

Liberating Structures:

The organization Liberating Structures (LS) make it easy for leaders of all levels to create conditions for people to work at the top of their intelligence and creativity. In this environment, people thrive and enjoy their work. It is also the path to top performance.

Liberating Structures defines the concepts of macrostructures (structures built for the long term like building, strategies, policies, core operating processes and are expensive to change) and microstructures (physical spaces where interaction takes place like meeting rooms that are small but are routinely interacted with). Although these work in tandem, having small incremental changes in microstructures allows for solutions to common problems to be found easily. It changes the approach to interactions and thus unlocks the creativity of the entire workforce.

	Tangible Structures	Intangible Structures
Macrostructures	Office building School Hospital Shop Ship Factory	Strategies Organization structure Policies and procedures Compensation/Incentives Core operating processes Grants of authority
Microstructures	Boardroom Classroom Meeting room Restaurant Office Water cooler	Presentation/Lecture Managed discussion Status report Open discussion Brainstorm Liberating Structures
Structural Elements	Large round table Large rectangular table Small table Chair Flip chart Post-its Projector Screen	Purpose/Agenda Question Theme Seating arrangement Group configuration Time allocation Standing instead of sitting Formal or informal

Table 2.1
Hierarchy and Examples of Structures

LS believes that every organization is looking for the ideal formula with the precise combination of people, resources and strategies that will produce top performance. All microstructures (conventional and LS) are based on 5 elements:

1. The invitation (provides direction in the form of a question or request)
2. How space is arranged and what materials are used (tangible and intangible elements that can contribute to the invitation but often conflict with it)
3. How participation is distributed among participants (how much time every participant will be given to contribute)
4. How groups are configured (freedom that exists to change the composition of the group like breaking it into smaller groups)
5. The sequence of steps and the time allocated to each step

Conventional microstructures like meetings, seating arrangement, theme or agendas tend to provide too much control of content or too little structure to include everyone. It can frequently generate feelings of frustration or exclusion and fail to provide space for good ideas to emerge. This means that huge time and money are spent in working without the right approach and then even more when fixing the unintended consequences. Intangible structures mentioned in the table above can be tweaked without disrupting the organization's flow of processes.

LS has identified 10 principles that emerge in organizations when liberating structures become a part of everyday interactions:

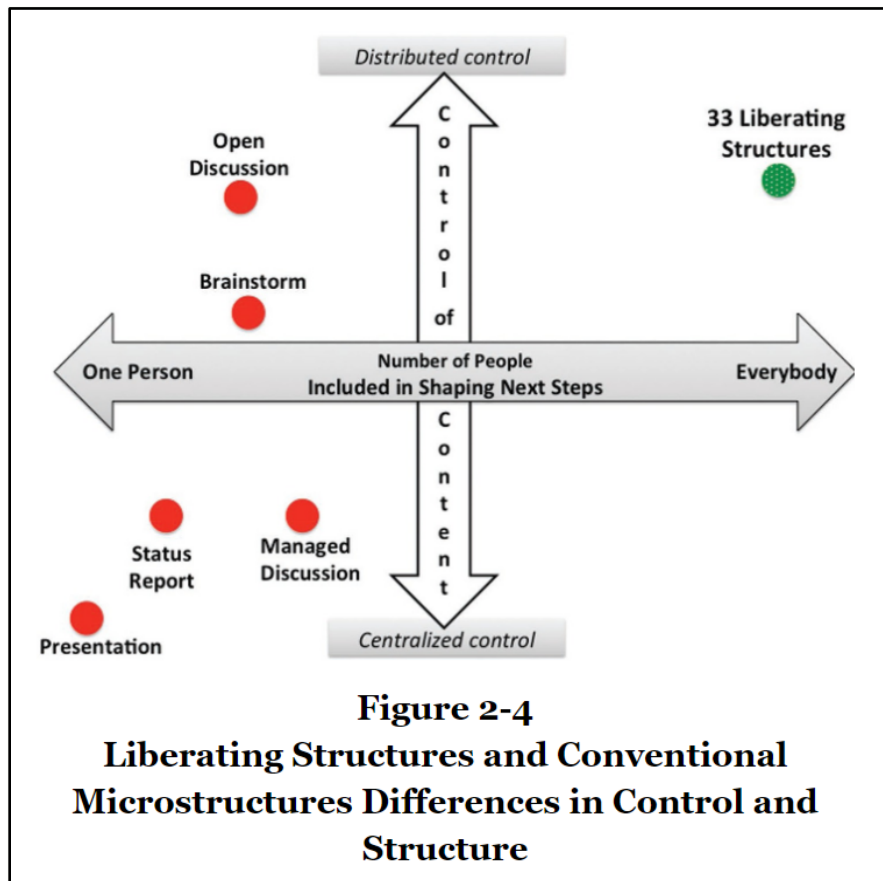
1. Include and unleash everyone
2. Practice deep respect for people and local solutions
3. Never start without a clear purpose
4. Build trust as you go
5. Learn by failing forward
6. Practice self-discovery within a group
7. Amplify freedom and responsibility
8. Emphasize possibilities: believe before you see
9. Invite creative destruction to make space for innovation
10. Engage in seriously playful curiosity

Liberating Structures lists down 33 different templates that can be followed for bringing about incremental changes in the habits and interactions of groups for more effective interactions. Depending on what works best for your team, based on questions like "Are all members contributing to the group?", "Are we generating enough ideas for approaching a problem?", "Are there the structures too inhibiting to encourage participation?" amongst others can be used to figure out what is it that needs to improve for achieving a higher efficiency. Knowing one's team, the macrostructures that drive them and the points in the process that need optimization can lead to the microstructures that are tweaked at no cost for improving the team's final output.

