)

- Your partner will ask why your work and why the people you serve are important to you.

- Now, get into *fresh* pairs.

9 Whys (aka the toddler)

Make the purpose of your work clear

- **Partner 1:** Briefly share your activity list.
- **Partner 2:** Start asking Why… (4 min.)
  - Why is this work important to **YOU**?
  - First answer, "_____…." Hmmm, why is *that* important to you?
  - Second answer, "_____…." OK, if your dream came true last night, **what would be different for the people you are serving?**
- Keep asking, "*Why… why… why…* until you make a discovery about your partner's *bedrock* purpose. Actively listen, digging deeper and deeper…

- **Then switch roles, repeat.** (4 min)

What ideas do you have?

1-2-4-All
Engage everyone simultaneously in generating questions/ideas/suggestions

5 minutes in the whole group

1 minute alone

4 minutes in a foursome

2 minutes in a pair

1-2-4-All in motion. Multiple short cycles are more productive than one longer session.

9 Whys

Make the purpose of your work clear

- Join with another pair

- Share your experience & insights by trying your hand at an 9 word purpose statement via 1-2-4-All (10 minutes)

Practice Deep Respect
for People and Local Solutions

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Engage people *doing the work & familiar with the local context.*

- Trust and unleash their collective expertise and inventiveness to solve complex challenges.

- Let go of the compulsion to control.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Import *best practices*, drive *buy-in,* or assume people need more training.

- Privilege experts and computer systems over local people and know-how.

Minimum Specs

Specify Only the Absolute Must-do's & Must-not-do's for achieving a purpose

Henri Lipmanowicz & Keith McCandless

Max Specs

Complex rules and regulations give rise to simple and stupid behavior.
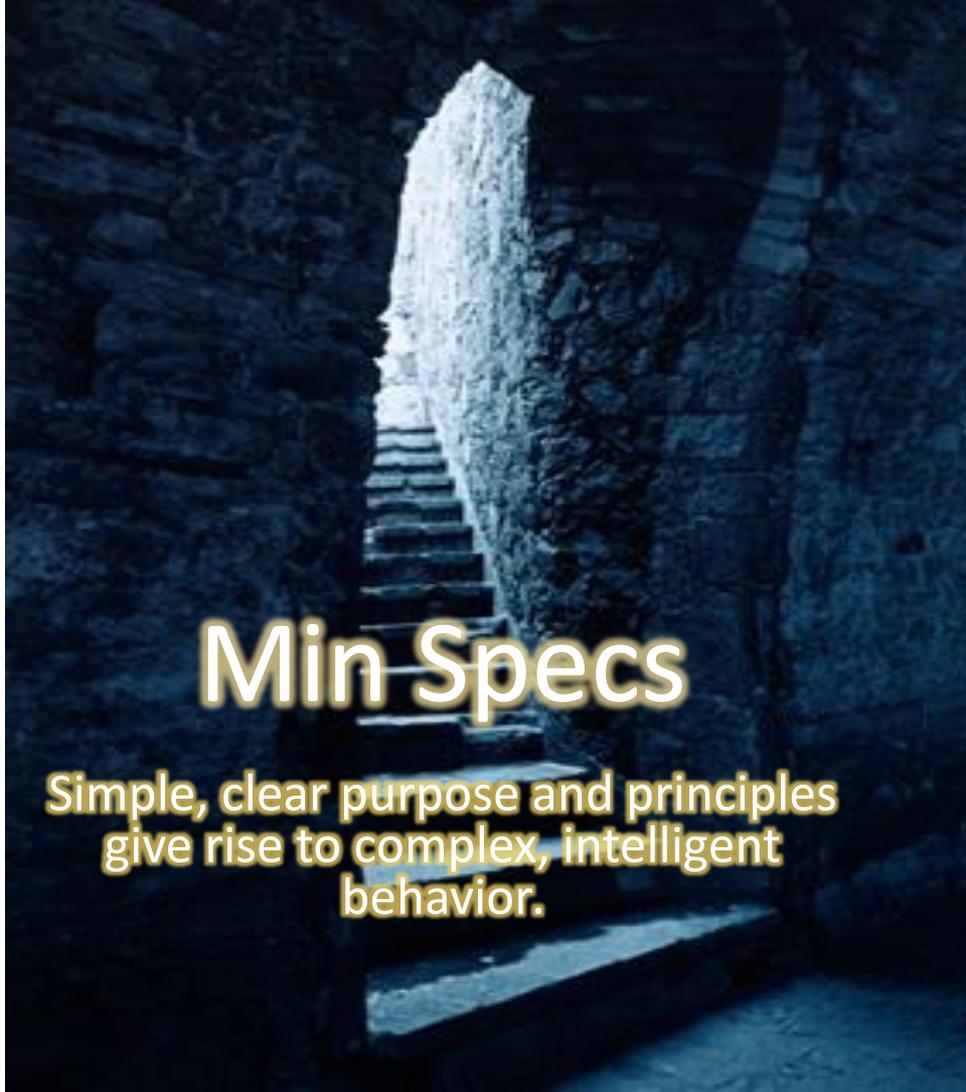
Min Specs

Simple, clear purpose and principles give rise to complex, intelligent behavior.

