

Liberating Structures start with something so simple and essential as not to seem worth doing and end with something so powerful and profound that it hardly seems possible.

Liberating Structures: Simple Ways to Unlock the Genius of a Group

Materials contained in these material have been adapted from the liberating structures website and LS Menu. Special thanks to Keith McCandless and Henry Lipmanowicz for developing these approaches and sharing them over time. For more information about liberating structures visit: www.liberatingstructures.com

Liberating Structures introduce tiny shifts in the way we meet, plan, decide and relate to one another. They put the innovative power once reserved for experts only in hands of everyone.

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STRUCTURES EMPLOYED TODAY!



Design Story Boards

Define Step-by-Step Elements for Bringing Meetings to Productive Endpoints (25-70 min.)

What is made possible? *The most common causes of dysfunctional meetings can be eliminated: unclear purpose or lack of a common one, time wasters, restrictive participation, absent voices, groupthink, and frustrated participants. The process of designing a storyboard draws out a purpose that becomes clearer as it is matched with congruent microstructures. It reveals who needs to be included for successful implementation. Storyboards invite design participants to carefully define all the micro-organizing elements needed to achieve their purpose: a structuring invitation, space, materials, participation, group configurations, and facilitation and time allocations. Storyboards prevent people from starting and running meetings without an explicit design. Good designs yield better-than-expected results by uncovering tacit and latent sources of innovation.*



Launching an Initiative

Multiple disciplines and functional groups are involved. Note that facilitation is shared.

Agenda Item	Goal	LS Micro-Structure	Why this LS?	Steps / Timing	Facilitator / Participants
Welcome	Form working group, get acquainted	 Impromptu Networking	Demonstrates respect for each person & discipline included	3 rounds in pairs, 5 minutes each	Carlos, all
Preparing to Launch Project	Make space for innovation	 TRIZ, 1-2-4-All	Some of our successful practices have become overly mature (rigid) over time	3 steps, 10 minutes each	Jenny, groups of 4 then whole group
Attracting Broad Participation	Define and sharpen purpose	 Nine Whys	We want to attract broad participation, innovating in many settings without formal controls	One rounds of 1-2-4, 30 minutes total	Katie, then groups of four
Action Planning	Identify action, get started now	 25-To-10 Crowdsourcing	We have a <i>do-er</i> culture that benefits from self-discovery in a group	25 minutes for 5 rounds + action group formation	Carlos, all

Five Structural Elements

1. Structuring Invitation

- Invite a design team (a representative subset of the group) to create a detailed plan, including visual cues, for how participants will interact to achieve their purpose

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- An open wall with tapestry paper or flip-chart pages
- 2-by-4-inch Post-its and/or Liberating Structures Playing Cards
- A blank storyboard (create a spreadsheet like the one illustrated above)

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everyone involved in the design and planning of the meeting has an equal opportunity to contribute

4. How Groups Are Configured

- 1-2-All or 1-All in rapid cycles for each step below

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- Clarify the purpose of your work together (use Nine Whys if needed). 2 to 5 min.
- Describe the standard approach or microstructure you would normally use for this session (including who is normally present) and assess how it succeeds and fails in achieving the stated purpose. 5 to 10 min.
- Reexamine and strengthen the purpose statement if needed. 2 to 5 min.
- Reexamine and decide who needs to participate or be involved. 2 to 5 min.
- Brainstorm alternative microstructures (both conventional and Liberating Structures) that could achieve the purpose. Determine whether the purpose can be achieved in one step. If not, what must be the purpose of the first step? Continue with first step only. 5 to 10 min.
- Determine which microstructures are best suited to achieving the purpose; choose one plus a backup. 2 to 10 min.
- Decide who will be invited and who will facilitate the meeting. Enter all your decisions in the blank storyboard. 2 to 10 min.
- Determine the questions and process you will use to evaluate your design (e.g., Did the design achieve desired outcomes? Did the group work together in a productive way? Does something new seem possible now? Use What, So What, Now What?) 2 to 5 min.



Impromptu Networking

Rapidly Share Challenges and Expectations, Build New Connections (20 min.)