Examples:

An example of a conventional structural design of a Presentation where one person - the expert - speaks for the whole duration with a round of questions in the end. Audiences large or small are usually sitting facing the same direction: toward the presenter. PowerPoint slides dominate the presentation and a podium or stage is used for large audiences. The expert gets 99% of the speaking time with the audience little to none of the speaking time. The problem with these structures is that it is neither inclusive nor engaging for the audience. The presenter discusses ideas that are predetermined and participants end up adopting a silent role which does not engage them. This tends to discourage engagement from the audience as the ideas discussed do not feel like their own.

Open discussions are discussions where a question is raised and every participant is encouraged to put forth their ideas. Here, there are no fixed participation constraints. However, this can lead to chaotic presentations that do not lead to any solutions. As groups get larger, a few people inevitably dominate the discussion, which can become too disconnected to be productive or too random to shape decisions or next steps. Another mode would be a managed discussion to avoid facing these issues. However, the concentration of moderation capabilities in the hands of one person can prevent an easy flow of ideas.



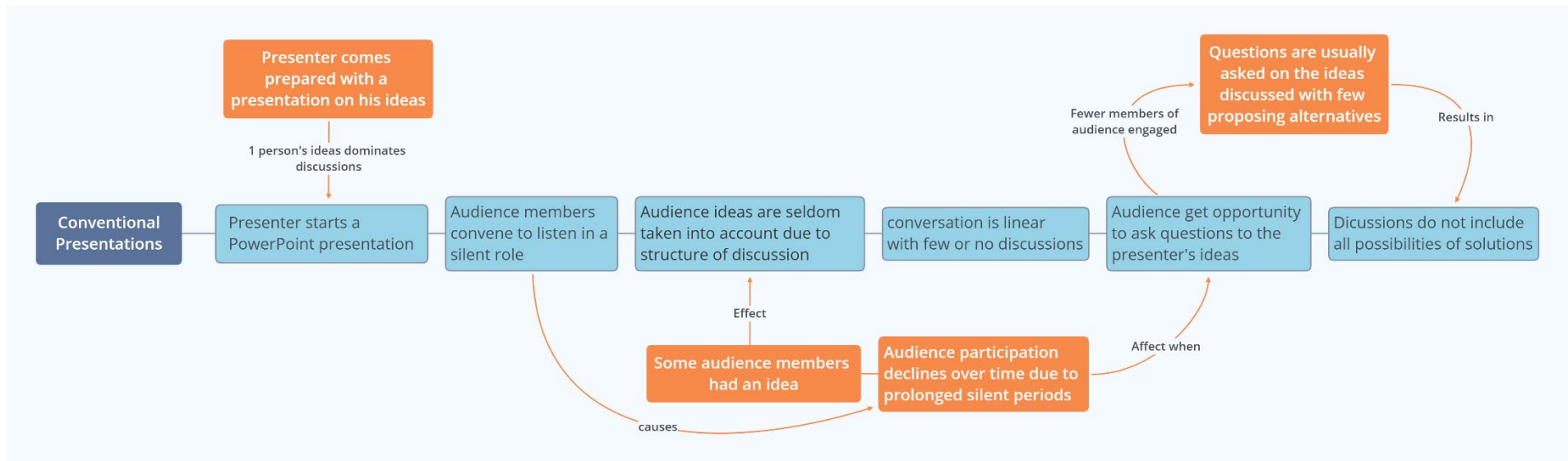
A Liberating Structure that can be used for effective discussions is 1-2-4-All. This can replace a long presentation with Q/A rounds with a discussion segment following the liberating structure. In this structure, people are asked to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper individually in silent reflection of the issues presented. These thoughts are then discussed in pairs and the best ideas selected or combined. Two pairs then come together and discuss in a group of 4. The ideas are refined further in this step with the feedback received from multiple people. In the end, the groups of 4 present their ideas to the whole audience. This whole cycle should be between 3-15 minutes long.

1-2-4-All does not hinge on expertise or talent. It gives everyone more and equal amount of time to contribute without the need for permission. It makes space for silent thoughts that would otherwise stay in people's heads to surface and be written down. In short, 1-2-4-All levels the playing field, providing the timid members with a safe space to discuss their ideas and prevents the more vocal members from monopolizing the entire discussion. Ideas are sifted in a rapid fashion and painlessly that quickly leads to solutions, conclusions or decisions.

1-2-4-All is one of 33 different liberating structures that the organization has provided as solutions. The links for the structures and how to apply them to your team are given below:

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/lis-menu/>

https://read.amazon.ca/kp/embed?preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_NYOPwb0H9QEMW&asin=B00JET2S76&reshareId=EQYACWFQBZA5PN30VG0Y&reshareChannel=system



Comparison between conventional presentations (up) and 1-2-4-All discussions (down)

