

# Liberating Structures

Liberating structures are frameworks that make it possible for people and organizations to create, do new things, be innovative. These are processes or rules that can be put in place that encourage people to be free, creative, and get results, rather than find themselves oppressed, constrained, confined, or powerless. For things to really change, structural elements need to change is short-lived. forms that make it easy together, making a creativity.

**Jazz** is a good example. structure, people are people who have never met, can sit down and something that is wonderful. The guidelines of jazz are a collection of principles that give enough structure so that people can create together. These same principles make possible infinite degrees of freedom. Different saxophone players playing the same piece can come up with totally unique expressions, each time they play it! Yet, you recognize it, as this piece rather than that piece. There's something about it that gives it a persistent identity, and there is plenty of room for individual creativity.



Through its underlying able to play together. In fact, seen each other, never before jam. They can create

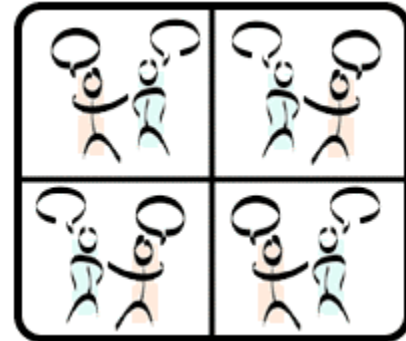
The processes we're using this week are liberating structures for engagement that create the conditions for new ideas to emerge.

# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 Impromptu Speed Networking

This is a great way to generate energy at the beginning of a meeting. It provides an opportunity for everyone to speak early. It gets everyone up and moving so blood is flowing. It signals that this will not be a meeting like all others.

Ask everyone to stand up and move into a space where there is some elbow room. Ask them to leave all their “stuff” behind.



Invite everyone to think individually about a provocative question that relates to the purpose of the meeting or the group. Make it a question that levels the playing field. No right answer. Something everyone has an equal ability to talk about.

Tell participants that when they hear the bell, they should find a partner - someone they know less well than they know others will be most interesting. Invite them to have a conversation about the suggested question. After a short time, 5-10 minutes depending on how much total time you have, ring the bells. Invite participants to find another partner and have another conversation. Put a hand up if you are looking for a partner so you can see who else needs a partner. Three “rounds” are usually good. When the bells ring continuously stop. Invite the group to sit back down or provide instructions for a next piece of the process.

This can be combined with 1-2-4 whole group process.

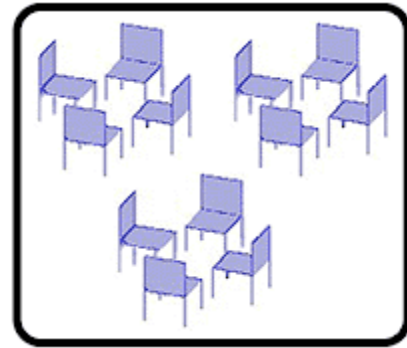
# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 1-2-4-Whole Group

This process is a great way to get into a rich conversation with small groups. It can be done on its own or combined with Impromptu Speed Networking.

### **Individual reflection**

Give participants a short amount of time (a couple of minutes is fine) to reflect on a question or issue. Some may want to jot down a few notes. Others may want to close their eyes. Ask for silence during this time so that individuals really have time and space to get their own thoughts together.



### **Twos**

Ask participants to find one other person and share their ideas. You can invite them to talk to the person next to them or, if you'd like them to move around and mix it up a bit more, ask them to stand up and find a partner. Depending on how much time you have, you could spend 5-10 minutes in pairs.

### **Small Groups**

Invite each of the pairs to join up with one or more pairs to make groups of 4-6. Larger than six is too big to give everyone a chance to talk. Suggest that they each first share interesting things they heard or said in the previous rounds. Then continue with the conversation as a group.

### **Whole group**

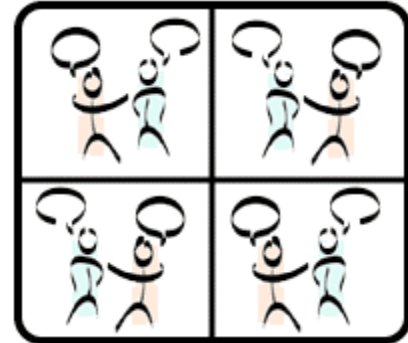
Invite everyone back to the whole group. Ask an open question such as "What insights emerged from your conversation?" or "How has your understanding/ view of the issue changed?"