Your "To Do" List

For a meeting or class that arrives at a productive endpoint

- ...

- ...

- ...

- ...

Often this is a long list of Max Specs

Henri Lipmanowicz & Keith McCandless

Min Specs

With Each Item on Your List, Ask This Question

1. To do item…	Can you violate this requirement and still achieve your purpose?
2. To do item…	If "yes," cross it off your list. It is NOT a Min Spec.
3.	
4.	
5.	

Henri Lipmanowicz & Keith McCandless

Min Specs

Specify only the absolute "Must do's" & "Must not do's" for achieving a purpose

| List of requirements to have **A Successful Meeting or Class**	*Can you violate this requirement and still achieve your purpose?* If "yes," cross it off your list.
1. Announce a time and location	
~~2. Recruit an expert speaker or give expert lecture~~	
~~3. Prepare a detailed agenda~~	
~~4. Project PowerPoint slides~~	
5. Articulate a compelling purpose	

Simple Rules for Strategy Making

What is made possible?

- By specifying only the minimum number of simple rules, the **Min Specs** that must ABSOLUTELY be respected, you can unleash a group to innovate freely while cultivating more ownership

- Often, two to five **Min Specs** are sufficient to boost performance

- Helps focus and redirect resources to the core of your success and growth

- Eliminates clutter of non-essential rules or Max Specs

- Guides local adaptation and decision-making while moving toward global goals
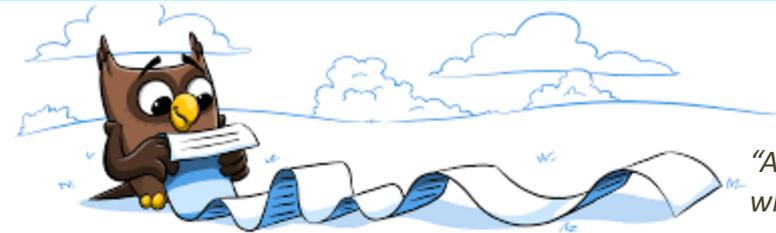
"A designer knows perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add but when there is nothing more that can be taken away." - Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Build Trust As You Go

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Cultivate a trusting group climate where speaking the truth is valued and shared ownership is the goal.

- Sift ideas & make decisions using input from everyone.

- Practice "nothing about me without me."

- Be a leader and a follower.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Over-help or over-control the work of others.

- Praise and pretend to follow the ideas of colleagues.

- Indirectly, respond to ideas from others with cynicism, ridicule, criticism, or punishment.

Practice Self-Discovery Within A Group

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Engage groups to the maximum degree in discovering solutions on their own.

- Increase diversity to spur creativity, broaden potential solutions and enrich peer-to-peer learning.

- Encourage experiments on multiple tracks.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Impose solutions from the top.

- Let experts "educate" and tell people what to do.

- Assume that people resist change no matter what.

- Substitute laminated signs for conversation.

- Exclude front line people from innovating.