What is made possible? *You can tap a deep well of curiosity and talent by helping a group focus attention on problems they want to solve. A productive pattern of engagement is established if used at the beginning of a working session. Loose yet powerful connections are formed in 20 minutes by asking engaging questions. Everyone contributes to shaping the work, noticing patterns together, and discovering local solutions.*

Five Structural Elements:

1. Structuring Invitation

- Ask, “What big challenge do you bring to this gathering? What do you hope to get from and give this group or community?”

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- Open space without obstructions so participants can stand in pairs and mill about to find partners

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everybody at once with the same amount of time (no limit on group size)
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

4. How Groups Are Configured

- Pairs
- Invite people to find strangers or colleagues in groups/functions different from their own

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- In each round, 2 minutes per person to answer the questions. 4-5 min. per round
- Three rounds



What? So What? Now What?

Together, Look Back on Progress to Date and Decide What Adjustments Are Needed (45 min.)

What is made possible? *You can help groups reflect on a shared experience in a way that builds understanding and spurs coordinated action while avoiding unproductive conflict. It is possible for every voice to be heard while simultaneously sifting for insights and shaping new direction. Progressing in stages makes this practical—from collecting facts about **What Happened** to making sense of these facts with **So What** and finally to what actions logically follow with **Now What**. The shared progression eliminates most of the misunderstandings that otherwise fuel disagreements about what to do. Voila!*

Five Structural Elements

1. Structuring Invitation

- After a shared experience, ask, “WHAT? What happened? What did you notice, what facts or observations stood out?” Then, after all the salient observations have been collected, ask, “SO WHAT? Why is that important? What patterns or conclusions are emerging? What hypotheses can you make?” Then, after the sense making is over, ask, “NOW WHAT? What actions make sense?”

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- Unlimited number of groups
- Chairs for people to sit in small groups of 5-7; small tables are optional
- Paper to make lists
- Flip chart may be needed with a large group to collect answers
- Talking object * (optional)

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everyone is included
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute at each table
- Small groups are more likely to give voice to everyone if one person facilitates and keeps everybody working on one question at a time

4. How Groups Are Configured

- Individuals
- Groups of 5-7
- Whole group
- Groups can be established teams or mixed groups

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- If needed, describe the sequence of steps and show the Ladder of Inference (see below). If the group is 10–12 people or smaller, conduct the debrief with the whole group. Otherwise, break the group into small groups.
- First stage: WHAT? Individuals work 1 min. alone on “What happened? What did you notice, what facts or observations stood out?” then 2–7 min. in small group. 3–8 min. total.
- Salient facts from small groups are shared with the whole group and collected. 2–3 min.
- If needed, remind participants about what is included in the SO WHAT? question.
- Second stage: SO WHAT? People work 1 min alone on “Why is that important? What patterns or conclusions are emerging? What hypotheses can I/we make?” then 2–7 min. in small group. 3–8 min. total.
- Salient patterns, hypotheses, and conclusions from small groups are shared with the whole group and collected. 2–5 min.
- Third stage: NOW WHAT? Participants work 1 min. alone on “Now what? What actions make sense?” then 2–7 min. in small group. 3–8 min. total.
- Actions are shared with the whole group, discussed, and collected. Additional insights are invited. 2–10 min.



1-2-4-All

Engage Everyone Simultaneously in Generating Questions, Ideas, and Suggestions (12 min.)

What is made possible? *You can immediately include everyone regardless of how large the group is. You can generate better ideas and more of them faster than ever before. You can tap the know-how and imagination that is distributed widely in places not known in advance. Open, generative conversation unfolds. Ideas and solutions are sifted in rapid fashion. Most importantly, participants own the ideas, so follow-up and implementation is simplified. No buy-in strategies needed! Simple and elegant!*

Five Structural Elements

1. Structuring Invitation

- Ask a question in response to the presentation of an issue, or about a problem to resolve or a proposal put forward (e.g., What opportunities do YOU see for making progress on this challenge? How would you handle this situation? What ideas or actions do you recommend?)