# Liberating Structures

## ☀ Appreciative Interviews

### Characteristics

Connection Through Empathy  
Personal Excitement, Commitment, Care  
Intense Focus Through “Third Ear” and “Third Eye”  
Generative Questioning, Cueing, Guiding  
Belief vs. Doubt  
Allow for Ambiguity, Generalization and Dreams  
From Monologue to Dialogue



Here are some possible questions to probe further:

Tell me more.

Why do you feel that way?

Why was that important to you?

What was your contribution?

What was the organization doing that helped you do this?

What do think was really making it work?

How has it changed you?

Let the interviewee tell his/her story, please don't tell yours or give your opinion about their experiences.

Take good notes and be listening for great quotes and stories.

Be genuinely curious about their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

Some people will take longer to think about their answers – allow for silence.



# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 **Complex Systems Game: How Many Ways?**

1. Fill a set of lunch bags with 12-25 random objects each - small toys, office supplies, kitchen items, party favors, etc - the more random the better! Items in the bags should be similar but not exactly the same.
2. Give each group a bag and instruct them to group the objects according to some criteria, similar colors, similar functions, similar materials, etc. and array them on a paper without labeling the group.

Try asking them to create several possible organizations and then choose the most “elegant” one. They need to figure out what that means to them.

You could suggest that they try to create an organization that would be EASY to guess or one that is HARD to guess.

You could ask the group to figure out a single “meta” structure that would allow them to organize all the objects into subgroups that relate to a single “super group”

3. Invite groups to look at each other’s results and guess what criteria they used to organize the objects.

## **Debrief**

This exercise provides an opportunity to talk about how people can “see” very different things based on their experience, their initial ideas, the makeup of their group, and a host of other factors. Some questions you might ask:

Is there a “right” answer? Is there a wrong answer?

What influences how a group gets to their solution?

What assumptions did your group make about the objects that influenced how you grouped them?

What was the group process like? How did you “negotiate” to get to your final result?

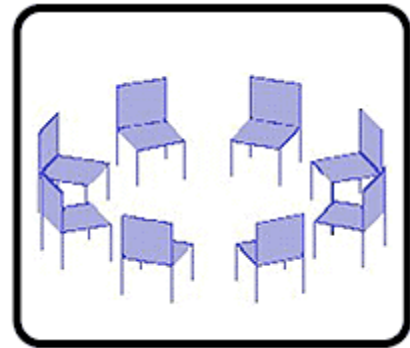
What surprised you about other groups’ solutions?

# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 Discovery & Action Dialogues

Discovery and Action Dialogues (DADs) are conversations with participants designed to:

1. Engage everyone in short, lively conversations to discover the existing solutions they already know and to create new ideas to eliminate and prevent the target problem.
2. Identify volunteers among this group to experiment with solutions and ideas.
3. Provide the facilitators and participants the opportunity to listen to each other and identify barriers to action or change.



What do you know/think about \_\_\_\_\_?

What do YOU do about \_\_\_\_\_?

What keeps you from doing that all the time?

Who/Where have you seen overcome those barriers?

What other ideas do you have about removing barriers? (or supporting desired behavior)

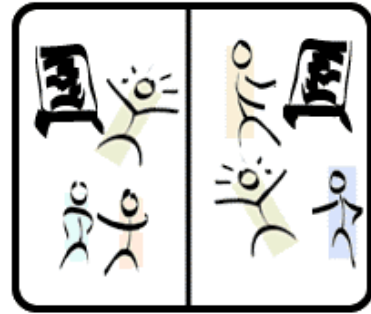
What has to happen next to make that happen?

Who will do what when next?

# Liberating Structures

## ☀️ TRIZ

**TRIZ** is "a problem-solving, analysis and forecasting tool derived from the study of patterns of invention. It was developed by the Soviet inventor and science fiction author Genrich Altshuller and his colleagues in the 1940s. In English it is typically translated as "the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving." It is sometimes used in Six Sigma processes, in project management and risk management systems, and in organizational innovation initiatives. The full TRIZ process includes many problem-solving strategies.



For our purposes we're only going to use one piece of the TRIZ approach.

Think about a difficult and complex problem you need to solve. Describe as many of the key elements of the result you want as you can. Be as specific as possible.

