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## What are we trying to learn?

- 1** Understand the shape of collaborative conversations
- 2** Recognize where the conversation is and where it needs to go
- 3** Pick up and exercise facilitation techniques

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## Who is this guy?

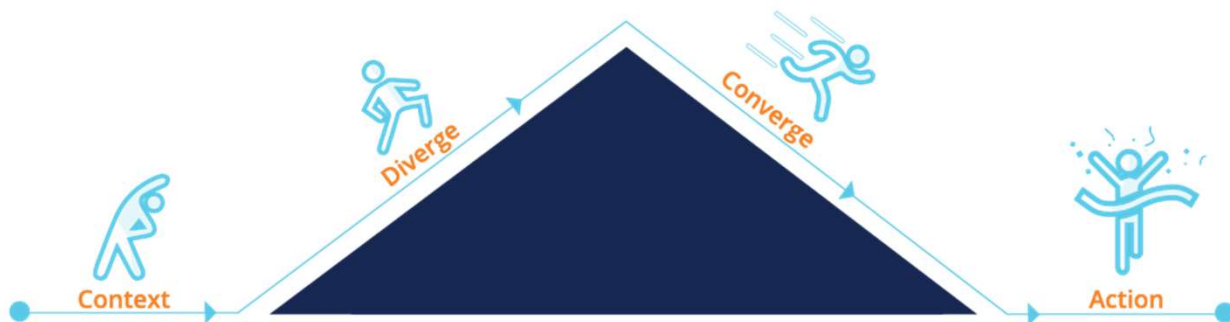


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## The shape of collaborative conversation



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## Context

Like a warm-up, the context phase prepares you for the primary activity of a collaborative session.

Warming up gives everyone a chance to adjust to the situation and be aligned on working together.

### **Value and purpose**

- Agree on desired outcome
- Buy-in from participants
- Collective ownership of outcome and process

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## Context

### **Tools and techniques**

- Send it ahead of time
- State it
- Write and edit it
- Define the vision

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## Send it ahead of time

Include this information in the agenda or pre-session materials.

Pair this with another technique used in the session to ensure everyone is in agreement.

This is a generally useful technique so people can digest before the session and come prepared to refine and/or accept the context.

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## State it

Verbally describe it to the participants and let them react.

This is useful if the participants are generally familiar with the context already.

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## Write and edit it

Write the information out on a whiteboard or on a projector and ask for questions and edits.

The more obvious you can make it that the material is editable, the more people will feel invited to participate.



## Define the vision

If you are further from agreement, you can build the vision together.

For example, you can use a fill-in-the-blank sentence to spur ideas:

We'll know it's a good output if it has/does \_\_\_\_\_.



## Context

### **Dangers and pitfalls**

- Rushing past the context phase and assuming everyone is bought in or has a common vision of the situation and desired outcome
- If missing, there may be disengagement by participants
- If missing, there may be disagreements at the fundamental level

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## Diverge

Like the beginning of your exercise movement, divergence is where you facilitate gradually increasing exploration of the topic.

### **Value and Purpose**

- Inspire creativity
- Generate possibilities

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## Diverge

### Tools and techniques

- The unappealing option
- Powerful questions
- Mind mapping
- Silent brainstorming
- **1-2-4-all**
- Appreciative interviews
- Troika consulting
- Wicked questions

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## The unappealing option

To get beyond the “blank page”, it can be helpful to suggest an option that you’re sure no one will love.

Much like suggesting McDonald’s or Taco Bell as lunch option to your co-workers, this usually elicits alternatives that get the ball rolling.

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## Powerful questions

Powerful questions are open-ended, concise questions that provide an invitation for introspection and/or discovery. They do not presume an answer or point, but cause people to look at a situation in a different way.

A good, powerful question will help others explore possibilities and evoke a meaningful response.

Examples:

- What is here that you want to explore?
- If you could do *anything*, what would you do?
- Where is the opportunity here?
- What other angles can you think of?
- What would the user think of this?
- What is our role/responsibility in this situation?
- How can we make this activity/solution more valuable?