LS Selection Matchmaker

## What objectives serve your purpose?
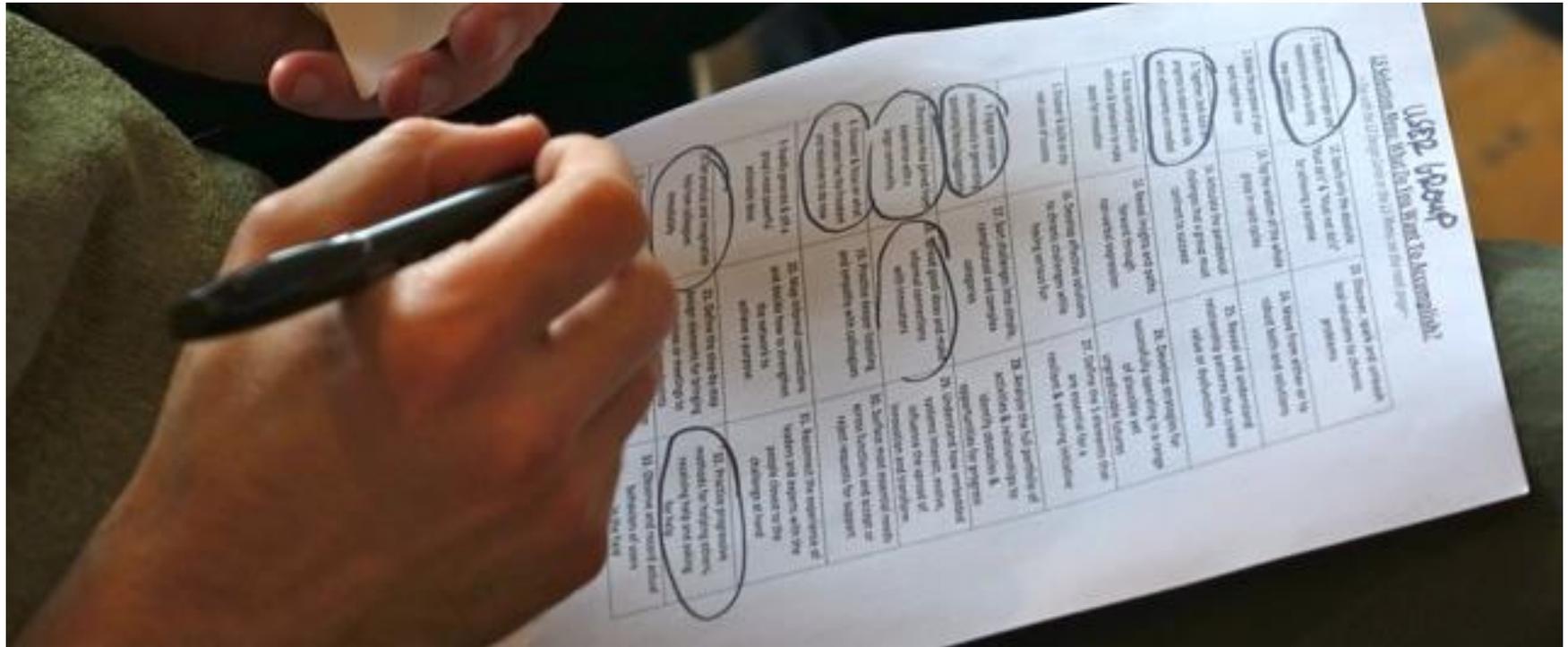
After the topic is broached, the **most** you can say is: ***What else? Tell me more…***
TIP: Do not interrupt their narrative.

Probe & inquire. Shape a pattern that elevates ideas with mutual appeal.
YES, and… !
If this, then _____ !
TIP: Build on top of bold ideas. Go wild!

Inquire only to get to the root cause:
Do you have a story about a time when _____?
TIP: Use all your curiosity! Find out about conditions and assets under the surface.

Inquire to deepen awareness of the pattern.
Talking this way, are we getting anywhere together?
TIP: Listen carefully and make adjustments.

Share ideas your partner may not see.
Would it be possible for you to try _____?
TIP: Gain commitment to your idea.

Quiet Presence

Generative Shaping

Guided Discovery

Troika Consulting Tips

Process Mindful-ness

Kind Provocation

Troika Consulting + *LS Matchmaker*

Get practical and imaginative help from colleagues immediately

- You are invited to match specific LS to a current challenge you face [see handout] (5 min)
- You are invited to ask for imaginative help with:
  - Your newly formed string or
  - any challenge you face
- Roles:
  - 1 Client
  - 2-3 Consultants (one of who is also the time keeper)

	Actions	Timing
1	*Everyone*: Individual Reflection on Challenge Question - Choose challenge, context to share - Create LS string	5 min
2	Client Shares	1.5 min
3	Consultants ask Clarifying Questions	2 min
4	Client Turns Around Consultants Discuss	3 min
5	Client Reflects Back to Consultants	1 min
6	Perform Steps 2-5 so everyone has the opportunity to be the client	X 4
	TOTAL TIME	36 min

Learn by Failing Forward

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Debrief every step.
- Make it safe to speak up.
- Discover positive variation.
- Include and unleash clients as you innovate.
- Take small risks quickly, reducing time between iterations.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Focus on doing and deciding.
- Avoid difficult conversations and gloss over failures.
- Punish risk-takers when unknowable surprises pop-up.
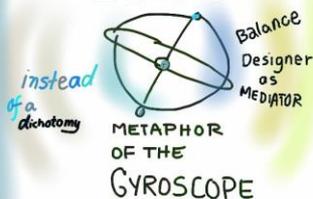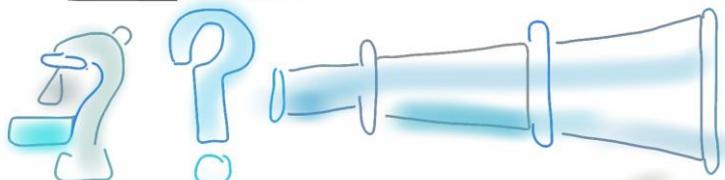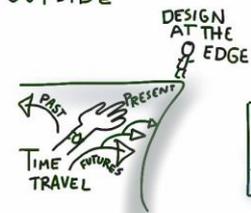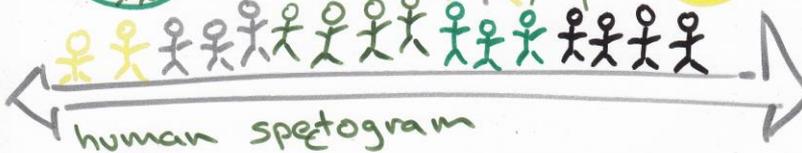
Liberating Structures & Systemic Design

