Hosting Transformation Library

EMPOWERMENT
A Guide for Facilitators

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Empowerment: A Guide for Facilitators

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Partners

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Preface

This book is from one professional to another. A go-to when you want to further improve your facilitation skills.

From a basis in my own more than three decades of practising and teaching facilitation, it has evolved to incorporate many more voices of experienced facilitators, telling stories of their learning journeys. Whether you agree or disagree with our ideas and conclusions, you will hopefully find inspiration and possibly provocation.

We are always happy to hear from our readers. Perhaps your voice will be heard in the next edition!

—Marilyn Mehlmann
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How and why to empower vulnerable groups to become more active citizens?

The 'why' is easy: not only for their own sakes, but for all of us. The state of the planet and of human civilization calls for the participation of everyone in crafting a viable future for humankind. 'No-one left behind'.

How may we as facilitators empower specifically vulnerable groups to be part of this venture? To become effective agents of change in their own lives as a preliminary to influencing the society in which they live? That is the topic of this guidebook.

Our desired audiences

We imagine that you, the facilitator reading this book, are working at least partly with 'vulnerable groups'. What characterizes them might for instance be

- They frequently experience stress, dissatisfaction, disempowerment
- They lack agency and wellbeing
- They long to transform their lives
- They want to change, but have no story of change (no narrative)

A.
BEHIND THE SCENES

The context

The role of active citizenship in Europe has undergone a change in the last few decades. Established institutions like political parties, churches and charity organisations are steadily losing members (Scarrow & Gezgor, 2010), while representation by such organisations is seen as only one way of influencing events. At the same time, direct participation is growing in importance (OECD, 2020), which creates new demands, such as a need for support for individuals and groups starting new initiatives or creating transformative processes.

Hosting Empowerment is a three-year project of program development, with the objective of enabling vulnerable groups to become more proactive citizens, by identifying and working with them in partner countries. From this and from considerable prior experience the partners have developed a toolbox and other

support (including this guide-book) for professionals whose work encompasses facilitation of such groups.

'Leave no-one behind' is a slogan frequently applied to aspirations regarding education. The Hosting Empowerment project expands the concept to include participation in society. No one, no matter how vulnerable, should be excluded from the opportunity to be seen and heard, and to influence.

Objective: empower vulnerable groups

A major obstacle to contributing to positive social change is a lack of confidence, in individuals and groups, in their own ability to affect society. *Hosting Empowerment* focuses on methods and skills that can help empower such groups to take action and

improve their own lives.

For the facilitator this may frequently mean coping with groups of very mixed abilities, requiring adjustments to methods used as well as to facilitation style.

Partners

The seven partner organisations Art Monastery Italia (Italy), Plenum (Austria), Legacy17 (Sweden), Biovilla (Portugal), Rogers Foundation (Hungary), Trekstones (Germany) and Visionautik Akademie (Germany, lead partner) work as 'Transformation Academies' that enable problems and challenges to be met through the initiatives of those most affected.

The work is primarily funded by the EU Erasmus+ program. In addition to this guide, the following is available:

- A toolbox for facilitators

- An app for personal empowerment
- A self-empowerment booklet which can also be seen as complementing the app
- A short video that serves to introduce the program to the public

The promise and potential

The experience of all the partners in *Hosting Empowerment* is that many of the individuals and groups who fail to reach their full potential, personally and socially, are held back by stigma or other experiences that undermine their self-confidence and sense of agency; and that even relatively simple methods and exercises can lead to an improvement.

Our ambition is to make available methods, tools and skills that enable facilitators and coaches working with such groups to become even more effective in supporting their participants to become increasingly empowered and active.

We believe that the use of this project's outcomes can lead to significant change, especially when embedded in a context of education or peer support. We thus envisage that the self-empowerment booklet, *Innertopia:*

Claim Your Power, can form the basis for peer support groups, and can be used together with the Innertopia app to train volunteer coaches to work with such groups. Similarly, we envisage that this guidebook can be used by facilitators together with relevant parts of the Hosting Transformation Toolbox, for example, to design workshop sessions for coaches and for other facilitators.

What do we mean by "vulnerable groups"?

The epithet 'vulnerable group' was hotly debated among the partners. On the one hand, many in the envisaged audiences may resent such an adjective. On the other, vulnerability is not necessarily a disadvantage: everyone is vulnerable at some time or in some way. Indeed, consciously acknowledged vulnerability is a strength, and can be an asset e.g.

for a transformative facilitator.

The outcome of the debate was to clarify that this program addresses the case of groups who find it difficult to take their place in society because they are more generally discriminated against or indeed stigmatized. They may be groups whose vulnerability is immediately obvious in any society where physical attributes such as size or skin colour are generally looked down upon. Or it may be less obvious, for example in the case of newcomers (refugees or others) who are still 'outside' the normative culture, or people with 'invisible' disabilities such as chronic depression.

Transformative potential

Empowerment can take place slowly or swiftly: in tiny steps, or in breathtaking transformation. For some, it might happen over the course of a few years as they develop their own voice and gradually enlarge their field of influence, for others it might be a sudden shift of perspective, an 'Aha' moment, that breaks their shackles and unleashes their voice.

Unlike 'ordinary' change, transformation cannot be planned or managed. It takes place when conditions are right, including

the preparedness of the individual or group. No doubt all long-term facilitators share this experience:

"At a conference, a man who looked familiar greeted me eagerly, saying 'Thank you SO much — your workshop changed my life!' When was that, I asked cautiously. 'It was 17 years ago — you remember! It took a few years but then I realized…' The ways of transformation are indeed unpredictable."

To be fully effective, an empowerment program needs to create conditions for both ordinary, often incremental change, and for transformative learning. The facilitator needs to be sufficiently responsive to recognize signals of preparedness, and sufficiently agile to accommodate different needs within a group. As both Eisenhower and Churchill are reputed to have said: plans are worthless, but planning is everything.

A personal experience of transformative learning:

"Way back in the 1980s we were attracted to the idea of an ecovillage: a community where we would explore, together with others, how we might 'live more lightly on the earth'. But our efforts to move to, or build, an ecovillage were dogged by failure. Then one evening at a workshop on sustainable lifestyle, the realisation struck: we don't have to move house in order to take action. We can 'live more lightly' here and now! From 'failed ecovillager' to 'conscious lifestyler' was a tectonic shift!"

– Marilyn Mehlmann

From surviving to thriving

Many vulnerable groups are stuck in a belief that change — if it comes at all — comes from an outside source, and that little change, or no positive change, can be expected. In such a situation, with little or no hope, there is no energy for change; the best that can be hoped for is no-change, or mere survival.

And in just such a situation, even a very small, observable change can cascade into multiple small changes, with a growing feeling of wonder and willingness to experiment. Indeed, it's not even necessary for the early attempts to be successful. The mere act of taking an initiative and seeing results can be empowering, even if the results themselves are not what was hoped for.

Initial changes can be quite modest, sometimes even recommended as 'the smallest change that will make a difference', which is indeed good advice for climbing out of survival mode.

What is change & how does it happen?

When we initiate a change process, it's normal and indeed essential to have an idea of potential outcomes, and to use them as a basis for planning. For instance, an empowerment program is intended to enhance the action competence of each participant, and that might include specific outcomes like mastering a new language or acquiring a new skill.

However, once the process has begun, the plans are of marginal use. Transformative change – say many oracles (Ziegler, Fritz) – is not really something you plan, it's something that happens when conditions are right.

So, an important focus for the facilitator is creating the conditions for consciously chosen change. This inevitably includes **working with the participants' conscious and unconscious images of the future**. In addition to hopes and fears, we can work with their expectations concerning the future. If what I *fear* is also what I *expect to happen*, then I have every reason to work for change – though I may feel overwhelmed by the challenge. If what I hope for is what I expect to happen anyway, I have no reason to work for change: I only need to wait, and everything will be perfect.

Warren Ziegler (2002) said that change tends to happen when there is a reasonable balance between hope and dissatisfaction. No hope – no reason to even think about change; no dissatisfaction – no *need* to think about

"Without self-esteem, the only change is an exchange of masters; with it, there is no need for masters."

—Gloria Steinem

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change.

In some cultures and with some individuals, one or the other is conspicuously lacking. To know whether to start with hopes or with dissatisfactions, you need to know what the existing balance looks like; but given the mass-media culture of today, there is likely to be a bias towards fears.

Is it possible that a combination of small hopes and small dissatisfactions is a basis for small changes? Whereas a combination of large hopes and large dissatisfactions can give rise to major changes? If that is the case then we might expect that — absent 'sudden' events — transformative change would be most likely to take place when both hopes and dissatisfactions are high.

Danaan Parry put the same thing differently (2009). He said that in the centre of our 'comfort zone' — where there are no dissatisfactions! — we have no incentive to change. If we are thrown too far outside of our comfort zone, presumably to a place where the challenges are too great for our hopes to handle, then we tend to 'freeze'; also no change. What we need is to propel ourselves, or our participants, to 'the growing edge of the comfort zone'. This is where incentives to change can be found — and where participants may experience 'edge emotions' (Förster, 2019) such as those in the 'fear zone' (see the figure to the left) that can be challenging for the facilitator.

Image source: Innobatics

The key to this facilitator competence, surfing complexity together with each participant, lies in the futures work mentioned above. In supporting participants to explore their own hopes, fears and expectations the facilitator is able to assess where that growing edge might be.

This is not to downplay external influences. The intrinsic factors need to be in place; but they can be jogged by external factors: some transformative change takes place as a result of sudden, unanticipated life events. Indeed, Mezirow (1996) seems sometimes to imply that such an event is an essential prerequisite.

Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) emphasize that – as is well known in mathematics – change that takes place within a system is always in a sense 'no change': plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose… In order to change a system, it's necessary to be able to place yourself outside it. How to achieve this expansion of perspective? That is perhaps the kernel of transformative learning.

What is empowerment?

The process of empowerment is, at its core, about *becoming*: becoming increasingly comfortable in one's own life, in the feeling that 'I am good enough just as I am'. It is thus in the first place the inner journey of an individual, a group or a community.

In the second place it can refer to externalities: factors or **interventions** that may facilitate, hinder, or indeed reverse the journey.

Such factors and interventions can be personal: a facilitator, mentor, coach or other person or

"If a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves."

— Robert Pirsig, writer

group can act in an empowering way. They can also be non-personal.

Some examples:

- Empowering writing: texts and illustrations (a component of all the other examples) can support or discourage the empowerment of the participant
- Interactive apps on phone or internet
- Culture and arts

Societal factors also play a role:

- Infrastructure, whether public or private
- Laws and regulations
- Common, implicit assumptions within a culture or subculture
- Media

Societal factors can also be influenced, though often indirectly. Many people feel so disempowered by such factors hindering their journey that they assume them to be unchangeable

constraints. In making visible and accessible possibilities to deliberately relate to those factors lies a huge potential for empowerment.

Empowerment and disempowerment: a scale

Empowerment can be seen as a state or condition: the end of a scale with disempowerment (victim *and* controller) at the other end.

The condition has two dimensions: the general and the specific.

A person or group can be generally empowered, or indeed generally disempowered. They may also be specifically empowered. For instance, a generally empowered person may feel disempowered in the face of global climate change; a totally disempowered mother may become a roaring lion when her children are threatened.

"Everything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

—Viktor Frankl
(1946; after years in concentration camps)

Empowerment and facilitation

Empowerment is not static, not only a condition, it is also a process: a movement of deepening insight and action competence. The process is inner, within each person. However it can be influenced by external circumstances, both positive and negative; and promoted by skillful facilitation.

Empowerment (as a facilitated process) "is a collective term for all those approaches in psychosocial practice that encourage people to discover their own strengths and help them to acquire self-determination and autonomy in life. The practice of empowerment is an encouraging practice — it supports people in their search for self-determination and autonomous life direction and provides them with resources with the help of which they can shape their own life paths and living spaces in a self-determined way." (Herriger, 2022)

In working with vulnerable groups we need to be aware that empowerment and disempowerment are often a question of perception. This is the window of opportunity: the moment that perceptions shift is the moment of potential change, either small change or indeed transformative change. This is not to say that obstacles to action are not real; but that by focusing on openings rather than obstacles, much can be done that previously appeared impossible.

Controller
"Shark"
aggressive fear

Victim
"Carp"
abject fear

"Dolphin"
empowerment

Empowerment and transformation

We are all hypnotized, said Willis Harman (1988) on the subject of perceptions. Hypnotized into believing we are less than we are, into staring at what is – or may be – impossible. "Perhaps the only limits to the human mind are those we believe in."

Empowerment is not only about comfort but also about action competence: about adventure, about exploring the largely unknown continent of the possible, both for us and for others. The adventure, this exploration, is as real and tangible as any journey of Ferdinand Magellan or Amelia Earhart. It takes us into deep space – inner space – and, just like the other form of space travel, brings a new perspective on ourselves and our world; our real world, the neighbourhood and community in which we live.

Transformation is about that shift in perspective. It's not 'only' change: many changes are reversible. But when we broaden our perspective we have embarked on a new journey: we can no longer 'not see' what has come into view. The journey may not always be easy, but it is a journey of liberation.

"If you want to change the world, change the story."

—Joseph Campbell

Empowerment is thus also another word for freedom.

Information, knowledge, action

The relation between information, knowledge and action is not simple. We constantly screen out information offered to us by the media, other people, and even our own experience. If it doesn't "fit", we reject it.

Why be surprised when some new scandal breaks showing that scientists have manipulated the "facts" to suit what they wanted to find? You and I do it all the time. Admittedly a scientific

education is supposed to teach how *not* to do that, but it generally misses out one very important factor: not only our minds but also our beliefs and feelings are involved in the conversion of facts to knowledge.

What I know is great, and what I don't know is no problem because I can find out. The major problems come with what I believe, or think I know.

There is no way that anyone, or even all of us together, can possibly know everything, and there is thus no pathway to perfect knowledge. There are however pathways to improve the accuracy of our knowledge, all of which may contribute to empowerment. Of particular interest for empowerment are (referring to the numbers in the *Knowns & Unknowns* table to the above right) are

3. The path of intuition

5. The path of humility

The path of intuition can be activated by Deep Listening to oneself, as described in the Toolbox (see hostingtransformation.eu). The facilitator's role is to teach the method, including the subtle art of asking oneself appropriate questions, and where appropriate to organize peer support groups.

The path of humility can for instance be activated by Deep Listening to and Deep Dialogue with others.

	Knowns	Unknowns
Known	1. Things we are aware of and understand	2. Things we are aware of but don't understand
Unknown	3. Things we understand but are not aware of	4. Things we neither understand nor are aware of
Believed	5. Things we (erroneously) believe we understand	

Nonetheless, most information campaigns are designed along the "scientific" (e.g., mind-focused) model, addressing primarily windows 2 and 4 in order to improve understanding in the *Knowns & Unknowns* table above.

It all seems very logical. But we also know very well that it's a poor model of reality. We inform and inform, for example about the risks of climate change. If the scientific model were an accurate picture of reality, the world would already be on a completely different climate trajectory.

In practice almost the opposite seems to be true. Each of us is bombarded with gigantic amounts of information every day, maybe hundreds of thousands as much as we can actually absorb. Somehow, each of us decides what to hear and what to activate.

A circular relation

One way to understand what goes on is to view information and action as two elements in a circular or even spiral relationship. The third element is attention, or caring. It works like this:

• I take in information about things I care about. If I decide to buy a BMW, I see nothing but BMWs where I saw none before.

• I care about things I believe I can affect by my own actions.

Conversely, things I believe I can't influence are things I care little about; therefore I may choose to take in little information about them.

Breaking into the circle

To bring about change, you need to support your participants to break into the circle.

It's extremely difficult to do

An empowerment spiral

this only via *information*, as the description shows. The other two main points on the circle can be more fruitful.

I can break into the circle at the

Exercise

What are the positive or negative spirals of knowledge-care-action that your groups are going through right now? Do you see any way to help them shift perspective, e.g., from what they (possibly erroneously) believe to be true?

"Stop thinking you're doing it all wrong. Your path doesn't look like anybody else's because it can't, it shouldn't, and it won't."

—Eleanor Brown

point of action, which seems quite the reverse of all conventional wisdom on influencing people's behaviour. First comes the changed behaviour, then the thirst for information, then the change in attitudes and beliefs.

I can also break into the circle at the point of caring, especially if I have personal interaction with people. In a facilitated situation, this means above all *listening for meaning*. What is important to the participants?

A heroic journey

Ascending through the empowerment spiral (see illustration on the opposite page) is in a very real sense a 'heroic journey' (Campbell, 1949) for each participant.