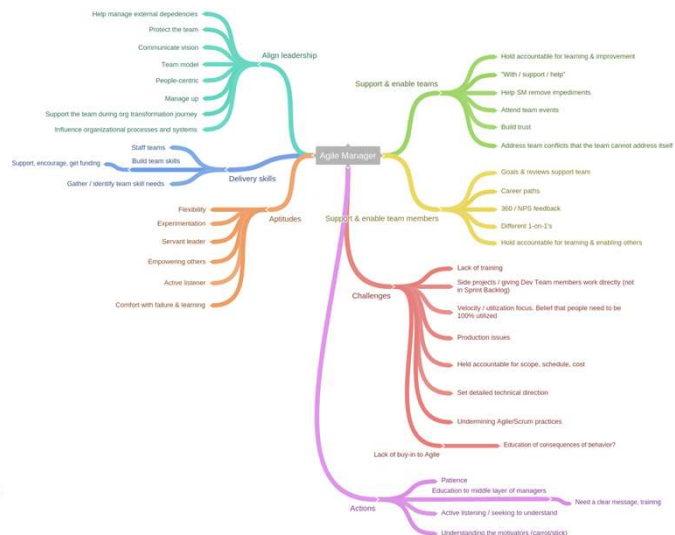


## Mind mapping

Mind maps help facilitate conversations by visualizing the ideas and their relationships.

Write the central, starting item (situation, context, problem) in the center of a whiteboard and draw a circle around it.

As an idea is discussed, write it near the center circle and draw a line between them. As other ideas are discussed, add them to the diagram, and connect them to the other relevant idea(s) with lines.







## Silent brainstorming

Each participant gets a pad of sticky notes and a pen. No one is allowed to talk.

The facilitator gives everyone a set time period to write their ideas on sticky notes, one per note. After the time expires, they post their sticky notes in a common place - a wall, whiteboard, or table.

The facilitator gives everyone a set time period to:

- Read other people's ideas
- Move the sticky notes to group similar ideas together
- Modify ideas by writing on them
- Add new ideas that are inspired by the ones posted

This technique gives introverts a voice and encourages creative inspiration from others' ideas.



## 1-2-4-all

- **Individually**, silent self-reflection 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.]
- **In pairs**, share ideas and build on them. [2 min.]
- **In a pair of pairs** (4 people), share and develop ideas from your pair, while noticing similarities and differences. [4 min.]
- **As a whole group** discuss, "What is one idea that stood out in your conversation?" Each group shares one important idea with all. [5 min.]

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/1-1-2-4-all/>



## Appreciative interviews

- Describe the sequence of steps and specify a theme or what kind of story participants are expected to tell. [3 min.]
- In pairs, participants take turns conducting an interview and telling a success story, paying attention to what made the success possible. [7-10 min. each; 15-20 min. total]
- In groups of 4, each person retells the story of his or her pair partner. Ask participants to listen for patterns in conditions/assets supporting success and to make note of them. [15 min. for groups of 4]
- Collect insights and patterns for the whole group to see on a flip chart. Summarize if needed. [10-15 min.]
- Ask, “How are we investing in the assets and conditions that foster success?” and “What opportunities do you see to do more?” Use 1-2-4-All to discuss the questions. [10 min.]

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/5-appreciative-interviews-ai/>



## Troika consulting

You can help people gain insight on issues they face and unleash local wisdom for addressing them. Peer-to-peer coaching helps with discovering everyday solutions, revealing patterns, and refining prototypes.

- Invite participants to identify the consulting question (their challenge and the help needed) they plan to ask when they are the clients. [1 min.]
- In groups of three, have the first person (“client”) share his or her question. [1-2 min.]
- The two others in the group (“consultants”) ask the client clarifying questions. [1-2 min.]
- Client turns around with his or her back facing the consultants
- Together, the consultants generate ideas, suggestions, coaching advice. [4-5 min.]
- Client turns around and shares what was most valuable about the experience. [1-2 min.]
- Groups switch to next person and repeat steps.

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/8-troika-consulting/>



## Wicked questions

You can spark innovative action while diminishing “yes, but...” and “either-or” thinking. Wicked Questions engage everyone in sharper strategic thinking by revealing entangled challenges and possibilities that are not intuitively obvious.