Design a comprehensive system that makes it absolutely impossible to get that result. What policies, practices, and ways of operating would make it 100% certain that there is no way any of the things you want can happen.

Does the system you've designed have anything in common with the current state of affairs?

What would it take to eliminate similarities between the current system and the adverse system you designed?



# Liberating Structures

## ☀ Wicked Questions

Wicked questions are used to expose the assumptions that we hold about an issue or situation. Articulating these assumptions provides an opportunity to see the patterns of thought and surface the differences in a group. These patterns and differences can be used to discover common ground or to find creative alternatives for stubborn problems.



A question is 'wicked' if there is an embedded paradox or tension in the question. A wicked question is not a trick question. With a trick question, someone knows the answer. Wicked questions do not have obvious answers. Their value lies in their capacity to open up options, inquiry and surface the fundamental issues that need to be addressed.

Examples:

How can we sustain quality standards across the system while allowing for local innovation?

How can we maintain top down discipline needed for safety and level the playing field for bottom-up creativity?

This is not a wicked question:

How can we succeed when the guys at headquarters are such bozos?



# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 15% Solutions

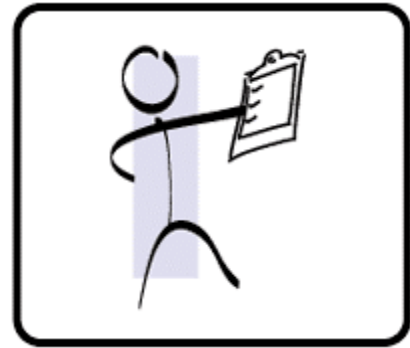
*Most people have about 15-percent control over their work situations. The other 85 percent rests in the broader context, shaped by the general structures, systems, events and culture in which they operate.*

*The challenge rests in finding ways of creating transformational change incrementally: By encouraging people to mobilize small but significant "15-percent initiatives" that can snowball in their effects. When guided by a sense of shared vision, the process can tap into the self-organizing capacities of everyone involved.*

Gareth Morgan, The Globe and Mail

It doesn't matter if you're a General Officer or an enlisted soldier, a Senior Executive or a member of the team. You still have only your 15 percent.

Where do you have freedom to act? What's in your 15%?



# Liberating Structures

## ☀ Conversation Cafe Dialogue

### Conversation Café Agreements

#### **Open-mindedness**

Listen to and respect all points of view.

#### **Acceptance**

Suspend judgment as best you can.

#### **Curiosity**

Seek to understand rather than persuade.

#### **Discovery**

Question assumptions and look for new insights.

#### **Sincerity**

Speak from your heart and personal experience.

#### **Brevity**

Go for honesty and depth but don't go on and on.

### **Process**

#### **Round 1**

Pass around the talking object; each person speaks briefly to the topic, no feedback or response.

#### **Round 2**

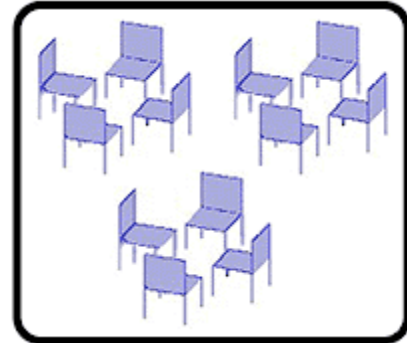
Again with talking object, each person deepens their own comments or speaks to what has meaning now.

#### **Dialogue**

Open, spirited conversation. Use talking object if there is domination, contention, or lack of focus.

#### **Final Round**

With talking object each person says briefly what challenged, touched or inspired them.



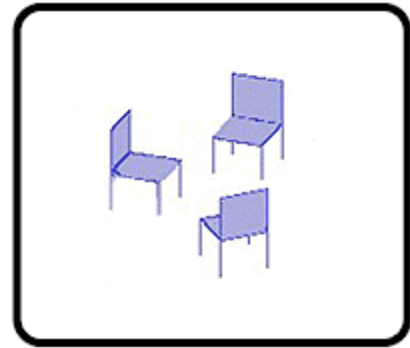
# Liberating Structures

## ☀ TROIKA Consulting

This is a great process to help participants get started thinking about applications and action planning.

Invite participants to find two partners and sit down in a knee-to-knee group of three. Suggest that one member of the group be a 'time-keeper' to keep the group on track so everyone gets equal time.