There is a delicate balance here. On the one hand, at each turn of the spiral, each participant becomes increasingly aware of their own adequacy and action competence, which is indeed at the heart of the empowerment process. On the other hand,

indiscriminate positivity can lead to a kind of 'hero complex' where "I am good enough" translates into "I can do no wrong – and therefore need take no responsibility for my actions."

This applies equally to the facilitator. We are all learners on this journey, and indeed heroes of our own stories – but that should not lead us to play the part of hero in someone else's story. Empowerment is not something we 'do to' our participants, nor even 'do for' them. The ideal of empowering facilitation is a

humble acknowledgment of the (potential) agency of each participant, and the patience and skill to create the space where they may realize that potential.

Why may we do this?

From the planetary to the personal, and back

Our society is dominated by an underlying perception of scarcity. This is evidenced by the competitive, win-lose (or lose-lose) ethos prevalent in many sectors, such as business, sports and education, and by the pressure to 'succeed' via constant acquisition. This perception, shared and intensified by media and the political discourse, promotes a general culture of disempowerment in which the already-vulnerable are particularly disadvantaged.

It's no coincidence that Johan Rockström's book is subtitled *Abundance within Planetary Boundaries*. If there is any reason for us as a society to encourage and empower participation by every person on the planet, it is in order to escape from artificial scarcity and contribute to that wonderful potential of abundance. Within planetary boundaries.

The crises or challenges facing humanity are often divided into social, environmental and economic.

- The planetary boundaries relate to the physical, living world, and are non- negotiable. "You can't negotiate with a cell whether or not it will survive in a given environment." — Karl Henrik Robért
- The social aspects are negotiable as part of political processes, within certain constraints: we know quite a lot about human wellbeing, and while it is possible for people to thrive

in a multitude of different contexts, there are boundaries here too.

- The economic aspects are totally negotiable. We — humans — invented money, and over history have re-invented it several times. Since it is clearly not serving us in its present form, it's apparently overdue for a redesign.

These aspects, then, constitute the planetary context within which personal and collective empowerment and transformation become meaningful.

At the same time it must be said that for most people around the world such concerns are not what keep them awake at night. A recent global survey of 'What Worries the World' (IPSOS, 2021) showed an emphasis on economic issues, closely followed by Crime and Violence (27% put this first). Climate Change and Education both came in at 16%.

Individual potential and wellbeing

On the one hand, each one of us carries within us the resources we need in order to 'become more fully ourselves' and to exert greater influence in our personal lives. (Ferrucci, 2009; Rogers, 1990.)

On the other hand, we live in an era of escalating global and local crises. "To navigate these troubled waters with a sense of joyful participation, each person needs not only a strong sense of self but also a desire and ability to

collaborate: to become an active member of his or her community or communities. Individual wellbeing cannot be separated from the wellbeing of the community." (Wahl, 2016)

Under what circumstances might 'joyful participation' become a reasonable option, in today's conflicted world? One key seems to be the word 'growth'. On the one hand, a 'growth mindset' is highly empowering: it builds on the perception that competence, talents and even intelligence can improve through effort (Cote, 2022). On the other hand, the dominant belief in constant

economic growth (eg Lewis, 1955) as a prerequisite for survival is itself one of the root causes of the current cataclysmic crises.

As empowering facilitators, it behooves us to hold and where possible convey this mindset: constant physical growth, whether of bodies, of society, or of technology, is neither desirable nor possible; but mental and spiritual growth are limitless.

Encouraging participation

Is it possible to engage "ordinary" people (citizens, staff, residents,

"We take it for granted, the world that we love—and we're destroying it so quickly. The light of dawn on the prairie. The silvery flash of fish in a stream. The cry of a hawk over a forest. Everybody has their own idea of the beautiful, and we'll surely miss it when it's gone."

—Johan Rockström

members) in a constructive and creative dialogue about development? Even those who are not especially vulnerable may not find it easy to participate. Especially when the convenors are not entirely clear about what is expected or possible.

Many development projects start with high ambitions to engage many people in active roles. Many are dissatisfied with the outcome. And some even come to believe that the dialogue process is almost by nature manipulative or at best hopelessly short-termist, no matter how honest the ambitions.

"Individual wellbeing cannot be separated from the wellbeing of the community."

—Daniel Christian Wahl

From discussions with a number of practitioners there is clearly much confusion over

- What aims are reasonable
- What forms dialogue can take
- How to choose a suitable form – and when to abstain
- Constructive relations between experts and 'lay participants'

Nonetheless there is clear evidence (eg Institute for Development Studies; Creighton, 2005) that in many cases, participation is not only beneficial but essential to achieving good results. The more complex the questions,

the more important participation becomes: sustainable community development is not a technical question for experts, but a complex set of sometimes-conflicting interests, including values and value judgments.

Characteristics of successful processes include

- A stakeholder approach
- Respect for both expert and values-driven success criteria
- Established ways to deal with conflicts of interest
- Transparent decision-making and enforcement

This section represents an attempt to apply structure to some of the experiences and anecdotes, as a possible step towards clarification.

The word "expert" is used to mean whoever is charged with conducting the dialogue – an official facilitator, members of the project team, consultants, a staff or residents' committee or some other intermediary: thus, an

expert on the *process*. The experts on the *content* are of course the participants.

A spectrum of aims

There is a whole spectrum of aims and thus approaches that could be legitimate, i.e. honest and non-manipulative, ranging from simple one-way information via consultation to full participation. Each has its place, depending on context.

Simple information

Often there is a need to inform people of a planned change. Once the decision has been made, by whoever and whatever means, calling the information "consultation" is simply misleading.

Information flow is generally one-way: the experts (or whoever is responsible) are charged with explaining to employees, residents or other stakeholders exactly what has been decided.

A separate but important point is that this type of information is often intended (or hoped) to lead to changed behaviour on the part of recipients. The nature of the behaviour change is dictated by the decision already taken.

Consultation

Consultation seems to take two forms:

- Choosing between options. We can have either a park or a football pitch, but not both – for example; or we can afford this year to invest either in development of a new product, or in specific new production machinery.
- Making space for objections. For example, all new ground-floor apartments will be adapted for wheel-chairs, but none above ground-floor level – does this create problems? Or, we will introduce more flexible shifts – does anyone have a problem with this?

The qualifications for having an

opinion are only that the person concerned is actually affected by the choice of options.

The experts need to make the options absolutely clear, and to document and publish (feed back) the opinions (including comments) of those consulted.

Participation

Here's the knotty one. When we wish to engage people in designing the change process, we need not only to supply information and document results, but also to create certain pre-conditions.

- There must be clarity about what is and what is not negotiable. The change project will have some kind of charter which dictates its scope in terms of time, place, budget etc. The charter itself may be open to negotiation, but it cannot be ignored. There will also be other (often implicit) restrictions, such as that solutions discriminating against

A spectrum of communication aims
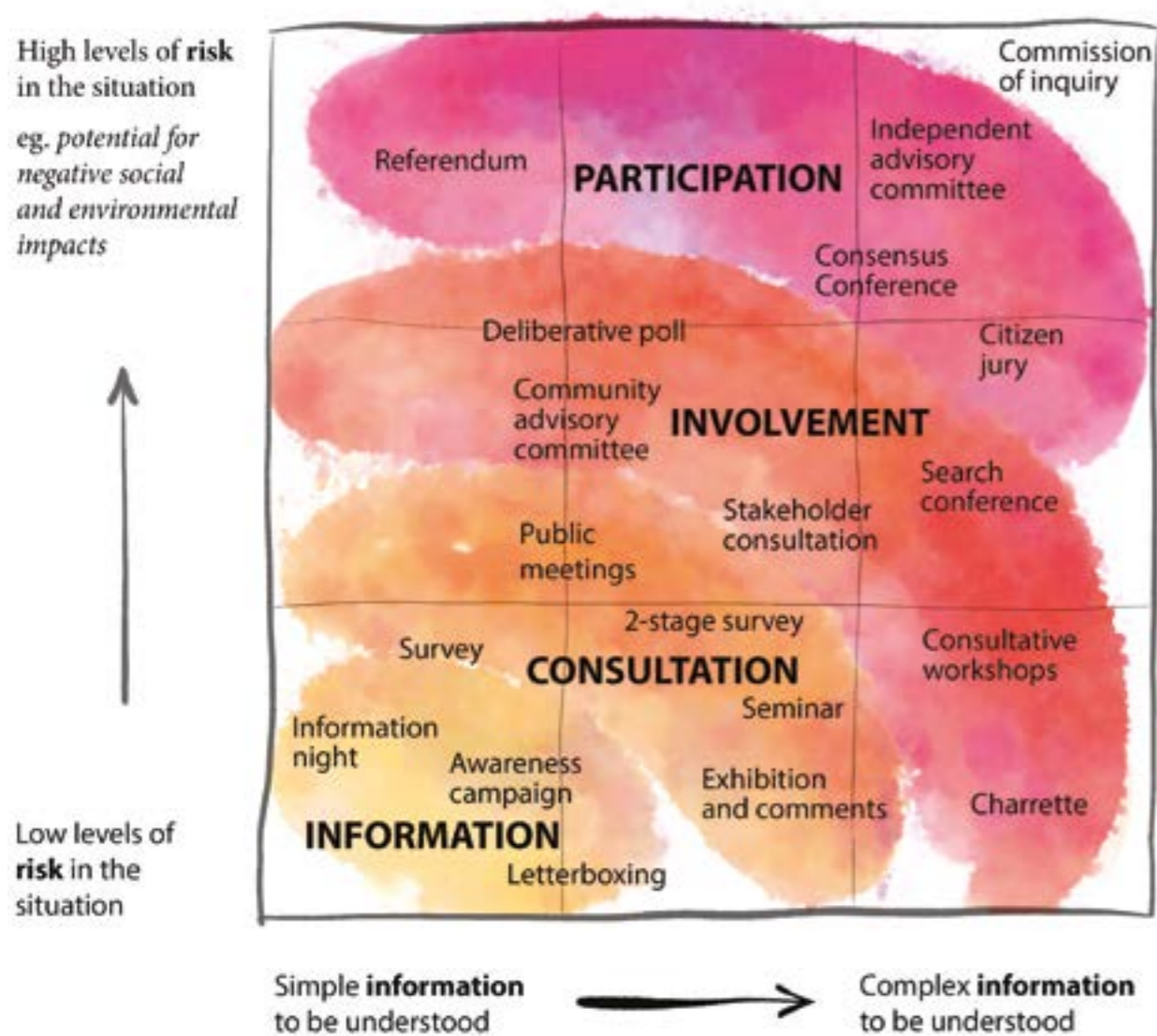
Another way of differentiating between communication needs and appropriate responses. Source: Biovilla.

women, or men, or immigrants will not be accepted.

- A mechanism must be provided to safeguard the interests of those unable to participate, as well as the natural resource boundaries of the environment.
- The process needs time and should preferably start well ahead of any physical changes.
- Access to experts. Those involved should be able to consult (not be lectured to by) experts in whatever discipline they need to explore. They should also have good lines of communication to anyone whose decisions (both present and future) may affect their scope to act.
- And maybe education. In order to make informed decisions some people may need to learn new working methods, or gain other new knowledge.

Education

So there may be an educational component where the aim is solely to provide the knowledge needed to make informed decisions and become realistically creative.

Perhaps a participation matrix here could be of use: *please see the diagram "A spectrum of communication aims" on page 28.*

Some commonalities

It may be possible to make some recommendations that are common to all these processes: information, consultation, participation. *Clarity* regarding scope seems to be one.

Another could be *continuity*: establishing

- Ways to register opinions (including any response to information, like 'the proposed shift times do not agree with bus schedules')
- Ways to communicate a regular response (like 'we have noted that x people say the proposed shift times will be inconvenient; we are talking to bus operators and will get back to you')

And *honesty* as being the best policy (ask anyone in PR). However, what does that actually mean? The truth, yes. Nothing but the truth, yes. The whole truth? Well maybe. It depends on who gets to define "whole". What an expert regards as the whole truth may simply not be functional information for a lay person. So *discrimination* is needed – an appropriate level of information, with easy access to detail for those who truly want more.

Some thoughts about approaches and methods

Sometimes the choice of approach is regarded/described as a "ladder", where more participation means better. This does seem to be counter-productive. There are quite clearly occasions when consultation is more

appropriate than participation, or information more appropriate than either.

Especially when large investments are involved, some decisions need to be made by experts, albeit with input (consultation) from those involved – if only for reasons of safety, equity, or making the most of investment money. Quite possibly most managers err on the side of keeping far too many decisions to themselves, but nonetheless…

Is it possible to formulate general recommendations?

A different question arises when public money is the main driver of development, for instance when a local authority decides to allocate money for community development, or when municipal budgets are decentralized to the very local level. Here, where the focus is primarily on providing public service (including maintenance), the guidelines could be

different.

So a good use of the "ladder" concept could be as a funnel/filter. A first step in selecting methods could be to identify and stratify decisions to be made:

1. Tease out all the decisions that are appropriately made through participatory processes
2. Identify those that are suitable for consultation
3. What is left is for information
4. Add educational components as required

Depth and direction

Some methods appeal to the intellect, some to the heart, some to the spirit. And combinations.

Methods that appeal only to the intellect are less likely to lead to sustainable solutions – but are tempting because they often appear to be quicker. "Appear to be" because of the potential lack of sustainability: decisions that have to be re-opened or reversed take a lot of time and energy.

Checklist: Criteria for participatory methods

- No-one who is affected by the decisions or recommendations should be excluded
  - …so should include a stakeholder analysis…
  - …and means of safeguarding the interests of those unable to participate, including particularly vulnerable groups
- Suited to the needs and capabilities of major stakeholder groups (degree of abstraction, language, literacy, depth of information, social skills)
- Plenty of interaction in small groups and between groups

- An empowering structure, where roles, rights and responsibilities are clear and where information is easily accessible and intelligible, including
  - Provision for documenting results
  - A system for following up decisions

The above would seem to apply equally to criteria for consultation methods.

B.
THE PARTICIPANTS' JOURNEY

Materials for self-empowerment

As part of the *Hosting Empowerment* project, two instruments for self empowerment have also been produced under the name Innertopia: an app and a booklet of exercises.

In developing the booklet and the app we have chosen to focus on three major areas of personal and group empowerment: Clarity, Confidence, and Competence.

- **Clarity** is about discovery: exploring self image, relationships, life journey; establishing a clearer picture of 'who I am' and 'where I am' in my life's journey, including recognition of any social stigma. Many of the methods can also be used by groups to clarify the same questions.
- **Confidence** is about acknowledging the status quo, letting go of fears of inadequacy, developing coping strategies for dealing with stigma and other potential conflict situations, discomfort and disappointment, and envisioning new paths.
- **Make it real!** The improved clarity and confidence lead to increased action competence: an ability to step out and put the new knowledge and awareness into practice. This is about gathering the necessary resources to move along new paths and take effective action.

It is envisaged that the booklet may be used not only individually but also through group sessions, for instance in peer support groups. Training for 'peer coaches' to lead such sessions may be available on demand.

The *Innertopia* app is designed to
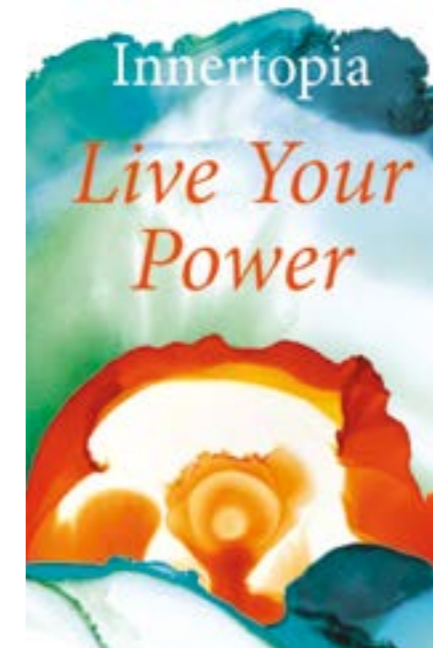
The workbook and app are available at innertopia.eu.

be user-driven: not as a fixed sequence of steps but as an exploration adaptable to the needs and opportunities of the user over a period of months, or for however long the user wishes to continue. It is presented as a 'travel agency' supporting the successive empowerment of the user by offering journeys of experience into inner space. It has been proposed that outer space pales in significance in comparison with the riches of inner space (Campbell, 2008); the tone of the app is of an invitation to adventure.

The app users, or travellers, can access a 'travel catalogue' and according to their needs and inclinations can choose between one-off exercises; or a choice of self-exploratory 'journeys', each presenting a series of optional exercises intended to be carried out over 10-15 sessions.