- Introduce the concept of Wicked Questions that contain a paradox. Illustrate with a couple of examples of Wicked Questions. Give the following template, “How is it that we are ... and we are ... simultaneously?” as the sentence to complete by inserting the two opposite strategies that are at play. [5 min.]
- First alone then in small groups, each participant generates pairs of opposites or paradoxes at play in his or her work using the Wicked Question format. [5 min.]
- Each group selects its most impactful and wicked Wicked Question. All selected Wicked Questions are shared with the whole group. [5 min.]
- Whole group picks out the most powerful ones and further refines the Wicked Questions. [10 min.]

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/4-wicked-questions/>

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## Diverge

### Dangers and pitfalls

- Getting stuck in what's not possible/constraints
- Getting stuck in diverge, unwilling to shift to converge

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## Converge

During the conditioning phase, you perform the exercise that produces fitness benefits - calorie burning, building endurance, or muscle strengthening.

In convergence, you do the hard work of narrowing the options so we can make a choice.

### **Value and Purpose**

- Refine and narrow options
- Navigate toward a choice

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## Converge

### **Tools and techniques**

- Dot voting
- Re-order one at a time
- Focus mapping
- **35 game**
- 25/10 crowd sourcing
- Min specs

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## Dot voting

- With all options posted visually, everyone gets an allotment of dots that they can place on any of the options, distributed however they want (e.g. – all on one, two on one, and one on others)
- Everyone must use all of their dots
- No one can trade, sell, or give away their dots
- Add up the number of dots and discover which ones received the highest votes

### Notes:

- You can use dot stickers, or everyone can draw dots on the items with markers or pens
- This could flow well from Silent Brainstorming
- This technique gives everyone a voice
- Usually, everyone gets the same number of dots; you can choose to give some people more



## Re-order one at a time

The goal is to get the options into an order that reflects everyone's input and ideas.

With all of the options identified on sticky notes in an "option pool," each person comes up and either:

- Takes an item from the "option pool" and posts it in the ordered list of options
- Changes the order of one item in the ordered list of options

This can be done silently, or people can explain why they placed an option where they did.

Continue until the sticky notes are no longer being moved around by the participants..



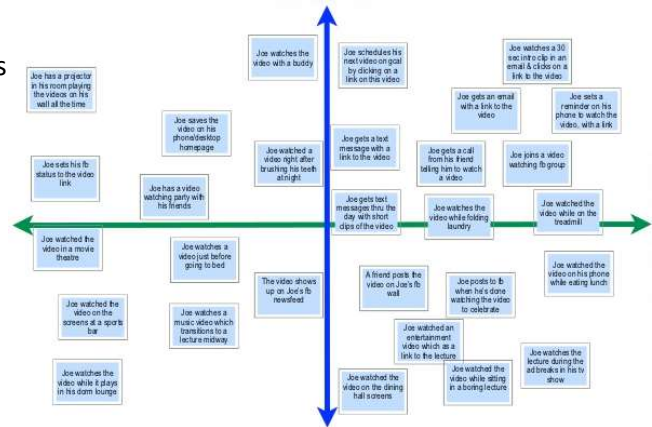
## Focus mapping

This is similar to reordering, but there are two axes that are used:

- Value: how effectively will this option address the situation identified in the context?
- Feasibility: how possible is this option to implement?

Start by ordering the options by one axis. Then order by the other.

The items in the high value and high feasible quadrant are often the best ones to focus on. However, be open to other items being considered important.



## 35 game

- All the ideas are written on index cards.
- Everyone gets an index card with an idea on it.
- **People pair up and divide 7 points between the two cards**, giving more points to the card that is more valuable or important (whole numbers only). Write the number on the back of the card.
- **Mill and pass cards** (no reading). When the bell rings, ensure you don't have a card you have already scored.
- **Pair up with someone else and divide 7 points between the two cards.**
- Repeat for a total of **5 rounds**.
- At the end of 5 rounds, each person **sums up the scores** on the back of the card they are holding and writes the total on the front of the card.
- You can **order the cards by their score** to reflect relative importance or value.