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- Unlimited number of groups
- Space for participants to work face-to-face in pairs and foursomes
- Chairs and tables optional
- Paper for participants to record observations and insights

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everyone in the group is included (often not the facilitator)
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

4. How Groups Are Configured

- Start alone, then in pairs, then foursomes, and finally as a whole group

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- Silent self-reflection by individuals on a shared challenge, framed as a question (e.g., What opportunities do YOU see for making progress on this challenge? How would you handle this situation? What ideas or actions do you recommend?) 1 min.
- Generate ideas in pairs, building on ideas from self-reflection. 2 min.
- Share and develop ideas from your pair in foursomes (notice similarities and differences). 4 min.
- Ask, “What is one idea that stood out in your conversation?” Each group shares one important idea with all (repeat cycle as needed). 5 min.



Making Space with TRIZ *

Stop Counterproductive Activities and Behaviors to Make Space for Innovation (35 min.)

Every act of creation is first an act of destruction. – Pablo Picasso

What is made possible? *You can clear space for innovation by helping a group let go of what it knows (but rarely admits) limits its success and by inviting creative destruction. TRIZ makes it possible to challenge sacred cows safely and encourages heretical thinking. The question “What must we stop doing to make progress on our deepest purpose?” induces seriously fun yet very courageous conversations. Since laughter often erupts, issues that are otherwise taboo get a chance to be aired and confronted. With creative destruction come opportunities for renewal as local action and innovation rush in to fill the vacuum. Whoosh!*

Five Structural Elements

1. Structuring Invitation

In this three-step process, ask:

- 1. “Make a list of all you can do to make sure that you achieve the worst result imaginable with respect to your top strategy or objective.”
- 2. “Go down this list item by item and ask yourselves, ‘Is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape, or form resembles this item?’ Be brutally honest to make a second list of all your counterproductive activities/programs/procedures.”
- 3. “Go through the items on your second list and decide what first steps will help you stop what you know creates undesirable results?”

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- Unlimited number of small groups of 4 to 7 chairs, with or without small tables
- Paper for participants to record

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everybody involved in the work is included
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

4. How Groups Are Configured

- Groups with 4 to 7 participants
- Established teams or mixed groups

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- After introduction, three segments, 10 minutes for each segment
- Introduce the idea of **TRIZ** and identify an unwanted result. If needed, have the groups brainstorm and pick the most unwanted result. 5 min.
- Each group uses **1-2-4-All** to make a first list of all it can do to make sure that it achieves this most unwanted result. 10 min.
- Each group uses **1-2-4-All** to make a second list of all that it is currently doing that resembles items on their first list. 10 min.
- Each group uses **1-2-4-All** to determine for each item on its second list what first steps will help it stop this unwanted activity/program/procedure. 10 min.

WHY? Purposes

- Make it possible to speak the unspeakable and get skeletons out of the closet
- Make space for innovation
- Lay the ground for creative destruction by doing the hard work in a fun way
- **TRIZ** may be used before or in place of visioning sessions
- Build trust by acting all together to remove barriers



15% Solutions

Discover and Focus on What Each Person Has the Freedom and Resources to Do Now (20 min.)

You cannot cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water. – R. Tagore

What is made possible? *You can reveal the actions, however small, that everyone can do immediately. At a minimum, these will create momentum, and that may make a BIG difference. 15% Solutions show that there is no reason to wait around, feel powerless, or fearful. They help people pick it up a level. They get individuals and the group to focus on what is within their discretion instead of what they cannot change. With a very simple question, you can flip the conversation to what can be done and find solutions to big problems that are often distributed widely in places not known in advance. Shifting a few grains of sand may trigger a landslide and change the whole landscape.*

Five Structural Elements

1. Structuring Invitation

- In connection with their personal challenge or their group's challenge, ask, "What is your 15 percent? Where do you have discretion and freedom to act? What can you do without more resources or authority?"

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- Unlimited number of groups.
- Chairs for people to sit in groups of 2-4; no tables required.

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everyone is included
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

4. How Groups Are Configured

- First alone
- Then in pairs or small groups

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- First alone, each person generates his or her own list of 15% Solutions. 5 min.
- Individuals share their ideas with a small group (2 to 4 members). 3 min. per person and one person at a time
- Group members provide a consultation to one another (asking clarifying questions and offering advice). 5 to 7 min. per person and one person at a time