The app includes choices of how to express outcomes and emotions at different stages, whether in words, pictures, bodywork; as well as alternative approaches to

"You could say paradigms are harder to change than anything else about a system… But there's nothing physical or expensive or even slow in the process of paradigm change. In a single individual it can happen in a millisecond. All it takes is a click in the mind, a falling of scales from eyes, a new way of seeing."

—Donella Meadows

some of the exercises, including guided visualizations and meditations.

Beyond the current scope of the app and booklet are other potential areas of support such as financial empowerment (see below), and learning to make

Exercise

We invite you to try the app for yourself. You may find it a useful facilitation tool.

decisions in a context of rapid change and uncertainty.

From the inner to the outer

And after the inner click: what?

With increasing empowerment comes often a growing wish or need to exert influence in the outer world. Skilfull facilitation

can support participants to define for themselves which possible actions are both feasible and prioritized, thus extending the spiral of empowerment beyond the individual or small group.

Enhanced action competence

One indicator of an empowering transformation is when a participant experiences and demonstrates enhanced action competence. A key moment for the facilitator is when participants begin to take action, previously believed to be 'impossible', to improve their own situation, including taking initiatives to influence the workshop and facilitator, or in support of others. The arena might be their personal network, neighbourhood, or other community. This is an important step in the empowerment process and indeed one of the objectives of the *Hosting Empowerment* project: to empower vulnerable groups to become more active citizens.

Such a development can be not only awaited but indeed triggered. A powerful intervention (noted above in the section

"What is empowerment?" on page 17) is an *invitation to experiment.* The
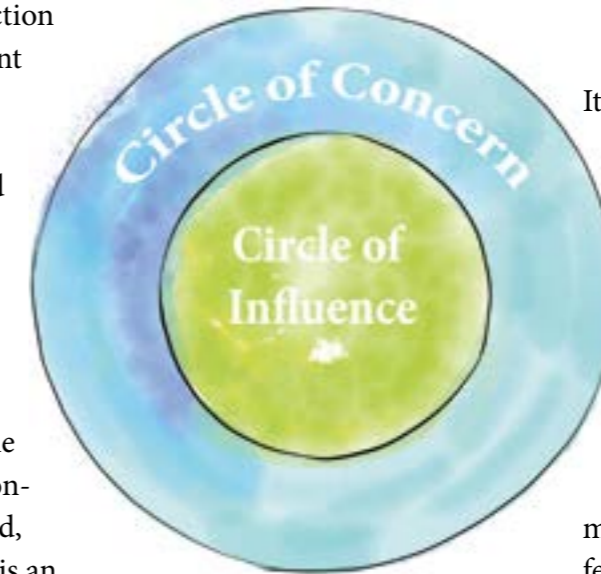
invitation needs to be sufficiently visionary to inspire and motivate action, while still being sufficiently practical to appear possible.

As facilitator you may be able to support participants to start by setting reasonable objectives, and to contribute in ways that enhance their own empowerment

while forwarding the external cause.

Intention

It is common to formulate objectives in ways that make it difficult to achieve success. For example, to say 'Everyone in my family will treat each other with respect', an outcome over which one has little control, instead of 'I will learn to handle disrespectful treatment by family members in ways that make me feel better rather than worse'. Or, in a wider social context, 'My local store will stock only organic eggs and dairy produce' may be less achievable than 'I will support my local store to increase sales of organic eggs and dairy produce'.

In other words, one secret of successful action is to narrow focus from the circle of concern to the
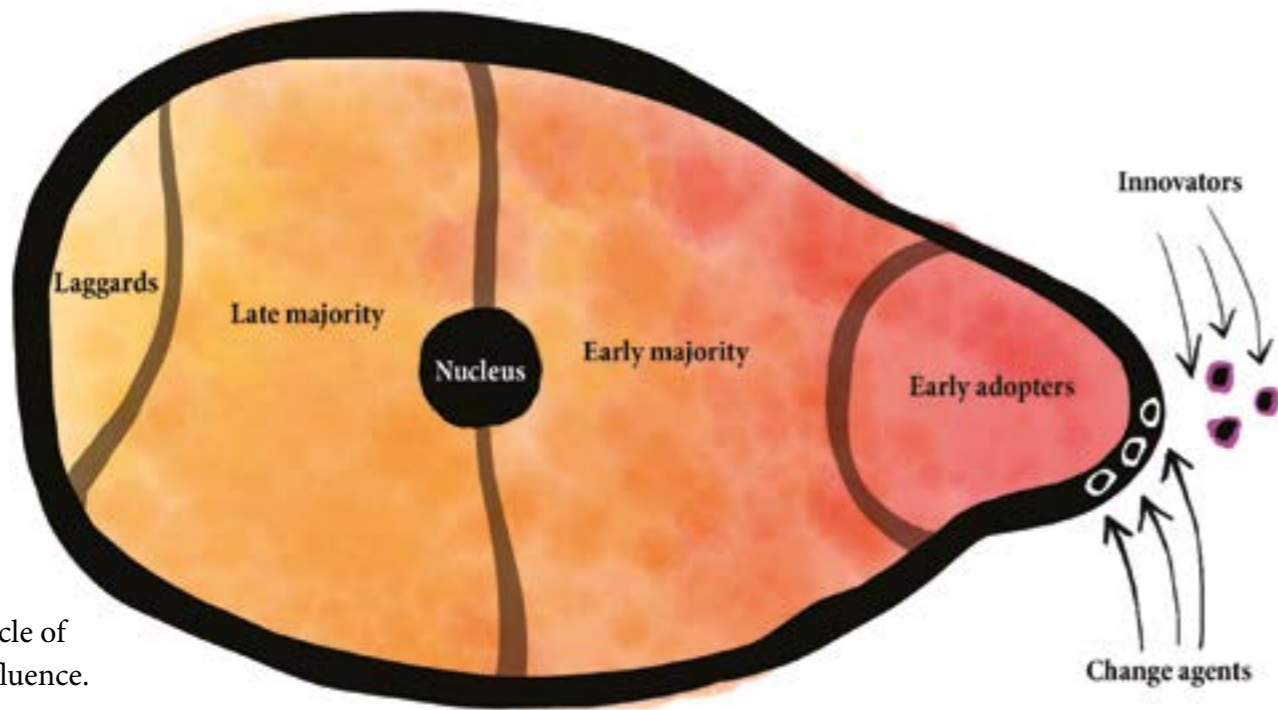
circle of
influence.

As a facilitator you can offer
feedback on objectives, including
the possibility of measuring or
assessing success; and can help
set up reasonable timelines.

Roles

The theoretical and practical
framework of 'social diffusion'
(AtKisson 1991; Rogers 2003)
identifies some different roles for
those engaged in social change.
From this research has emerged,

among other things, the con-
cept of the 'change agent', a term
that has passed into the English
language, originally meaning a
person who is the link between
an innovator and the general
public. In some other contexts
this role is referred to as the 'first
follower'.

When encouraging and support-
ing your participants' steps into
social action, you may find these
categories helpful.

The innovator is almost by
definition initially unheard and
unseen by most people since
she or he is perceived as being
'different', not one of us. It takes
a change agent, someone who to
the majority is definitely 'one of
us', to act as spokesperson and
advocate for the innovator.

Rogers (2003) also delineates the
conditions that are likely to lead
to effective diffusion of changes.

Finding the flow

The literature concerning the
concept of 'flow' offers maps
of the emotional terrain that
accompanies a specific form of
action competence: the ability to
complete tasks with total absorp-
tion and minimal effort, which
is in itself highly empowering.
The 'flow' is that aspired-to state
when work is hardly perceived
as work. It is a highly personal
experience that yet has some

common features. For one thing,
it is more likely to occur when
there is a good alignment bet-
ween skills and challenges.

In the figure below (Csikszentmi-
halyi , 1997), the coloured shapes
(worry, apathy, control, etc)
can be of different shapes and
at different places on this figure
depending on the personality of
the individual.

The same applies to the figure
on the next page: the "flow zone"
can be more flattened in people
who need less difficult tasks and
more confident skills to operate
well; and can also be more steep
in people who tend to be moti-
vated by more difficult tasks even
if they lack some of the skills for
them.

As a facilitator you can help
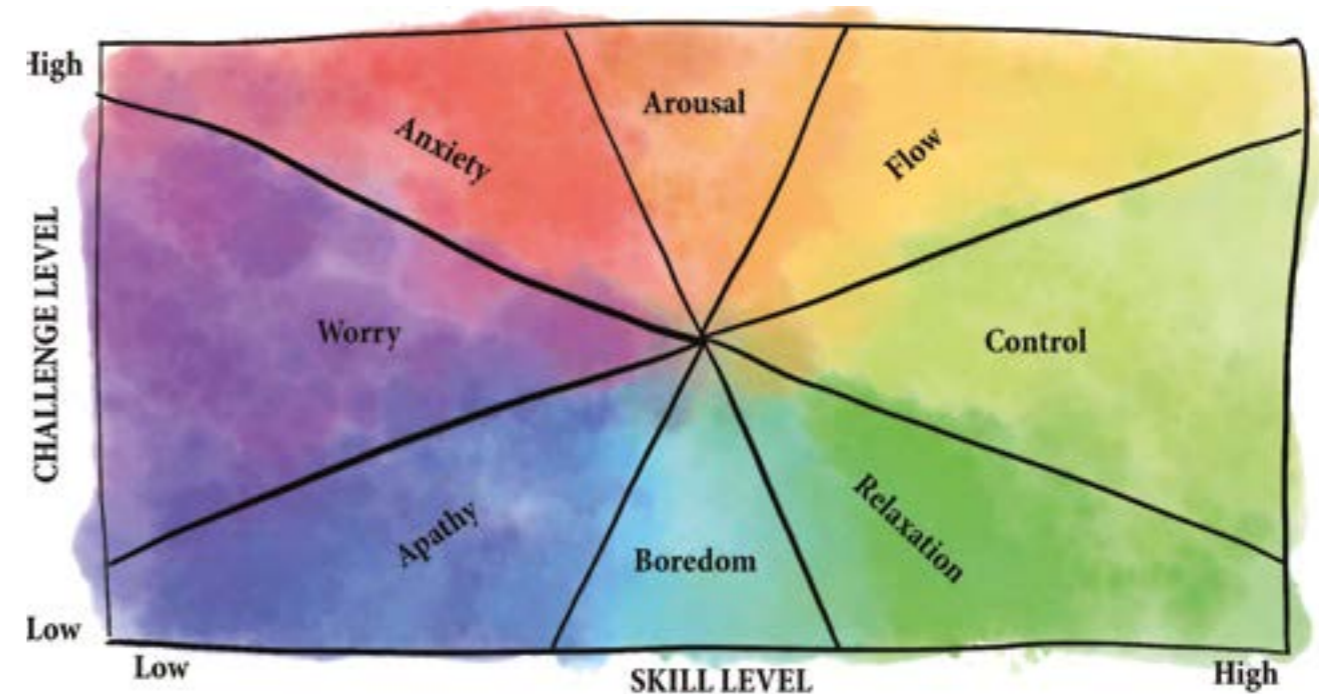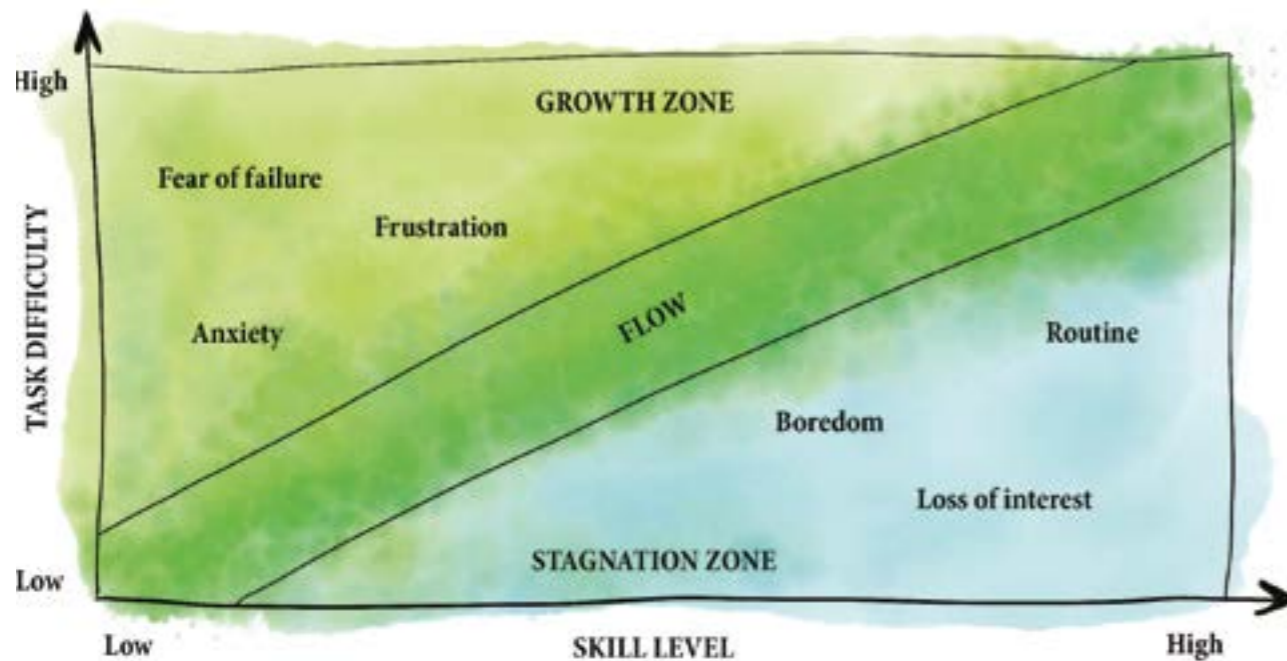
participants identify their flow zone. For instance, you can invite them to reflect on situations where they felt motivated, excited, creative, where they felt they are in the flow state; and also to recall situations where they had to complete certain tasks and they became frustrated, anxious, and were afraid of failure. Was it a very difficult task? Was it something they were not trained for? You can help them find out what made them feel bad and

what would have helped them to get closer to the flow state.

The same can be done with the stagnation zone. Help the participant recall when a specific task made them bored, they lacked interest and were reluctant to do the task because they felt it was too easy or insignificant. What would have helped them to get more excited about it? In this way you can help a participant find out what kind of task would

be best for them.

It is possible to guide this process via conversation but you can also use methods or tools such as a collection of photographs, or a set of metaphorical associative cards — for example, 'angel' cards or 'animal' cards.

Financial empowerment

One area in which many people feel distinctly disempowered is that of money. Indeed, in the absence of support to deal with immediate financial crises, other work to empower vulnerable groups may simply fail. Equally, offering or connecting participants with appropriate support can unlock big empowerment potential.

Personal crises

If you know or suspect that one or more of your participants are heavily burdened financially, you may want to research local availability of public or private support programs. In some places the primary place to look will be public social service; in others it may be religious or other non-governmental organisations.

For those not qualifying for emergency relief, there are books and web sites of varying

relevance depending upon the country and the context (eg Robin & Dominguez, 2020; Singletary, 2021).

Once a crisis is averted and pressure relieved, it can be useful to continue with the next section.

Perception and understanding of money

Few areas of modern life are so poorly understood as money and economics. For instance, few people believe they have any responsibility for creating money, a function which probably 99% of the population firmly believe is the prerogative of governments. This is in itself a disempowering (as well as inaccurate) belief (Koenig, 2003).

Building a more empowering personal relationship with money inevitably involves storytelling:

"When you deal with money, you are always dealing with a story" (Koenig, 2003). The centrepiece of each participant's story is how they define money. This is influenced by their biography and socialisation. Once the story is told, the key question for each participant becomes: is this a useful story for the present moment in your life or do you want/need to transform it?

Money is not what you think it is, but your experience leads you to believe that it is what you think it is. This basic recognition is important. Our idea about money is reinforced through our selective experience and this selective experience again reinforces our idea about money. And then we try to resolve the consequences without noticing the underlying pattern. So a next empowering step is to deal with this underlying (unconscious) pattern.

Therefore Koenig developed his money work, recognizing money as a medium for projection. The first part of the work is to make the unconscious projections on money conscious. The second part is the reclamation of your projection on money.

As a starting point you can find an experience-oriented method in the Toolbox "The Money Game" at hostingtransformation.eu.

Community funding potential

If you are working with a cohesive group, you may consider offering them a chance to work on community funding — an area with strong empowerment potential. A good place to start researching the potential could be the international NGO Winkomun (winkomun.org).

Translation or cultural adaptation?

If you are working with participant material that originated in a different language or culture, you may need to weigh the options of translation versus cultural adaptation.