| Systems Thinking | Design Thinking |
| Complexity Science | Process |
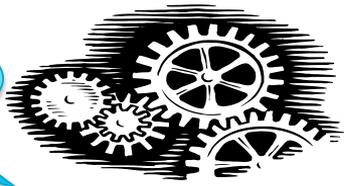
Simple/Complicated Machine Metaphor

Role defining – specify job and task descriptions

Conflict management – restore order in each part

Tight structuring – use formal chain of command

Simplifying – prioritize or limit simple actions

Socializing – seek homogeneous values & ideas

Decision making – find the "best" choice

Knowing – decide & tell others what to do

Controlling – tightly managed execution w/max specs

Planning via forecasting – plan & then roll out

Staying the course – align & maintain focus
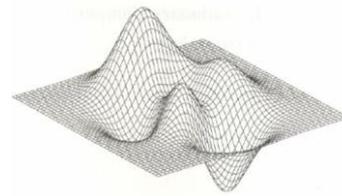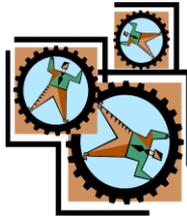
Complex Biologic Metaphor

Relationship building – work with patterns of interaction

Uncover paradox – draw out difference as source of creativity

Loose coupling – work with informal communities of practice

Complicating – add more degrees of freedom & multiple actions

Diversifying – draw out & exploit difference

Sense making –many right answers in different local contexts

Learning – act/learn/plan at the same time

Improvising – acting in an instant w/minimum specs

Shaping adaptive strategies – co-evolve & hedge strategies

Noticing emergent direction – build on what works

Adapted from Professor Reuben McDaniel Jr. (UT Austin) and Ruth Anderson (Duke).

Liberating Structures: Links to Complexity Science

Beyond merely adapting, **we simultaneously shape & are being shaped** by the environment

What³ debrief

Being **holistic AND specialized** helps us navigate paradoxical waters

Wicked questions

Common generative **patterns** give rise to our small local and large global events

Min specs

Our outcomes are not predicable in detail, we can expect **surprise**

Open space

Our **interactions** generate **more than the sum of the parts**

Critical uncertainties

Inter-dependencies across embedded systems influence our efforts to transform

Panarchy

Redundancy enables parallel processing & rapid learning

Social network webbing

Non-Linearity: tiny changes & deviations can make a big difference

15% solutions

Order unfolds from our independent actions w/o much central control or shared intention

9-whys

Chunking: Our robust innovations are shaped from pieces working independently

Improv prototyping

Co-Leadership in Action

- Co-leading LS includes four simple functions:
  - Inviting
    - clarifying what this LS makes possible and making a concise invitation to participants (avoid over-helping & -explaining)
  - Specifying mechanics
    - timing, sequence, groups, use of space, debrief
  - Maintaining structure
    - actively fixing as the LS unfolds if *sideways* happens
  - Debriefing
    - What happened? What was structured? What was liberated? Are there other settings you can imagine using this LS? How would you structure the invitation?
- Frequently ask your co-leader, "Anything else?"

Emphasize Curiosities, Possibilities:
Believe Before You See

Must Do's (start and amplify)

- Expose what is working well.

- Focus on what can be accomplished now with the imagination and materials at hand.

- Take the next steps that lead to the edge of creativity and renewal.

Must Not Do's (stop and reduce)

- Focus on what's wrong. Wait for all the barriers to come down or ideal conditions to emerge.

- Work on changing *the whole system* all at once.

What did you notice?
What was structured? What was liberated?

What opportunities do you have to use these LS?

What invitation would you make?

What³ Debrief

Together, look back on progress and decide what adjustments are needed *

In regard to this workshop...

- **WHAT?** [5 minutes]

    Looking back, what facts & observations stand out?

- **SO WHAT?** [5 minutes]

    What do you conclude from those observations? What is important?

- **NOW WHAT?** [5 minutes]

    What is your first move?

Thank You!

http://www.liberatingstructures.com/