<http://anaquilemind.net/2014/11/20/game-of-35-for-consensus-and-prioritization/>



## 25/10 crowd sourcing

- All the ideas are written on index cards.
- Everyone gets an index card with an idea on it.
- **Mill and pass:** Then people mill around and cards are passed from person to person. No reading of the cards.
- **Read and score:** When the bell rings, people stop passing cards and pair up to exchange thoughts on the cards in their hands. [Another good option is to read the card with no talking]. Participants individually rate the idea/step on their card with a score of 1 to 5 (1 for low and 5 for high) and write it on the back of the card.
- **Repeat:** Mill & Pass and Read & Score are done for a total of five scoring rounds.
- At the end of cycle five, participants add the five scores on the back of the last card they are holding. Finally, the ideas with the top ten scores are identified and shared with the whole group. 3 min.

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/12-2510-crowd-sourcing/>



## Min specs

This technique includes both the converge and diverge parts of a collaborative conversation.

- Highlight the purpose statement or desired outcome that everyone is aligned with.
- **Max specs:** Generate the list of all must-do and must-not-do activities (Max Specs) to achieve the purpose or outcome. Do this alone for one minute then consolidate and expand in the small group for five minutes. Make list as complete as possible in a short time. 6 min.
- **Min specs:** Each small group tests each spec on its Max Spec list against the purpose statement. If the spec *can* be violated and the purpose still achieved, the spec is dropped from the list. 15 min.
- Compare across small groups and consolidate to the shortest list. 15 min.

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/14-min-specs/>



## Converge

### Dangers and pitfalls

- Shutting someone down because their idea wasn't selected or was laughed at
- Fear of offense
- Defer to HiPPiR

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## Action

The cooldown phase allows your heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature to return slowly to normal.

In collaborative conversations, the Action phase focuses on getting benefit from all of your hard work.

### Value and Purpose

- Get desired outcome and value

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## Action

### Techniques

- Thumb voting
- Fist of five
- Experimental language

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## Thumb voting

As a choice is presented, everyone votes in one of these ways:

- **Thumb up:** I agree and support that choice
- **Thumb middle/sideways:** It's not my favorite choice, but I will support it if the majority do
- **Thumb down:** I disagree with that choice and have an alternate proposal



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## Fist of five

As a choice is presented, everyone votes in one of these ways:

- **Five fingers:** I strongly support that choice
- **Four fingers:** I support that choice
- **Three fingers:** I am not in total agreement, but I am comfortable enough to agree if the majority does
- **Two fingers:** I have some concerns with the choice
- **One finger:** I have major concerns
- **Closed fist:** I cannot support that choice



This method can be used to measure support, commitment, agreement, etc. Clearly define the meaning of each option so all participants are speaking the same language with their votes.



## Experimental language

As a choice is presented, use experimental and temporal language to reduce the risk that the group is taking.

Often, a choice is unknowingly viewed as a “forever-and-ever-amen” selection. This is a way to overcome resistance or hesitance to commit.

### Rules

- Define the desired outcome
- Identify how long the experiment will run
- Determine how the outcome will be reviewed

“If this works, our next planning session should be significantly shorter. Let’s try this for two weeks, then reconvene to review the results.”

## Variations: Multiple cycles



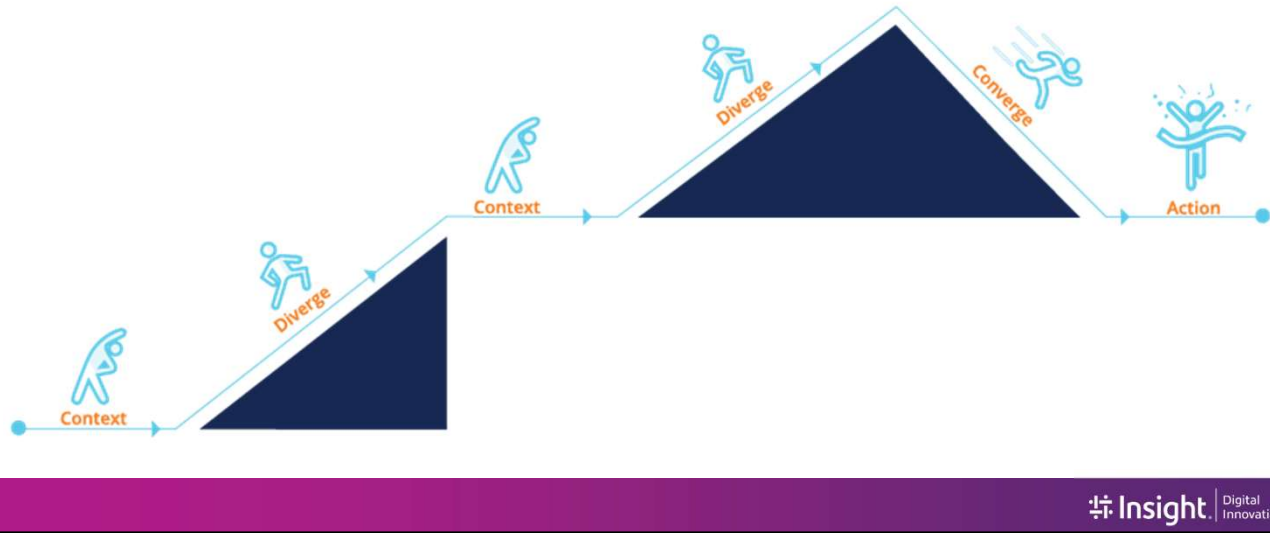
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## Variations: Cycles within cycles