For example, for this *Hosting Empowerment* project the participant materials — the self-empowerment booklet and app — were developed by an international, primarily European team with deep experience of transcultural work. In such circumstances, a good translation will usually suffice if reviewed by someone with expertise in the field; though transition to non-European cultures might call for adaptation.

A method for cultural adaptation, the Adaptation Carousel, was developed by Global Action Plan International, an NGO, to enable member organisations anywhere in the world to rapidly produce a cultural adaptation of participant material for behaviour change developed by any other member. The method is outlined in the box to the right.

The efficacy of the Carousel was demonstrated when a small delegation from Japan once appeared at the international secretariat office. They admitted quite cheerfully that they had 'stolen' a workbook of English-language copyrighted material and translated it into Japanese. The reason for their visit was to complain that it 'didn't work'. By contrast, member organisations using the Carousel to adapt the same material to widely different cultures, including some in Asia, had been very successful and used it to reach several million people.

Adaptation Carousel

Recruit an adaptation team of ca 20 people for an introductory workshop and collaborative planning.

Roles: *project manager, editor (or small editorial group), work teams*

Carousel process: *The translated material is divided into sections (chapters, topics), and each team takes one section*

- Each team works its way through their section 'as if' they were program participants
- Each team adapts the material according to their experience, using some predefined questions to test suitability, and passes its new version to the editor
- The editor reviews incoming sections, (re-)establishing a common style, and passes the new version to a different team
- Each team repeats the process
- The editor reviews the whole material and produces a final version, for possible review by one or more experts external to the project

C.
A PROFESSIONAL FACILITATOR

Different starting points

The facilitator: a midwife to transformation

A group signing up for a facilitated process is in the best case implicitly saying: "We're not satisfied with the way things are. Help us bring about change." It can be about making even better something that is already good; it can be about removing obstacles, or gaining new perspectives, formulating new visions. But change is the key.

With empowering facilitation, the desired change is defined by the client, not by the facilitator. You may be asked or find it appropriate to suggest possible changes or ambitions. But the decision remains with the client; your role as facilitator is to act as midwife to the desired change, using whatever methods, tools and skills you possess or can unlock together with the participants.

Ultimately, transformative change – which is implied in the concept of 'empowering facilitation' – is not something that can be completely planned in advance. The transformation of the collective comes about through the transformation of those engaged.

The responsibility for the possible outcomes of a facilitated event differ depending on the type of client. In an open event each participant is a client and thus responsible for the outcomes. In a commissioned event, where for instance the facilitator's client is an employer, national agency, civil society organization, or local authority, the client needs to be able to handle major openness and flexibility around potential outcomes.

In particular a commissioned event brings specific challenges related to the outcomes, which need to be thought through

beforehand. For example: What happens when the participants initiate change processes that were not anticipated or perhaps even desired by the client? What happens if an open discussion fails to resolve these? What if the client refuses to approve or even discuss the participants' ideas?

In such cases, the facilitator needs to focus on supporting the participants to formulate their own individual or collective responses to the situation, disregarding any pressure from the client to ensure a particular outcome. Their response may take many forms, for example initiating a dialogue with managers or union representatives, suggesting reforms, requesting a transfer, starting an internal lobby group… or looking for employment elsewhere. A skillful facilitator can support and guide this process with the interests of the participants in mind.

Who and where is the client?

Where is the client (if this is an internal event) or where are the participants in an open event, in regard to the change process – at what point, at what level? Asking these questions can help focus your facilitation.

Conscious change, whether by individuals or a group, tends to cycle through different phases with different qualities. A clear basic model that describes typical phases of a change process in a circular way is the Dragon Dreaming model (Croft, 2018),

which consists of four phases. Once hopes, fears, and expectations have been examined, the steps are:

- Phase 1: Clarify one or more desired future states
- Phase 2: Plan and test different ways to move towards a desired future
- Phase 3: Take action
- Phase 4: Evaluate, celebrate, move on

The focus of your work as a facilitator will depend on the client's phase. In Phase 1, for instance, you can help develop images of desired futures. In Phases 2 and 3 when obstacles are encountered you may invoke pattern hunting. Conflict handling tools can be useful at any stage, and so can general tools for self-efficacy, and for building trust in the possibility of making a difference.

One word of caution. Phases 1 and 2 are important; but 'only' reaching predetermined goals is not necessarily success. Once empowerment and transformation

are engaged, new possibilities will emerge that could not have been foreseen. The facilitator's role is then to enable participants to balance seizing new, golden opportunities against the risk of losing much by trying to do too much. See also "Flexibility vs plans" on page 65.

Where are you?

As a facilitator, you do well to be aware of your own ongoing change process. You are also on a journey, which intersects with the journey of the participants for a while. Taking this perspective, of being a companion on the road, is a good starting point.

Being a good facilitator is also a question of personal style. You don't become an excellent facilitator by trying to be someone else. Warren Ziegler (2002) identified nine different personal styles that he called Spiritual Archetypes (below, 'The professional and the personal'). Identifying your own principal archetype(s)

can help you to hone your own style, to bring out and shine up the facets of yourself that contribute to your being a good facilitator. Showing yourself the way you are in your own style, with your strengths and vulnerabilities, will enhance your quality as an empowering facilitator, as it implicitly gives your participants a signal: "Here you are allowed to be yourself, with everything this implies." It helps them to feel welcome and comfortable with the way they are. It can also help you see others, including your participants, in a new light.

Be gentle with yourself, though. Show as much of yourself as you feel reasonably comfortable with. Any major discomfort or hesitation on your part is likely to be picked up and possibly mirrored by the participants. For each time that you dare to be open, your own comfort zone expands: it becomes easier next time.

Typologies such as that proposed by Ziegler — there are many of them — can be a useful tool for improving self-knowledge. However, for a facilitator, the most important learning from any typology is that people are different! Facilitators are different, and

their participants are different. Any attempt to impose our own way of seeing the world on others is not only aggressive, but also likely to fail.
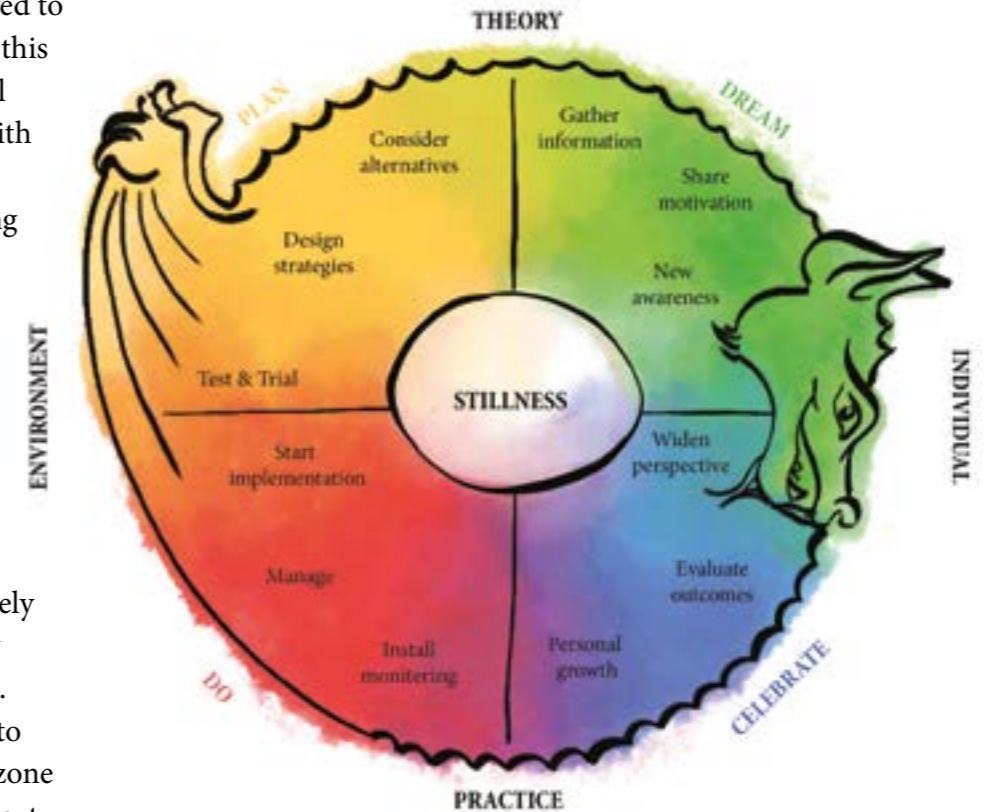
Dragon Dreaming process

The borders of facilitation

Facilitation is one of many roles in which we may offer support to another person, or to a group of people. There are no clear boundaries between them. Partly, they overlap; and partly, you as a practitioner may decide to move from one to another during a session.

Facilitator, coach, teacher, consultant, mentor, counsellor… The differences between them can be viewed through the lens of their respective agendas.

A facilitator — usually taken to mean the leader of a specific, interactive group process — tends to be process-driven. Sometimes, the facilitator follows or builds on a process concept in which they have received training, for example *Open Space Technology* (Owen, 2008), *Dragon Dreaming* (Croft, 2018), or *Learning for Change* (Benaim & Mehlmann, 2018) – often in a personally-adapted version to suit themselves and the circumstances; or they use a general concept from which to build their own mix of exercises.

The agenda of an empowering facilitator is to support a group of participants to make the best use of the chosen process and its tools, each in pursuit of their own particular agenda as well as the group's agenda, if it has one.

> *"There is a very thin line between a facilitator and a space invader."*
>
> —Open Space facilitator

An **empowering coach** sometimes claims to have 'no agenda', but in fact does: the objective is to invite those being coached to become increasingly empowered. This wish comes from a value that says: more empowerment is good for both the individual and the collective. So, the coach's agenda is value-driven rather than either process-driven or content-driven. However, the key word is *invitation*: the person or group is free to say no, which is no reflection on either them or the coach.
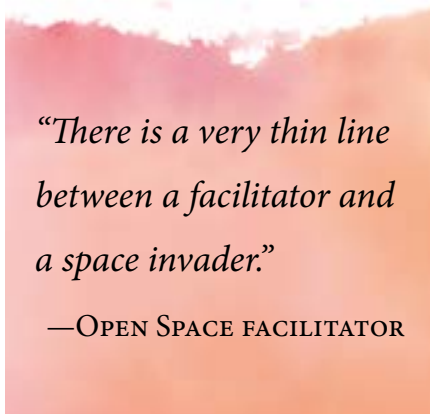
A **consultant** usually has an agenda that has been defined in dialogue with the client and specified in the contract. Very often, the agenda will be primarily concerned with content: a certain result should be achieved or problem solved. It's not unusual for a consultant also to find themself in a coaching role in regard to one or more people in the client organization. This is fine, as long as the client actually asks for it – and the distinction should be clear.

A **mentor** is typically content-oriented: someone who knows the business, has good contacts, can open doors, knows what to do and – not least – what *not* to do, in order to get ahead professionally. Some mentors are able and willing to act as coaches too, but it's different, and some excellent mentors are not comfortable in a coaching role.

A **teacher** almost always has a content-driven agenda, and frequently has a values-driven agenda too. In either case, the agenda may come from outside, e.g. from national curricula or parental ambitions; or from the teacher's own values and ambitions. For example, a violin teacher may dream of a pupil becoming a star; a class teacher may dream of pupils becoming useful or prominent citizens or athletes. A values-driven teacher is acting in the role of a facilitator or coach; though not necessarily an empowering coach, depending on the values in question.

A **counsellor**'s role is also many-faceted. There are, for example, courses that distinguish between 'pastoral' (religion-related) and 'clinical' (health-related) counsellor training. It also has in common with teaching that it can be an actual job title/employment.

Your commitment as a facilitator

When you are facilitating an open event, the situation is clear: within the framework for which the event has been convened, your commitment is to the participants. Your ambition is to lead them through the (their) process and for them to leave with feelings of comfort and achievement.

When a client has hired you to facilitate a particular event, it may not be so simple. For instance, the client, if an employer, may press you to tell them about the opinions and attitudes of the participants.

It is useful to be clear when signing the contract: your loyalty is to the participants; you will not under any circumstances breach their confidence. How can you otherwise create the safe space that can engender transformative moments?

Empowerment and psychotherapy

Some forms of psychotherapy have a great deal to offer when it comes to empowerment, facilitation, and coaching. Two of the more influential, the movements started by Roberto Assagioli (founder of psychosynthesis, 1888-1974) and by Carl Rogers (1902-1987), are represented in the team that developed this guide.

The approaches of both Assagioli and Rogers build on a kernel of trust in the innate wisdom, resources, and potential of both the individual and the group. The task of both facilitator and therapist is seen as eliciting that potential. The difference is in the level of intervention that may be required or justified. For an individual with deep-seated issues, for instance of identity or with trauma, professional help by a psychotherapist may be the most practical way forward.

At some point, while facilitating or coaching an empowerment process, you will probably be confronted with such a situation: one calling for professional psychotherapeutic help. The person concerned may or may not have access to such help. What to do?

Identifying the need

First, how do you determine that such a point has been reached? There is no absolute defining line but there are some indicators.

- If you introduce an exercise that includes deep breathing, and you find that a participant is not able to do that.
- If you introduce an exercise that includes imaging, and a participant expresses strong reluctance to take part.
- If you invite participants to formulate their values in the form of 'I want...', and

someone has no answer or can *only* formulate what they don't want.

- If you introduce an exercise like 'What gets me out of bed each morning' and someone finds *only* negatives ('what makes me want to never get up again').

Dealing with the situation

Rule No. 1: don't insist! Explain to the whole group that the invitation IS an invitation and they are at full liberty to say no, or to decide for themselves to what extent they want to participate.

Treat that person with great respect and compassion.

- If reasonable, consider offering them an alternative exercise or a private coaching session.
- If you have an opportunity,

you might ask privately whether they have considered psychotherapy — especially if you have any potential solution, like how to find someone

and/or how to finance the therapy. But that is secondary.

With sufficient respect, the person may still derive benefit from

the empowerment program — or may choose to leave it, which is also to be respected.

The facilitator

The psychologies of both Rogers and Assagioli offer the facilitator an empowering stance, namely that everyone has the inner resources that allow them to live happy and meaningful lives. If we turn to our fellow human beings with this attitude, we can create a climate of trust that helps them release their resources, making their decisions wiser, healthier, and more constructive.

Distilling from their wisdom and

our own experience, we propose four core conditions for creating trust in addition to Community building and Confidentiality mentioned above:

- Authenticity
- Unconditional positive regard
- Empathy
- Playfulness

While these conditions can seem very straightforward, it is a lifelong journey to continuously

develop ourselves in these areas. Carl Rogers for instance was very open about his own shortcomings. As we continue to develop, we are increasingly able to create an environment for our participants in which they feel safe, validated and understood. This environment can empower them to encounter the dissatisfactions in their life and create opportunities for growth and transformation.

FOUR CORE CONDITIONS FOR CREATING TRUST

- **Authenticity**
- **Unconditional positive regard**

- **Empathy**
- **Playfulness**

Authenticity

Authenticity means being real and honest. It doesn't mean you have to tell everything you happen to feel in the moment to the participants – but it does mean that you need to be aware of your feelings. In case it is helpful for the process, you should find a way to express them, even if it is uncomfortable. It is perfectly OK to share if you feel frustrated, helpless or tired, just as it is perfectly OK to express satisfaction and happiness. By doing so you not only give permission to others to express these feelings, you also give an example of how it can be done.

While always keeping an attitude of unconditional positive regard for the other person (see next page), you can let them know about the feelings, words, impulses, or fantasies that emerge in you. In this way you are being authentic, using your capacities as a whole human being, not just your conscious self. When people experience you this way, they intuitively realize that they don't need to make assumptions about what you think, as they can be sure you will tell them if it is important. This increases their trust in you and consequently in the group.

One has to be thoughtful about this though – expressing praise too early in the process might give the impression that only "happy feelings" are permissible, not uncomfortable ones. Voicing difficult emotions can be too much for certain individuals and should never be forced. Also, being aware of your own intention is crucial – you shouldn't use the group for your own emotional gain, but be there to serve them, while being authentic and true to yourself.

Giving honest feedback is also a part of being authentic. This can be difficult for many, as we generally don't enjoy confronting others. But confrontation, when we are still being empathetic and accepting, can help the other person to recognize the parts of themselves they might not be comfortable with, and to which they don't get feedback elsewhere.

Finally, being authentic is not only about personal feelings, but refers to the whole process. If you have a plan for the group, it is best to be open about it, avoiding manipulation and deception. Be clear about the frames of your time together, which includes specifics of time and the physical space, house rules, and the "permissions and prohibitions" – e.g. if it is OK or not to be late for a session, or skip it altogether.