Give everyone time to reflect individually on a gnarly question. It may be very useful for them to take some notes.



Think about a challenge you are facing in your work. How might you apply some of the ideas from this workshop?

What's the question you most need to answer in order to move forward? How can you get that question answered?

What's the biggest obstacle to making the changes you want to make? What can you do now to move beyond that obstacle?

In each "round" (10 minutes is a good amount of time) one participant will share their challenge and ideas for next steps. The role of the partners is first to ask questions to help them hone and improve their ideas. Next, the partners engage with each other and, finally, with the participant about how they might handle the challenge and what possibilities might contribute to moving forward.

Switch roles so that each member of the troika has a turn. After each member of the troika has had their turn, the group can spend some time in conversation about insights and patterns they noticed across the three rounds.

# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 25 Will Get You 10

Tap into the wisdom of the crowd.

Distribute file cards to everyone. Pose a question. Ask everyone to think about it and write their best idea clearly on the card. No names.

When everyone has completed a card, invite participants to:

Stand up, mill around, and pass your card to someone new. Keep milling and passing until you hear the bell... don't try to read the cards yet.

Then, stop in front of another person. Read the card you were given, and rate the card on a scale of 1-5. "5" is fabulous, 1 is OK. Talk over your ratings with your partner and adjust as needed. Write your final rating on the back of the card.

Mill again. Pass "your" card to someone else. Keep milling & passing.

When you hear the bell, stop in front of another person. Rate the cards in the same way.

Repeat five times, in five rounds. By round 5, each index card should have five ratings. Add them up. What is the score?

Ask, "Does anyone have a card with a score of 25... 24... 23? until you get a "yes." Ask that person to read out loud their card. Continue with the countdown, "Anyone with a 22...21...20? Please read your card aloud." Identify the top 10 high scores or more as needed.

Collect ALL the cards and keep them somewhere. Sometimes an idea that didn't seem that interesting or important at the time of the exercise will seem more interesting or stimulate some other good thinking later.



# Liberating Structures

## ☀ **Design Debrief: What, So What, Now What?**

At the conclusion, or sometimes in the middle, of a meeting it is very useful to ask the following questions in the following order:

### **WHAT?**

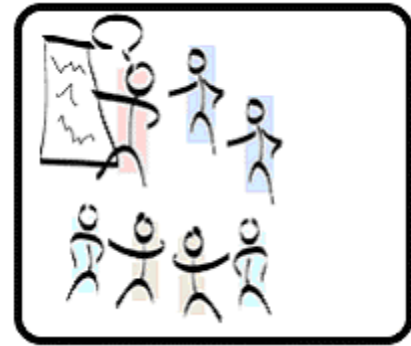
What is emerging here? What data stands out? What actually happened?

### **SO WHAT?**

What do the data imply? Do you see a pattern? Does it make a difference?

### **NOW WHAT?**

What action may help us move forward? Who else should be here?





# Liberating Structures

## 🔦 Levels of Accountability

Take Action and Learn	Make it happen, renewal	
Find Solutions	“This can work”	<i>Learn &amp; Grow</i>
Accept ownership	“It starts with me”	<i>Empowered</i>
Acknowledge situation	“I’m a piece of the puzzle”	
<hr/>		
Wait ‘n Hope	“Somebody should do something”	
Blame self	“It’s my fault,” guilt	<i>Protect &amp; Defend</i>
Blame others	“It’s their fault”	<i>Disempowered</i>
Denial	“Woe is me” “This has nothing to do with me”	

***What do we need to do to work “above the line?”***

# Liberating Structures

## 🌟 Fishbowl

Create a circle of chairs in the center of a larger circle. 5-6 is a good number. If you have a very large group, there may be multiple outer circles.

Invite a small group of people that have direct experience with the challenge into the small circle of chairs at the center. Ask this group to talk about the challenge together, sharing stories of their direct experience and insights as they might do if they were sitting in a coffee shop or at dinner together. They talk to each other, NOT the audience.



Invite the audience to ask questions and share their insights about the conversation while those in the center circle just listen. Gather all the questions. You might want to use file cards or have someone capture all the questions on chart paper.

Then invite the group to dialogue with each other between the two circles.

Some good questions for the debrief:

What did you hear that surprised you?

How has your perspective on the issue changed?

What questions are still open for you?