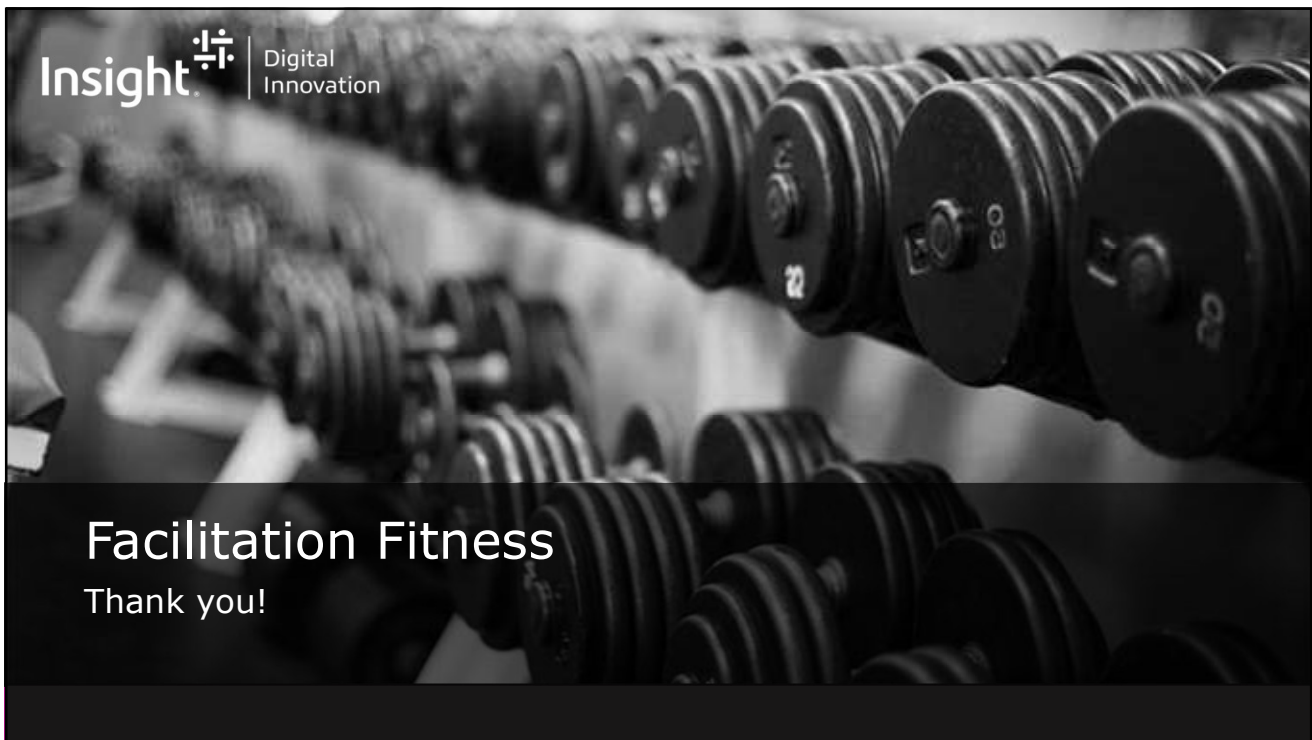


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## Variations: Change of desired outcome



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Facilitation Fitness  
Thank you!

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