Ultimately, by owning his/her own emotions, the facilitator provides an example for the participants to do the same: to take responsibility for themselves, for their emotions, and so take control of their lives.

Unconditional positive regard

Having an accepting attitude towards the group as a whole and to the individuals within it is something most helpers would agree is core in creating a trusting environment. It doesn't necessarily mean praising anything expressed by our participants, or forcing ourselves to accept even destructive behaviour; but rather to care for them, to respect them as individuals in their own right, to have an underlying belief that they are trustworthy people.

In its most simple form, we can express our positive attitude by listening to what the other person says, deeply caring for what they want to express. You cannot promise to save them from any pain or from any honest, potentially difficult feedback from other participants – but you can promise them to be right there with them in those painful moments.

Accepting also means to trust and accept the group and the individuals where they are, as they are. You might have objectives for your group, goals you want to achieve – but you need to be able to listen to the needs of the group. It can be frustrating to listen to superficial discussions or a participant constantly intellectualizing, or maybe not even saying a word; but pushing too hard to deepen the discussion is not helpful.

Empathy

Understanding what the other person is communicating assumes a sensitive awareness of the perspective and the experience of that other person, so that you can relate to the expressed content from their perspective as opposed to evaluating or judging it. This helps participants to feel safe, as the experience of being understood is deeply appreciated and creates trust and a willingness to be open.

Empathy also means dealing with participants' negative self-talk. Habits of self-deprecation are happening moment to moment in people's minds. To counteract that, the facilitator needs to consistently invite new ideas, repeatedly reinforcing the value of experimentation. The consistent message is that 'failure' is only failure if it leads to giving up; otherwise, it's a normal part of the learning process.

Playfulness

Laughter is a good indication that creativity is taking place. Playfulness and indeed play can be a powerfully transformative experience, while often bypassing some discomfort associated with challenging norms and beliefs; these are tools with a high impact potential for an empowering facilitator. (See the Toolbox at hostingtransformation.eu.)

Playfulness can be interpreted as being offensive, for instance if a vulnerable participant construes

it as 'being made fun of'; this needs to be carefully monitored by the facilitator, as it may not be immediately obvious. Moreover, different kinds of "play" can have different cultural interpretations. Therefore, play and humour need to be combined with intercultural sensitivity and with a practice of deep listening to the group.

It can also be viewed as being unprofessional, for instance by a client. This is a misconstruction that needs to be challenged.

The professional and the personal

As we embark on the 'Hosting Empowerment' journey it is good to be aware not only of our participants but also of our own empowerment. Indeed, the importance of the facilitator's self-awareness is central to both personal and professional development. This implies a willingness to continuously examine our own motives and behaviour: this is step zero in any kind of helping professions, as the main "tool" of a helping professional is themself as a person.

Five principles of advanced self-empowerment

As an experienced facilitator you are doubtless already highly empowered. And, empowerment is also a journey. If your experiences lead you to question yourself and your competence, you may wish to consult the 'advanced' checklist for self-empowerment, as follows.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF ADVANCED SELF-EMPOWERMENT

1. Action

2. Progress

3. Cooperation

4. Attitude

5. Personal well-being

Action

- *Formulate positive goals.* Focus on what you want – not on what you don't want.
- *Experiment.* Try new behaviours and see whether they work for you.
- *Build on what works.* There are probably many people, organizations and solutions that actually share your vision, even if you sometimes feel lonely. Keep a lookout for them, and build on them. Scan the news for good examples.
- *Measure/observe results.* Once your new behaviours have become habitual you may "forget" how much you actually achieved. Keep a record – both to remind yourself how much you already did, and to help set new goals when the time is right.

Progress

- Create a *personal vision* of how you would like things to be – a truly visionary picture of what life might be like if all your hopes came true, and none of your fears!
- *Divide ambitions into manageable chunks.* For each action decision, ask not "How much can I possibly manage to do?", but "What is the smallest step I can take now that will move me closer to my vision?"
- *Turn habit into an ally.* Habits are powerful and may seem difficult or impossible to change. Think of it the other way around: once your new behaviours become habits, they'll be just as "automatic". Create practical support systems for yourself and your new habits.
- *Look for "win–win–win" solutions.* The best solutions give multiple benefits: you win, others around you win, your community wins. Every step in the "right" direction, no matter how small, should be valued.
- *Take one more step…* Any time you find yourself thinking you've "done it all" – re-examine your vision of "the good life" and look for your next step. There's always something more to do.

Cooperation

- *Partnership and long-term relationships* are key elements of self-empowerment.
- *Find a coach, create a team or join a dialogue circle* that meets regularly for mutual support.

Attitude

- *Park problems.* Don't hesitate to admit the problems you see. Pull them out, look at them – and then park them while you get on with possible solutions. They won't go away! (Or maybe they will…)
- *Park negative emotions* that arise during your work – anger with the boss, irritation with participants, whatever: admit to yourself that you have these feelings – but don't get trapped into feeling bad about having them!

For more about Parking, see the Toolbox at: hostingtransformation.eu.

Personal well-being

- *Look for the "growing edge"* – the lessons life is offering you right now. What barriers do you see to doing the things you want to do? Keep asking yourself "what is my growing edge now?".
- *Identify turnarounds.* Practice identifying "limiting beliefs" (those barriers to action which are at least partly mental), and then exploring how they can be turned around into possibilities. See for example *Turn habit into an ally* under "Progress" on the previous page.
- *Take care of your own needs,* and choose to do what gives you energy. It's not selfish – you need the energy to do good work!

Professional supervision

All professions need further training and supervision. Learning about new methods and techniques is always good; however, it is also important to remember that working with people requires our whole personality, so we need to work at that level too.

Our participants may trigger emotions and reactions that need to be parked during our sessions, but still need to be worked on. That is the main focus of professional supervision: the development of our professional personality.

Formats

Supervision can take place in different formats: it can be one-on-one, as well as small group supervision. The aim is the same, and while there can be more focus on one's own problems at the one-on-one level, in group supervision the learning comes

from others' issues and can add as much to our own development.

What themes can be relevant to supervision? Some examples:

- Why a particular participant irritated me in a given situation
- Why I felt shame / anger / irritation / sadness in a professional setting
- Cooperation problems or conflicts between two or more colleagues
- Sexual tensions or gender conflicts with participants
- Inclusion and personal reactions in / for group dynamics

During a supervisory discussion, after a short introduction to a particular case, the more in-depth personal level of the professional is discussed, to bring up those issues which can be working in the background (such as relation to authority, gender, some norms, or other personal issues). These issues are only brought to the surface in order

for the professional to recognize what is happening; in-depth work would call for counselling or therapy.

The idea of supervision is thus to work on the self-awareness of the facilitator and not on the case itself; though in a mixed supervisory and case advisory session the two can be combined.

Peer support

An alternative to professional supervision is to organize some form of peer support, for instance a *Community of Practice* (Wenger-Trayner, 2015) or an *Intervision* group (UK Department for Education, 2019, *see resources*). It is important to choose a method and format that ensures the integrity and enhances the learning potential of each participating facilitator.

Personal facilitation style

While there are many skills and characteristics common to empowering facilitators, it is also true that there are many different, effective styles of facilitation. Role models are extremely useful, but finally, as mentioned above, you don't become an outstanding facilitator by trying to be someone else.

Here is one example of a 'categorization' of styles: Warren Ziegler's 'spiritual archetypes'. In searching for your own style you may find it useful to consider them. Which are your own greatest strengths? How can you use them as a path to becoming an increasingly skilled facilitator and coach?

- Breakthroughs
- Taking risks, acting your convictions
- Enacting your gifts and talents
- Marshalling your inner resources to a point of action

The sustaining spirit

A call to rediscover and reinvent partnerships of equals.

- Intentioning and partnering
- Parity
- Mutual learning
- Giving and receiving

The entrepreneurial spirit

A call to put your creative energies into new ways of being and doing.

The loving & caring spirit

A call to go beyond negative emotions (anger, fear, competitiveness, loneliness…) to see the potential of personhood in everyone.

- Transforming another person's negative emotions into self-recognition
- Putting the other's needs first
- Beyond peace-keeping to peace-making

The mending spirit

A call to fit together and bind parts too long separated.

- Discerning
- Patience and tenacity; cutting away
- Bringing together
- Envisioning /inventing the future

The just spirit

A call to champion the weak and enspirit governance.

- How are we to live together on this planet?
- Justice as governance
- Justice as a passion for balance and fairness
- Empathy

The organizational spirit

A call to create space within our collective conduct to promote the flourishing of our human spirit in that which we do together.

- Work in circles

- Create new purposes
- Transform systems
- Beyond peace-keeping to peace-making

The enlivening spirit

A call to bring the human spirit back to life, wherever and however it may be found.

- Listen to the un-heard, accept what is offered
- Invite stillness: offer a refuge
- Tough love

The reflective spirit

A call to re-think the story to better fit reality.

- Accept nothing at face value

- Thoughtfulness
- Look behind what is said and done
- Call to action

The poetic spirit

A call to try something new.

- Pictures and metaphors
- Create new meanings for human spirit by expressing them in multiple 'languages'
- Shift realities by naming them differently

Checklist: Planning an event

For a comprehensive approach to designing an event with potential for transformative learning, see Section D of the book A Transformative Edge. *Here, we list only some items of significance that seem relevant for this present facilitation guide.*

Purpose

Take time to be clear about

- The learning objectives for the participants, according to the client (if there is one) or to you

- The objectives of the participants, as far as you know

- Your personal objectives in offering this event

Physical event

Secure an empowering physical environment

- Room to move around, but not so big as to be intimidating

- Moveable furniture

- Plenty of wall-space or flip-charts for posting by groups

- If possible, easy access to the outdoors; or if the event is mostly outdoors, some access to more private space

Think staffing

- Do you have a co-facilitator who can take over from you if necessary?

- If planning intensive group work, do you have people (assistants or experienced participants) who can coach each group?

Checklist:
Planning an event (continued)

Online event

Technical platform

- Choose technical tools that are either familiar to participants, or very easy to learn (familiarity is more important than advanced function)

- Review your proposed program to check for feasibility with the chosen tools

Think staffing

- Do you have a co-facilitator who can take over from you if necessary? And who can keep an eye on incoming messages (eg chat) and make sure nothing gets overlooked?

- If planning intensive group work, do you have people (assistants or experienced participants) who can coach each group?

- Do you have a tech support person?

Check timing

Make a detailed plan — not to share with participants but to check feasibility.

- Does it look likely to fit into the time allocated?

- If you run into time constraints, which elements might you most easily take out or significantly reduce?

- If using interpretation, have you allowed enough extra time? Even with simultaneous translation you will need to allow perhaps 10-15% extra; with consecutive translation you may need 50-80% more time, depending on how much will need translating for the whole group.

How do we know it's working?

Success criteria

We propose that the four metrics used to assess the success of a program for transformative learning can also be considered as success criteria for an empowerment program:

- Enhanced self-knowledge
- Enhanced social competence
- Enhanced action competence
- Enhanced tolerance for uncertainty

These criteria, in particular social and action competence, are illustrated in the video material produced in the course of the *Hosting Empowerment* project (see "References" on page 99).

Success for whom?

If the major success criteria, proposed above, are uniquely concerned with the success of each individual participant (and to some extent of participating groups), there are also valid questions to be asked about other stakeholders.

The client, if there is one, has undoubtedly opinions about desirable outcomes. For instance,

- For a peer support group of people with a controversial medical diagnosis: "We want our groups to detect both external and internalized stigma concerning their diagnosis, and build the strength to cope with it."

- For an empowerment program with bank tellers the client stipulated: "I want you to transform our bank tellers from obedient employees into change agents."

- For a national trade union association: "We want to empower some key people — mostly negotiators and local organizers — and enable them to empower other members."

Can you agree on criteria, and on a process for assessment? Do you need to consider the impact of your work on third parties, for example the family members in the first example above, or customers of the bank in the second?

You as facilitator undoubtedly also have ambitions or aspirations. The first thing is to be clear about them, the second to be transparent. And the third is to acknowledge that the ambitions of and for the participants take precedence over yours.

D. PRAXIS

Create a safe (enough) environment

There are many different facilitation styles, but irrespective of style there are steps we can take to empower participants through creating a space where they feel able to unfold more of their own potential. Two specific aspects of safe space are central to successful facilitation:

- The concept of 'safe enough' space: too safe can be as disempowering as unsafe
- The paramount importance of trust at all levels and in all directions

The first step, if your meetings are physical, is to create a physically empowering space. The second (e.g. as prescribed by Carl Rogers, 1967) is to create an atmosphere of trust, which has strong implications for your skills as a facilitator, and in particular for your listening skills. (See the Toolbox for modes of listening: hostingtransformation.eu.)

From the report Online Transformative Learning we garner:

"As long as we trust the facilitator, we will get our work done, no matter what. As soon as we think that the [facilitator] is trying to talk down to us, lecture to us, or is not in control of the process, we get derailed..."

If I trust the people in the room I can take risks: to be creative, to bring my ideas forth, to reveal who I really am. If I sense there is a good chance I will be judged, laughed at, or criticized, I am much more likely to stay quiet, to withdraw, or to present a more polished and less true version of myself.

– Jutta Goldammer

Reflection becomes routine

It's hard to overstate the importance of a regular practice of reflection, enshrined in such concepts as double- and triple-loop learning. There are many ways to establish such habits, such as learning circles and Communities of Practice as well as recurring slots in workshop programs, and even individual reflection. The crucial element is regularity. Praxis questions proposed by Warren Ziegler:

- What is the practice we are discussing?
- Why do I/we choose to do it?
- How does it feel to do it?

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Physical space

Is the physical space inviting and welcoming? Preparing the space sends the message to the participants that the facilitator cares about them. For example, adding colour to a white room, decorating, engaging the senses (music, lighting, draping fabric), rearranging the furniture, hanging signs. A space that feels different sends the message that something different is happening.

Confidentiality

Participants need to feel confident that what happens in the group, stays in the group. If you as facilitator are acting under contract, for instance to their employer or someone else with a position of power over them, they need to know this and to know that they can trust you not to reveal anything about them that might be construed negatively.

The context

They also need to trust each other to maintain confidentiality; this is a question that may need raising more than once in the group, as part of Community building (see below).

If any materials are produced during your program, be sure to have the consent of all engaged participants before anyone makes any use of them outside the group.

Community building

Some minimal sense of community is necessary to lay the foundation for opening to transformational work in a group. The first step is learning each other's names. Ideally, every person knows the name of every other person in the room. When we learn each other's names, we become present to each other and cannot fade into anonymity. There are name games to help.

See the Toolbox at hostingtransformation.eu.

Be clear about the external conditions: number of meetings, time and place, any conditions for participating, any ambitions of your own or of your client.

Support the group to create a set of community agreements that are explicitly about building a sense of safety and trust. It can be useful if you arrive with a set of examples and yet are ready and willing to scrap those in favour of what arises spontaneously in the group. Examples include mutual respect, mutual support, confidentiality, no interrupting, no yucking someone's yum; and 'house rules' such as what to do if late or unable to attend a meeting, and how to deal with photos and potential publicity.

Community building begins with welcoming. Time is well spent at

the beginning of an event connecting each participant with themselves, with the others in the room, and with something larger (the community or environment, for example).

As the facilitator, participants look to you to set the tone of the experience. Your energy, posture, and attitude set the standard. If you can authentically welcome people as they arrive, people are immediately set at ease. When you bring your authentic self, you offer permission to others to be exactly who they are.

Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are.

— Brené Brown

Balance

Balance emerges as a ubiquitous key word for successful facilitation. Finding the sweet spot between too much and too little is seen to be essential for empowering facilitation. For example, the degree of variation, structure or transparency can help make or break 'safe enough space'. At an even more granular level one can talk about how to balance the number of participants in breakout rooms, distribute breaks, or deal with silence.

Perhaps the most important and at the same time most difficult balancing act for a facilitator is to help the empowerment process to keep moving forward. This requires a balance within the participant between a visceral sense of safety and a motivation to explore. Different traditions and theories of human development have expressed this in different ways: the balance between love and will, being and doing, and hope and disappointment, to name a few.

Facilitation in practice

There are many methods and tools that are commonly and successfully used by experienced facilitators. Some examples: methods to enhance trust, to stimulate creativity and co-creation, to bring out visions of the future, to introduce group work and exercises. Such methods, and more, are described in the Toolbox (see hostingtransformation.eu).

As said above, dissatisfaction is a crucial part of learning, even though in everyday life there is often a tendency to avoid uncomfortable emotions and situations. It is a responsibility of the facilitator to create an environment in which it is possible for the participants to be present with their whole being, with all their desired and liked qualities and motives, as well as the disliked and uncomfortable ones.

FOUR RHYTHMS TO GET BEYOND THE USUAL LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING

1. Hope and dissatisfaction

2. Individual and collective

3. Analysis and synthesis

4. Hard stuff and soft stuff

Rhythm and flow

A workshop or training program needs a rhythm, like a heartbeat: alternating between hope and dissatisfaction, between the individual and the collective, between analysis and synthesis, between hard stuff and soft stuff. These four rhythms enable participants to move beyond the simple gathering of results to another level of understanding, awareness, and transformation.

Hope and dissatisfaction. Warren Ziegler said that 'change happens when there is a reasonable balance between dissatisfaction and hope'. Often, project descriptions focus on either one or the other: in collections of 'good practice' the focus is on success and satisfaction, whereas in project evaluation the focus tends to be rather on weaknesses, risks, and concerns. In this way, little learning can take place. A transformative event creates an environment conducive to change by focusing first on satisfactions,

and then homing in on a desire to do better.

Individual and collective. Shift between plenary, small groups, pairs/trios and individual work. One of the direct purposes of this alternation is to bring to light aspects that are relevant to the individual as well as the collective: if one deals with collective challenges (improvements) that are not perceived as challenges by the individuals involved, change is unlikely to happen. Engaging the concerns of each individual enhances the likelihood of individual change, and linking those concerns to the collective enhances the likelihood of collective change.

Individual exercises create a respectful context for each participant's perceptions and reflections, while collective exercises help to develop a sense of community and connection in dealing with collective and individual issues. Together, they address the 'I' and 'We' needs of participants,

enabling them to focus more clearly on the 'It'. (See "Group dynamics" on page 83.)

Analysis and synthesis. This alternation addresses a particular cultural issue i.e. the overwhelming tendency to analyse and pull things apart, by complementing it with its counterpart: recognizing patterns that link the parts. Synthesis is essentially a process of recognizing underlying patterns, enabling both problems and solutions to be grouped, understood at a new level, and used as a basis for action.

Hard stuff and soft stuff. Yes it's important to get practical, make plans, marshall resources. And, it's important to stay in touch with the dreams and the visions too, to ensure that action takes us where we want to go. See for instance the Dragon Dreaming method in the Toolkit: hosting-transformation.eu.

Flexibility vs plans

When is it 'right' to stick to the pre-planned program, and when to deviate from it in response to what happens in the group?

There is no simple answer to this question, yet it is at the heart of empowering facilitation. Think of it like this:

- You have an ambition to complete a particular process during the allotted time
- You have made detailed plans to 'fit' all the process components into the time
- Now you have a dilemma: the process is proving really meaningful, *and* it's taking more time than you planned

Ask yourself:

1. Is there an easy way to round off the ongoing component and move on?
2. Is there a way to eliminate some later steps and still reach a satisfactory outcome?
3. If not: how can you engage

the participants in re-planning?

To test Option 1 it may be sufficient to say something like "This is really interesting, I'd love for it to go on for longer, but then we'll miss out on some other interesting things later in the program. If we move on now, do you think you could continue the discussion over lunch?"

For Option 2 you may need to spend some break time re-calculating, and to come up with two or (max) three options for the group to choose from.

To activate Option 3 you might build on a question like that for Option 1, and tell participants: "This is what we have planned for this afternoon. What's your opinion — would you like to cut something out in order to continue our present discussion?"

If opinions are divided it may well be possible to split the group. Easiest if you have a co-facilitator (or two), but

even without you could suggest: "Those of you who wish to continue the present discussion, I propose you go to break-out room x and come back at xx.xx. In the plenary at that time we'll ask you for your conclusions, and bring you up to speed on what the rest of us have been doing." Make sure, in the plenary, that you bring the focus of the event into... focus so that the contributions of each group are clear.

Time-keeping

To make this kind of replanning possible, and indeed to bring any event to a successful conclusion, the facilitator needs a keen awareness of time. For instance, group work needs to be brought to a graceful conclusion; individual participants need to be encouraged to take the space they need — without encroaching on the needs of others.

With some methods, time-keeping is built into the structure. See, for instance, Open Space

Technology and Synergy Meetings in the Toolbox (hosting-transformation.eu). Even such structural support is only effective when the facilitator sets a good example by adhering to the rules.

Introducing an exercise

One of the key skills of a facilitator is that of introducing an exercise. It's an ongoing challenge: there will never come a time when every participant immediately understands exactly what you mean (and does it); the opportunities for misunderstanding are infinite. In other words, every event is an opportunity to hone this particular skill.

If an exercise is new to you, write out the instructions and practice on some willing person. Do they think the instructions are clear? Attractive? What happens when they try following them? Modify accordingly!

It's an invitation

When introducing an exercise, it is useful to give the instructions in the form of an *invitation*. Then ask the two salient questions:

- Is it clear what I am inviting you to do?
- Do you want to do it?

The second question is often skipped, not least because many facilitators don't see the instructions as an invitation. Try it and see. What do you do if someone says 'no'? The first time, no-one will; when you've used the phrase a few times, possibly someone

will; and they may be prepared to motivate their response.

If their reason sounds good to you and to at least some of the other participants, this may be an opportunity to re-think. Perhaps call a 10-minute mini-break and invite those saying 'no' to join you to talk about alternatives.

Otherwise a good response can be something like: "That's fine. Let's get the others started, then you and I can talk about what you might do instead."

Multiple-part exercises

If an exercise takes place in several stages, it's worth considering introducing it stage by stage. With for instance Nominal Group Technique (NGT), which has three steps, you can

- Say that it has three steps
- Say that now you will give instructions for Step 1; and that you will give instructions for 2 and 3 once 1 has been completed, so that there is no need for detailed note-taking in advance

"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive."

— Dalai Lama

- Ask whether this is acceptable

This is not always appropriate or indeed necessary. When introducing Fleck's Synergy Method (see "Empowering meetings" on page 84), which also has three steps, it is generally appropriate to go through them all to show how they hang together, and document the introduction on a flipchart or in another form that is available for participants to consult throughout the exercise. The difference is that with NGT the explanations are not so simple either to present or to document on a single flipchart.

It's also possible to prepare posters in advance and have them prominently displayed throughout. This is for example one of the methods used with Open Space Technology, in combination with spoken introductions and clarifications by the facilitator.

A facilitation team

It can be both challenging and inspiring to work in a team of facilitators. There are numerous models that can be appropriate, depending on circumstances, for instance

1. One or more 'plenary' facilitators, with co-facilitators in charge of one break-out group each; especially appropriate for highly interactive events with many small-group exercises.
2. A single team of facilitators sharing responsibility for both plenum and groups; can be particularly useful for a team of trainee facilitators under supervision.
3. For events easily segmented into topics (e.g. per half-day), one facilitator takes overall responsibility while one or a pair of facilitators may take responsibility for each segment, both planning and delivery.
4. For online or hybrid events,

a team with different roles for plenary, chat, and break-out activities.
5. For dispersed events, one facilitator per location, with a coordinating team of at least two: the overall content facilitator, and the communications facilitator.

Roles

In all models it should be crystal clear who has overall responsibility for content and delivery; including cutover points when/ if the responsibility is transferred from one facilitator to another.

For all but the smallest groups it's also good practice to ensure access to technical support, whether 'external' or part of the facilitation group. Who steps in when the projector fails to project or the internet connection dies?

Agreements

In general the team needs to discuss and agree about such topics as

- How to communicate and share tasks, during both preparation and delivery
- How to introduce small-group exercises
- How to cooperate and adjust while the processes are taking place
- How to share decision making on the spot, including how to engage participants in any re-planning (see also "Flexibility vs plans" on page 65)
- For hybrid events, how to synchronize between on-site and on-line facilitators

It is also strongly recommended that the team should plan a time after each event to review, evaluate and learn.

The facilitator as performer

Facilitation is in some respects a performance. This is not to say that the facilitator assumes a 'foreign' role; on the contrary, it's important to be oneself. However, you can call on all and every talent you may have as a performer to reinforce your message.

- If you have or can develop expressive *body language*, this is a great way to communicate which bypasses and thus reinforces the intellectual message.
- In any case you can *move about*: on the podium, if that's where you are, but even better among the participants. Just make sure you don't make it difficult for some people to hear or see you.
- Vary your *tone of voice*. It's easier to keep focus on what you're saying when you vary speaking faster/slower, louder/ quieter. Practice!
- *Ask questions, listen to the answers*. And don't be afraid

of *silence,* either as a pause in what you're saying, to allow participants time to 'digest', or in response to a question.
- If you have talents as an *artist* or *musician*, don't be afraid to use them, for example in documenting outcomes of group work or setting the scene before a session.

This is related to the 'Rhythm and flow' section above. Find the variations with which you feel comfortable and incorporate them gradually into your praxis.

Such 'performance' doesn't necessarily mean putting yourself centre stage. Indeed you might intentionally want to "take less space" in order to make space for the group to shine and find its own voice. This, at times, might imply sitting at the group's level or lower, lowering your voice, refraining from performing songs or jokes or demonstrating other talents. Indeed if you feel moved to tell an anecdote or sing

"PERFORMANCE" TO REINFORCE YOUR MESSAGE

1. **Practice expressive body language**

2. **Move about**

3. **Vary your tone of voice**

4. **Ask questions, listen to the answers**

5. **Artistic & musical abilites**

a song, it's good practice to ask permission of the group to do so; this can in turn encourage them to make a similar offering.

An additional dimension is invoking this flexibility in your participants; and indeed to call on such dimensions to mitigate fear of failure. One example from a course for potential stage artists:

All participants are invited to do all three disciplines, theatre and singing and dancing, no matter if they are coming from dance or music or theatre. This way everyone can have the experience of shining in at least one area and to struggle in another area — to get away from feeling bad about an area they are not good at and from comparing. Instead this gives the opportunity to mark their own individual progress.

Working with an interpreter

Working with an interpreter places special demands on both facilitator and interpreter — and offers some opportunities. We are not concerned here with simultaneous interpretation of the kind often supplied at big events; but with consecutive interpretation, where the interpreter stands next to the facilitator and translates after each 'chunk' of speech by the facilitator and each question or comment from a participant.

Consequences for design

When designing an event where an interpreter will be used, you need to allow more time for everything in plenary: between 150 and 200% of the time you would normally allow. This also applies to group exercises calling for interpretation, if any.

Choice of interpreter

If working in a new place, try for an opportunity to interview candidates; or see whether someone whose judgement you trust can do it on your behalf.

The first criterion is of course fluency in both (or all) languages. This is not just a matter of 'the language', but of the specific use of language in your line of work. If it's not possible to test, then testimonies from others doing similar work are useful.

One criterion can be simply how comfortable you feel with them — which may mean, the extent to which they resemble you. You have your own personal style as a facilitator, and if they are sufficiently close to be able to mimic it, they will serve you well. And vice versa. For instance, if you have strong body language, you don't want a physically-rigid interpreter.

Sometimes the organizer of an event will suggest that one or more of the participants do the interpretation. This can work but generally it's not a good idea: partly they are probably not trained in consecutive interpretation, which is a very specific skill; partly they will not be able to participate fully. It can, however, work with a few individuals who (in addition to outstanding linguistic skills) have participated in a similar event previously, and perhaps themselves are planning to train as a facilitator.

Preparations

Send as much as you reasonably can to the interpreter in advance. This might include:

- The invitation to the event, including any background information
- Any presentation materials you will use
- Any handouts or other materials for distribution at the event
- An outline program, including any standard instructions for exercises

Invite the interpreter to ask questions or to comment. Some words may invite more than one translation to the other language, some may be used in a very special sense (jargon — which is useful as a brief way of expressing something more complex).

Doing it

Most professional interpreters have an amazingly good memory. Nevertheless: keep your 'speech chunks' as short as you can. While the interpreter is speaking, keep an eye on the participants: does it look as though they understand? Be prepared to ask them questions to probe comprehension.

It may happen that the interpreter asks your permission to reformulate something, to fit better with the local culture or for other reasons of comprehension. Normally this is to be encouraged, but not always. If, for instance, you need to test the validity of a statement like 'you can't do that here': very often as a stranger you can get away with doing things that would otherwise be questioned, which may indeed provide transformative moments.

It may also happen that they do it without asking, with or without telling you! Keep an eye on the responses. Do the participants laugh or frown in unexpected places?

Is there an upside?

There are a number of advantages to working with an interpreter, even if they don't completely outweigh the lack of direct communication.

Firstly, explaining to the interpreter forces you to review what you actually want to happen. Consequently, both presentations and introductions to exercises

may be improved.

Secondly, it gives you a chance to compare the reactions of those who do understand what you say, and those who need to wait for the translation. This helps you to understand and assess the work of the interpreter as well as to refine your own contribution.

This second point also means that some participants have a chance to hear each message twice; as well as giving extra time to reflect for those who only understand one of the two (or more) languages.

Thirdly, there is also more time to reflect in Q & A sessions with the participants. Make good use of it!

Online facilitation

The material in this section is taken from the report *Online Transformative Learning,* and its companion guidebook *Online Alchemy,* the results of a project of the same name.

A major finding of the project was that the role of facilitator is both special, and crucial to success with online learning. A second was the critical nature of technical support and training.

There are some disadvantages to working online…

A lot of people (e.g. in Hungary) don't have a separate office at home, not even a room where they can be alone.

When it is about online time other family members, pets, friends

can appear.

Some may not even have a desk or convenient place to sit.

Time management can also be a big problem.

POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES TO ONLINE WORK

- Increased possibility for connection
- Financial cost
- Inclusion
- Integration time
- Variation
- Flexibility
- Safety & boundaries
- Facilitation & communication
- Potential for your own growth
- Unforeseen possibilities

…but also potential advantages

Surprisingly much from the offline environment can be carried out online with similar functions and effects. And then there are aspects that are *better* online. What are those digital advantages?

1. Increased possibilities for connection

Although evident and self-explanatory, the online potential of connecting people cannot be overstated. Getting together with others is the fertile soil of our growth. With ease, in pyjama pants and a double click, we can transcend the limitations of geography and connect in ways that cross other, less tangible boundaries:

- …those inherent in our hierarchically organized societies and working lives (disciplines, sectors, rank)

- …those that are culturally

determined (lifestyle, modes of expression, lines drawn between the formal and the informal e.g., when interacting via an avatar or alias)

- …those between 'work' and 'life' (eg our personal space can become visible)

Furthermore, new opportunities open to form interpersonal relations for instance through access to a wider range of mentors, coaches, therapists. These advantages become available not only to our participants/students, but also to us, their facilitators.

2. Financial cost

If we take hardware and software as given, the cost of bringing people together online is usually low. This allows for more flexibility regarding the number of sessions, duration of the program, or length of the gatherings — in short, better conditions for

learning.

3. Inclusion

Not having to take geography into account already makes a world of difference for supporting inclusion, but it doesn't stop there. Other thresholds for participation are also lowered, for example for those who have disabilities, illnesses, or are stuck in quarantine.

And here is a riddle for the digital age: Who is invisible, but is still potentially feeling more included in an online group, than someone who is visible? Answer: a participant with their camera turned off, a person who risks being discriminated against, judged, or excluded based on physical appearance.

4. Integration time

Online follow-ups and sessions for integrating new

understanding and skills regularly and over a longer period of time is a vastly superior strategy for learning, compared to a once or twice-off workshop face to face.

5. Variation

At little or no extra cost, participants can be offered a variety of experiences and indeed choices to suit their lifestyles and preferred learning modes. When planning program design and structure, there is a large smorgasbord of choices:

- Individual work with asynchronous/self-study learning platforms (e.g. MOOCs, videos)
- Synchronous webinars, events, and conferences
- Peer coaching, learning buddy systems
- Individual or group coaching by the facilitator

They can be further extended by combination with offline elements, either simultaneously (hybrid) or in separate events (blended learning).

As for materials, some verbal items can be made available as a choice of text, audio, or video. When using written and physical materials for an exercise, there is sometimes the option to distribute them in advance; but there is also the option to invite and enable participants to locate suitable materials in their own environment, making the exercise more personally relevant and the experience of the group more diverse.

The possibility of locating course materials in their 'home' environment (whether literally at home, or in the participant's own workspace) is just one example of the opportunities that online learning offers to bridge the gap between learning and doing. For instance, a workplace program can bring in aspects of the workplace and an environmental program can bring in aspects of each participants' actual environment, whether in the community or at home.

6. Flexibility

Some things are more inconvenient and outrightly disturbing offline, such as participants physically moving around. Online there is more physical flexibility for generating comfort, and in connection with the actual work and learning. Attending a meeting on platforms such as Zoom, you can sit or stand, walk and talk (even outside), stretch and move around in the (presumed) comfort of your own home or workspace. It is recommended that such behaviour is agreed upon within the group, and that a message is left in the chat if someone leaves the group.

Synchronous group work has advantages online. You can enable flexible choice of group rooms, as well as have participants move freely between breakout rooms, or between breakout rooms and the plenary, without the disruption this would entrain at a physical event.

7. Safety and boundaries

The possibility of being anonymous or distant from other participants potentially reduces fear. A sense of reduced interpersonal risk and increased safety may lead participants to dare more: ask more questions, have instructions repeated; and it removes some of the barriers to engaging in significant inner work, such as having more intimate exchanges with each other. Also, it can be easier to respect one's own boundaries when the online environment offers less peer pressure, and for example opt out of activities and exercises.

It can be useful to set common frames for the workshop, such as asking participants to arrange to be in a room where they are alone. it might be highly disturbing if family members or others walk around behind the screen — it creates the sense that I have no idea who else listens to me sharing potentially very personal stuff.

Even more broadly: agree beforehand how the group deals with family members or others talking to participants when they are online. Is it for instance OK if a parent steps out for a few minutes when a child asks for something? If yes ,make it clear. If not, decide how to deal with these situations, as they are very common when people participate from home.

8. Facilitation and communication

The obvious inconvenience online is the loss of touch, smell and seeing 360 degrees in 3D. A couple of the senses are helped, though. Providing that the technology is adequate, it can be easier to hear each other online, especially with headphones. Video often allows us to see each others' faces better in gallery view and speaker view than in a lecture hall or classroom. This makes a big difference for the deaf or hard of hearing who read lips.

Facilitators also benefit from a better overview of people's faces and their reactions when they fit into one online conference screen. Reactions can also take the shape of non verbal communication like comments in a chat, emojis like hearts or fireworks and confetti, or physical hand gestures shown on screen like thumbs up or applause. People are not as instantly expressive offline.

9. Fertile soil for your own growth?

The online environment may entail increased self knowledge, or self development of the facilitator. Having to take the role of a learner when adapting to online facilitation may result in some personal insights, and perhaps more empathy for participants.

A hypothesis is that the time and effort invested in learning to become a good online facilitator in turn benefits offline practices. Also, the digital landscape forces us into a certain measure

of uncertainty, and hopefully increases our tolerance for it. The ability to handle uncertainty and loss of control is fertile ground for transformative learning.

10. Unforeseen possibilities

The forced online fraternising induced by the Covid-19 pandemic brought an expanded experience of what is possible. The full potential of the online context was hard to see — until we did, and had to. Could we use this realisation for other needed changes as well? We are only limited by our thinking and habits of mind. As the head of an educational institution exclaimed after its programs went online due to the pandemic: *So much more is possible than we were able to envision!*

The 'home alone' effect

For the participant there are both positive and negative aspects of being at home alone. One university reported, in Online Transformative Learning:

"The personal development of introverted students benefited from the online situation. They came back to class blooming. The hypothesis is that it's an effect of a safer and peaceful space at home combined with more individual work. A reflection is that they normally took other students (and others' feelings) too much into

account. Now they could and were forced to focus on themselves."

Some facilitators also report benefits for themselves. Others, on the other hand, report high stress levels when being thrust abruptly into a "home alone" situation and expected to simply do online what they previously did face-to-face. Their experience highlights the importance of offering training and support in the use of the technical platforms, at the very least.

"Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion."

– BELL HOOKS

Software as an empowering factor

For some experienced facilitators, being confronted with new software can initially lead to frustration. However there seems no doubt that software, judiciously chosen and skilfully used, can smooth the path to empowerment.

Some risks are equally clear, for instance:

- The consequences of poor software choice, i.e. mismatched to the needs and capability of the participants (or the facilitators)
- Lack of skill in delivery, particularly the absence of any necessary training and practice for participants and facilitators alike

Choosing and using software

How may you find the 'right' software/technology for your online empowerment work? There

are some simple rules of thumb, presented in *Online Alchemy*.

Keep it simple!

When it comes to technology, theory and practice do not always align as expected. The interplay between software and users is a sensitive matter. Aim for balance between digital literacy of facilitators and participants, complexity of software, and applied methodology.

A general recommendation is to reduce the number of tools to a minimum and keep things simple — or introduce them thoroughly by providing introduction material, tutorial videos and ensuring solid onboarding of participants preferably with the whole group at the same time.

It is essential for the facilitator(s) to know how to handle the software and to anticipate what features will be used for what

purposes.

Ask the right questions

When choosing software, take the time to survey options for the type of event, the nature of the participants, and the potential of the various technical options — including your own familiarity with them. For checklists, see Online Alchemy report at hostingtransformation.eu.

"The technology you use impresses no one. The experience you create with it is everything."

– SEAN GERETY

You and your team

Many practitioners report on the need for support when facilitating all but small groups. The types of support usually mentioned are two:

- Technical support, including handling break-out groups and responding to technical questions from participants
- Co-facilitator keeping a check on chat-box and other signals from participants

With a small group or with a very experienced facilitator these roles may not be necessary. But practitioners strongly advise starting from the assumption that they will be needed. In particular for hybrid events, with participants both online and physically present, the support roles are essential. See also "A facilitation team" on page 68.

I had some stressful experiences with hybrid events — technical stuff rarely worked as it should, and then balancing fixing that and maintaining group focus meanwhile is challenging.

—Zsuzsa Vastag

Careful preparation

Preparing for an online facilitation task arguably requires more time than preparing for a face-to-face event. It also requires creative anticipation of possible issues that can arise, e.g. technical problems with audio and video, participants not able to deal with the software used, etc.

Preparation of material to be used by participants in breakouts also requires more time, not least because expanding on explanations in response to questions can disrupt the flow.

Examples of preparations before and during workshop days:

- Host a meeting before the meeting in which participants can get to know and practice the technical platform and apps. This reduces the focus on tech matters during the event itself.
- Explore mutual expectations
- Decide on clear roles that are co-constructed in the first meeting and preferably described in a mutually agreed document
- Prepare for how to handle surprises
- Meet with a steering group after each day to evaluate and prepare the next day

"Clearer online makes it better offline." It is widely agreed that the careful preparation needed to be invested in online work in turn benefits offline preparation practices.

Ongoing support and multi-part, blended events

Offering individual or small-group support to participants before, between and after sessions is not exclusive to the online environment, but in an online environment emerges with clarity as something to be planned, structured and facilitated. Such support can of course itself also be provided online; when offline, it brings the event into the 'blended' category.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of such support for empowerment, since it adds two critical dimensions to: continuity over a longer period; and the opportunity to 'dig deeper' into the personal ramifications of the topic studied. In addition, a heightened level of support helps to ensure that the 'safe enough space' is held beyond the training events.

Several forms of support are reported by practitioners, including:

- Preparatory exercises in the form of, for example, a video to view, questions to consider, or observations to make
- Peer coaching
- (Self-defined) tasks for participants to undertake and report on
- Individual or group coaching by the facilitator, much more accessible in an online environment.

"True power is the power to empower others."

— Rhymefest

Checklist: How likely is it to be successful online?

"That the online environment per se is no obstacle to deep personal work is evidenced by the fact that psychotherapy, both individual and in groups, is successfully carried out online."

"We can achieve a surprising degree of team-building… by online-only means, and in less than two full days' time."

—Online Transformative Learning: an enquiry

Some success factors in addition to those mentioned above under "Software as an empowering factor" on page 77:

- Emphasize for participants the need to secure a quiet, private space for the online sessions.
- Plan sessions for a maximum of 2 hours, and a maximum of 4 hours in any one day.
- Pay attention to achieving consistent, high audio quality. "Audio is more important than the camera".
- Be clear about your desired outcomes, including how you will measure success.
- Invite links to the physical world, either during a session (eg show an object on camera), or between sessions.
- Introduce different modes of listening, and set an example of non-judgemental listening.
- Hybrid events, with some participants physically together while others are simultaneously present online, are challenging; work closely with a co-facilitator, so that one of you can focus on the face-to-face participants and the other on the online participants.

Notes

E. GROUPS

Group dynamics

The life of a group – I, We, and It

In any group, three major topics are always on the agenda in the minds of the members. We can call them I, We and It.

I is about who I am and how I feel right now. It is also about I–thou (one-on-one) relationships within the group.

We is about our behaviour towards each other, for example our meeting culture, decision processes, quality aspirations… everything to do with our common relations.

It is about what we do together, our collective task or focus.

'It' is often what appears to be on the agenda, while I and We are hidden under the surface. It is common to try to be super-effective from the beginning, discouraging any deviation from It. Under the surface, I and We lie in wait. Those unexpressed topics can pop up and drain time and energy from the work of the group, which may remain forever stuck at an ineffective "beginner" stage.

If, instead, we consciously allow I and We topics to surface, we might find that the group initially spends a lot of time on these topics, and less on It. But over time the balance will shift and the group will develop into an effective group where people enjoy meeting, manifest creativity and feel that they can bring up topics of importance to them. A group with a positive dynamic is learning how to satisfy these needs. We learn how to satisfy our individual needs, our needs as a group, our need to accomplish It.

In relation to what constitutes ethical or sustainable development, "The startling fact is that ecological wisdom does not consist in understanding how to live in accord with nature; it consists in understanding how to get humans to agree on how to live in accord with nature." (Wight, 2020). According to this view, sustainable development is primarily a social rather than a technical question. Put differently: I and We are at least as important as It.

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

—Proverb from Burkina Faso

Empowering meetings

General principles

There are many books and courses about how to run meetings. Some basic rules are generally proposed:

1. In the invitation state clearly

- The aim of the meeting, what you want to achieve
- What time the meeting starts *and ends*

2. Start and end the meeting on time. It is more important to pay attention to the people who come, than to people who are not there.

3. If people don't know each other, start with introductions.

4. Encourage quiet people to talk.

5. Make space for all participants to be actively involved e.g. by a good balance of speaking and listening or breakout groups.

6. Leave time for an evaluation of the meeting.

With these guidelines you can achieve a lot, but it is still common for people to find meetings boring, ineffective, even a waste of time. Yet there are specific techniques that turn every meeting into an effective and usually enjoyable event with the potential to empower each and every participation. They add such characteristics as

7. Engage *all* participants in designing the agenda, including not only topics but how much time to spend on each.

8. Have the meeting facilitated, by an experienced member or by a professional who ensures that each agenda topic is run by the person or people most concerned (topic owner).

9. Encourage each topic owner to use whatever methods are best suited to the topic: discussion, lecture, exercise…

10. If there is a chairperson, take the weight off their shoulders with the help of the facilitator.

Specific techniques

Several such methods are included in the Toolbox (see hosting-transformation.eu):

- Two major methods that incorporate all these principles are Fleck's Synergy Method® for small-to-medium groups, and Open Space Technology for medium-to-large groups. They overlap somewhere between 15-30 participants.
- Nominal Group Technique, which incorporates many of the principles, and also supports synthesis rather than analysis (see page 67).

- Fast Prioritization is highly empowering and participatory.

Ongoing groups

A facilitator will sometimes be called upon to act more as a coach; not least each time participants are invited to do group work. Additionally, many empowerment programs find it useful to establish small groups that meet regularly over time: ongoing groups, which benefit from coaching when this is possible.

There are many approaches and techniques for organizing coaching in an ongoing group, which can provide valuable continuity as well as establishing a culture of mutual support. Here we mention only three:
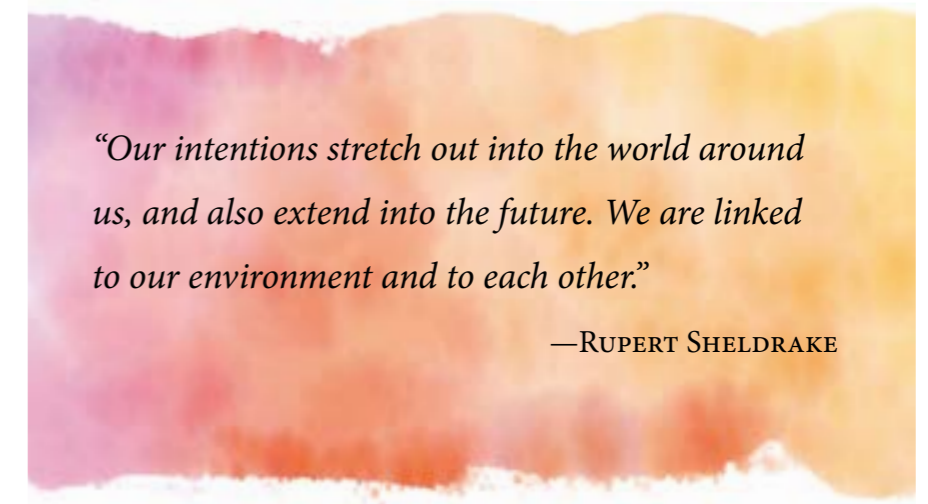
"Our intentions stretch out into the world around us, and also extend into the future. We are linked to our environment and to each other."

—Rupert Sheldrake

- Dialogue Circle
- Community of Practice, CoP
- Synergy Group

Dialogue circle

A regularly occurring dialogue circle may be convened for many reasons, personal or professional. There are many practices, words and expressions to remind us that a group of people in purposeful, ongoing dialogue may create a 'group entity' with capabilities beyond the sum of its parts. This is particularly true when the group acknowledges dimensions beyond the purely intellectual, and actively brings emotional and spiritual qualities into the circle.

Dialogue circles take many forms. One is the Community of Learners introduced by Warren Ziegler. As he taught, a dialogue circle can help its synergy by systematically engaging in mutual praxis. Some key praxis questions are

- What is it I/we am/are doing?
- Why do I/we do it?
- How does it feel to do it?

Circle meetings can be face-to-face, or indeed – for instance in Deep Listening – back-to-back.

Or they can take place by telephone and sometimes by other means; a combination of telephone and web site/chat is one possibility. The non-physical meetings are easiest when the people have earlier met personally.

In addition to Praxis, there are methods that are conducive to synergy. One of them is Fleck's Synergy Method®, a method that is not only effective but also satisfying — and evolutionary, in that a group consistently using it tends to enter a steep learning curve. It was designed for face-to-face meetings, as described below, Synergy Groups, but is easily adapted for online meetings.

Some online groups develop protocols to ease the dialogue. One is similar to a talking stick: when a general question is put to the group, members reply in a predetermined sequence (for instance, alphabetical or conference-list order). Each speaker explicitly 'hands' the stick to the next on the list. It is OK to 'pass', or to ask for the stick on the next round.

Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a passion for something that they do, and who interact regularly to improve their abilities through collaboration, group exercises, knowledge sharing and empathetic listening. They are meant to develop learning capabilities, build and exchange knowledge, and most specifically, lay the groundwork for identifying the community's area of expertise and interest. (ref Biester & Mehlmann, 2020)

Synergy Groups

Erhard Fleck, originator of Fleck's Synergy Method® for meetings (described in the Toolbox), originally developed the method for the purpose of group coaching.

In its 'classic' form a Synergy Group consists of six people, usually three men and three women from different walks of life, and meets for two hours about every six weeks with one or sometimes two coaches. Any (or no) topic(s), personal or professional, can be put on the agenda by any member.

The method has proved extraordinarily effective, not least as an arena where participants learn mutual support skills.

Dramatisation

In specific group situations, a method that dramatizes a problem can be more effective than mere words. Methods range from simple role-play to Gestalt, sociodrama, and Forum Theatre.

Group outreach: designing a campaign

A model for social diffusion

How new behaviour spreads through a population is much researched, and often referred to as 'social diffusion'. From this research has emerged, among other things, the concept of the 'change agent'.

Like an amoeba?

Alan AtKisson has compared the social diffusion process to the movement of an amoeba: the amoeba extends a part of itself in the direction it wants to go, and as more and more of 'it' tips in that direction it finally reaches a tipping point where the nucleus shifts.
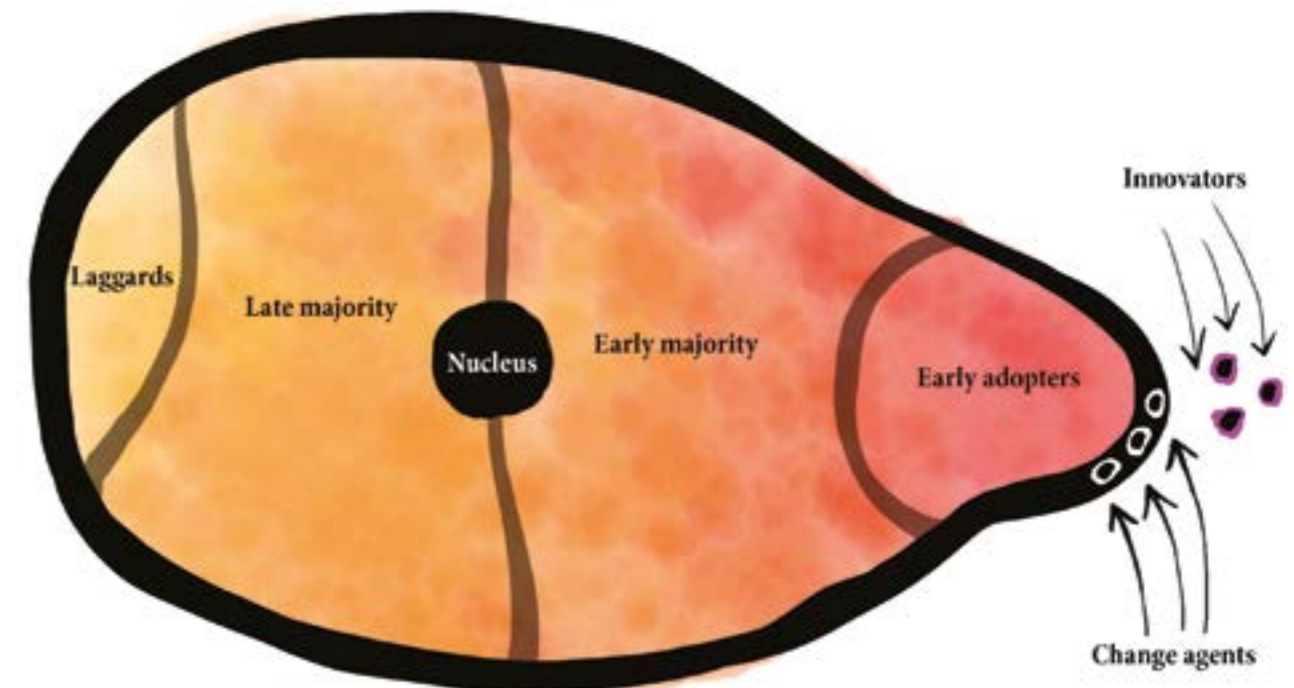
Checklist for outreach

Is the desired innovation clearly and unambiguously described?

Where are you/where is the group on this map? (See the Amoeba map on the previous page.)

1. Innovators looking for change agents

2. Change agents looking for early adopters

3. Early adopters aiming to engage an early majority

- Include network-mapping in the program. Encourage the participants to use invitational words like 'pioneering' and 'experimenting'.

- Support participants to use expressions like 'beta test', being a (market) leader, being first.

- Support participants to use expressions like 'well tested', 'evidence-based', mainstream; appeal to not being last.

Consider including in the program such skills as public speaking, negotiation, stakeholder analysis.

Notes

F. LEADERSHIP

Empowering leadership

It is easy to see the ideal empowerment process as so participatory that it is virtually leaderless – indeed, many development projects have been based on an assumption of this kind. But this is to confuse leadership with domination. Leadership – empowering leadership – is vital for sustained development. Without leadership, change processes tend to dissipate, disintegrate or stagnate.

Leadership, in this context, needs to be seen as 'an episodic affair' (Joseph Rost, 1993): being a leader is not a job description, it's something done by one or more people as a result of their passionate desire to help a process. So it's a long way from conventional ideas of management. Nonetheless, it's a key aspect of the tasks of anyone undertaking to manage an empowering process – for instance, a sustainable development project.

New ideas about the organization of work are emerging – for instance, holacracy, sociocracy, and evolving forms of cooperation; as well as new leadership concepts and metaphors, for example servant, host, quantum, peer, catalytic, dolphin leadership. Despite the wide range, all lead to one conclusion: the need for personal awareness and development on the part of the leader – and the led.

Approaches to empowering leadership

Leadership is needed to inspire, to create focus, to foster discovery and creativity, to align intentions, to keep moving, to keep faith with visions and values. It takes some highly skilled navigation to steer between extremes; to inspire without dominating, to create focus without manipulation, to foster discovery and

creativity without losing focus, to align intentions without becoming deaf to inconveniently divergent views, to keep moving at a pace that suits those most affected. To keep faith.

Since there are not enough Gandhis or Martin Luther Kings to go around, the rest of us who may take a leadership role could do with some pointers.

Quantum leadership?

Interesting inspiration can be found in quantum physics. Everything is a wave – that is, potential – until attention is focused on it. At that point it collapses into a particle – that is, one (and only one) of its potential forms becomes manifest. One conclusion for empowering leadership can be the power of holding back on attention (decisions, beliefs, the 'one way' to do things) so that many potential futures can attract attention and be seriously

considered.

Another concept from quantum physics is that of 'tangled hierarchies'. In the quantum world – where leaps are not only possible but frequent – there is no obvious up and down, leader and led, master and servant. Indeed a prerequisite for quantum leaps seems to be an ease of flow from one role to another; which fits with Rost's concept of 'episodic' leadership.

Catalytic leadership

Another metaphor from science: the leader as catalyst. John Robb writes:

"Unlike traditional leaders, catalysts don't organize structure, aggregate power, and give direction. Instead, they serve as

- *Connectors*. Able to map, mine and connect loose networks of people with similar needs/interests.
- *Onsite helpers and trust builders*. Willing to work with people on the ground in the role of helper. Forge emotional bonds and encourage trust.
- *Supporters*. They let the network navigate itself forward by walking away from leadership responsibilities/roles. They trust the network and embrace its ambiguity."

Serving first

"Train people to create relationships by having them help people", says Rost. It can also be said that a desire to be of service is the starting point for empowering leadership. What can be achieved by education is a growing understanding of how 'help' can be constructive – the Essene concept of makikh: 'I strive to understand your true needs and to meet them, if practical without causing harm to others or myself. I treat my own needs with the same respect.'

In this spirit, Robert Greenleaf (1904-1990) coined the term 'servant leadership'. In describing it, he put his finger on a point that is central to all forms of empowerment, not only leadership as generally understood, but also coaching, educating, parenting, or 'just' being an empowering friend:

"It begins with the natural feelings that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant — first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served."

"The servant-leader is servant first… He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first…" Fortunately he went on to say that 'Between them there are shadings and blends that
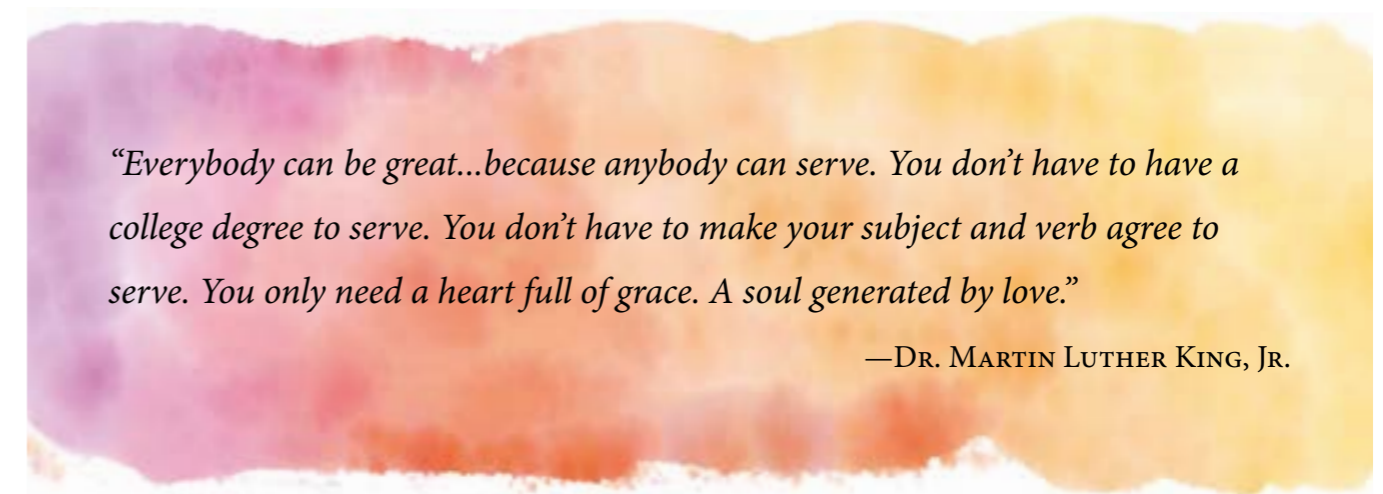
"Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

are part of the infinite variety of human nature.' So it's not black and white, but we need to have a desire to be of service that is at least as strongly developed as our need to shine.

Greenleaf even proposed a test:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, *more likely themselves to become servants*? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?

Community leaders

Gwendolyn Hallsmith is the author of *The Key to Sustainable Cities*. She too underlines the need for 'leadership with service as its primary objective'. She builds on the concept of the servant leader, quoting Larry Spears on the ten characteristics of such a leader:

1. Listening receptively

2. Acceptance of others and empathy with them

3. Foresight and intuition

4. Awareness and perception

5. Highly developed powers of persuasion

6. Ability to conceptualize and communicate concepts

7. Ability to exercise a healing influence

8. Building community

9. Practising the art of contemplation

10. Recognition that servant

leadership begins with the desire to change oneself

Hallsmith adds: 'One person can't really change anyone else.' She points out that laws, jails, education, sermons, canvassing, advertising, and wars all represent attempts by one group of people to change another. But '… those efforts are only successful when the people on whom the change is imposed agree to it.'

The leader as host

An additional dimension is offered by the metaphor of the leader as host. From the website of The Host Leadership Community:

The shortcomings of existing metaphors of leadership based on the leader-as-hero are becoming increasingly clear. A clear-cut alternative, leader-as-servant, also suffers from problems of misinterpretation.

The key role of the host — some-one who receives and entertains

guests — is deeply embedded in human society worldwide. This is a very rich metaphor. It is a role of which we all have first hand experience — who has not been invited into someone's home, or invited others? — and which lies at the heart of many cultural and spiritual traditions. It builds and expands on the ideas of servant leadership, while making quite clear the responsive and interactional nature of leadership in a complex and changing world.

A host is someone who receives or entertains guests. Hosts sometimes have to act heroically: stepping forward, planning, inviting, introducing, providing. They also act in service: stepping back, encouraging, giving space, joining in. We all know good hosting (and good guesting) at an instinctive level, and this carries over into leading groups of all types and sizes.

'Leaving no-one behind'

Yet another perspective with particular relevance for vulnerable groups comes from Pär Larshans:

"During the Second World War, the British relied on Churchill. However, he suffered from depression and possible bipolar disorder. Today, there are many like Winston who don't fit in. These people are not seen as hireable."

But today no society can afford to reject from the labour market everyone who is unusual, not only for humanitarian reasons but also because

- Globally, population is aging and will do so even more when population control measures take firmer hold; the proportion of people of working age is fast dwindling

PRINCIPLES OF INNER CHANGE

- Motivation
- Non-attachment to outcome
- Compassion for adversaries
- You are unique
- Letting go of having to figure it all out
- Give space to your inner optimist

- In times of enormous challenges, innovation and creativity are at a premium; often, 'different' people (like Churchill) are at the forefront.

"The key is to have leaders/line managers who can both recruit and balance the abilities of unusual employees. To do that, they need to be enabled to work on their self-awareness."

Inner change

So there's no getting away from it: empowering leadership begins

with the desire to change oneself. Or, to use a phrase from psychosynthesis, *to become more completely oneself*: to move towards a state where knowledge, beliefs, experience and emotions are servants rather than masters.

That 'moving' can take place in many ways. The Satyana Institute has distilled some principles from its experience in training and supporting community leaders. Some are paraphrased below, with minor additions.

Motivation

Transformation from anger/fear/despair to compassion/love/purpose is a vital challenge for today's leaders, and entails a

crucial shift from fighting evil to working for love, and the long-term results are very different, even if the outer activities appear identical.

Non-attachment to outcome

This is difficult to put into practice, yet to the extent that we are attached to the results of our work, we rise and fall with our successes and failures – a sure path to burnout. "Planning is invaluable, but plans are useless." – Winston Churchill

Compassion for adversaries

Demonization makes adversaries more defensive. This does

not mean indulging falsehood or corruption. It means moving from "us/them" thinking to "we" consciousness, from separation to cooperation, recognizing that we humans are ultimately far more alike than we are different. Be hard on the issues, soft on the people; a perpetual learner, constantly challenging your own views. (See Dalai Lama quote on page 95.)

You are unique

Find and fulfill your true calling.

> *"Better to tread your own path, however humbly, than that of another, however successfully."*
>
> – BHAGAVAD GITA

Let go of having to figure it all out

"The first step to wisdom is silence. The second is listening." If you genuinely listen, inwardly as well as to others, and allow yourself to be guided by what you hear, you become an instrument of truth and integrity.

Give space to your inner optimist

Your dreams may manifest in ways different from what you imagine. Don't get trapped by "pessimism concerning human nature." — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

What (else) a leader needs to know

If the above sounds abstract, Rost has plenty more concrete things to say on the topic of leadership training, including:

• Help people understand the nature of real—that is, transformative—change.

• Train people to think about the process that leadership is.

• Train people to think of leadership as a specific relationship of people planning a mutually agreeable, real change.

• Train people to use influence.

• Develop people to work within non-coercive relationships. "Non-coercive means that the people in the relationship are able to respond yes or no to an attempt to influence them."

• Train people to base the leadership relationship on mutual influence, not authority or power.

• Help people build relationships around a sense of purpose instead of other more utilitarian objectives.

• Train people to create relationships by having them help people…

A business perspective

Bill Murray has pursued the *servant leadership* concept into a business context and executive coaching. He writes:

"The servant leader or professional is foremost a servant of the people led... seeing human enhancement as the primary goal. This leadership approach can result in an astonishing increase in zest, creativity, and productivity while bonding people into communities of caring."

Does this really work?, he asks. "Yes, indeed. Just ask Tom's of Maine, Ben & Jerry's, TDIndustries, Interface, and many other companies that have tried it. Studies are now confirming that socially responsible companies that put people on the bottom line too are outperforming traditional companies that put only profits on the bottom line." (1998) This is not to say that economic success is guaranteed or even easy for the servant-led company; but to illustrate that it is at least possible.

How to do this? Murray writes that servant leaders create a culture of trust and collaboration, developing vision and mission in a participative process, and aligning systems, structures and resources with the vision and mission. He continues:

Servant leaders need to do constant inner work for at least three reasons.

1. To be aware of their inner landscape, noticing when they are coming from fear and switching to love.

2. They need discernment and the ability to intuit how to serve others. Sometimes encouragement is needed, and sometimes, assertiveness or tough love.

3. They need to know how to love and nurture themselves.

Chuck Blakeman documents that, more generally, companies run by leaders rather than managers outperform more traditional companies; and not by small margins.

Organising principles

Just as with techniques for conducting meetings, some organizing principles are more empowering than others. It's possible to be an empowering leader within a disempowering structure – but a lot easier when leadership and structure are aligned.

Equally, even in an empowering structure not everyone easily accepts working with an empowering leader, especially when the leader themself is changing. Some people may feel let down by the lack of a 'hero' – or alternatively a suitable scapegoat/villain; they may experience a lack of support, lack of structure. This was described by McGregor as the self-fulfilling aspect of 'Theory X and Theory Y' management: a group accustomed to the security of a relatively autocratic Theory X leader may feel bewildered or betrayed if the leadership changes too quickly

in the direction of Theory Y, i.e. a culture based on trust and responsibility.

So building an empowering structure is not a matter of drawing a new organizational diagram, more to do with patient, step-by-step empowerment of individuals and groups.

Where structure can be designed, or redesigned, more empowering models than the ruling hierarchy are emerging. The cooperative ecosystem developed in Mondragon is one example. Another is 'sociocratic' organization, a Dutch invention that is gradually gaining acceptance. 'Holacracy' seems also to be gaining ground.

And back to facilitation

The overlap between leadership and facilitation is great. Perhaps not all facilitators are leaders, but certainly all leadership benefits from incorporating facilitation as a daily practice.

In fact, anyone embarking on a journey to become a more empowering facilitator is also learning to lead, in the best sense of the word. Let's support each other on this journey.

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Professional materials

- *Empowerment: A Guide for Facilitators*
- Additions to the Hosting Transformation toolbox
- *Live Your Power*: a short video illustrating through mini-interviews the concept of empowerment

Public materials

- A self-empowerment booklet, *Innertopia: Live Your Power*, in numerous languages and formats:
  - Printed in English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish
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