

LiFT

Methodology Book

Designing and hosting Collaboratories

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LiFT Leadership
for Transition



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2. The context: differing settings and how to deal with them
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This book gives users a sense of what an **optimal setting for a Collaboratory** would look like. Based on our practical experience, we also give you a panorama of **potential deviations from this ideal setting** that you are likely to encounter in real life. This will help you respond more adequately and enable you to work productively with the respective constellation. Beyond this, the chapter again caters for different levels of proficiency. While beginners will prefer to focus on standard elements, more advanced learners can dive deeper into background and meta-level considerations.

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Designing and hosting Collaboratories

If someone wants to learn the language of business, and become facile in subjects like accounting, finance, and marketing, then an MBA is a great way to go . . .

If, on the other hand, your passion is about working with people and finding ways to address the huge challenges our culture and world are facing, then committing yourself to the practice of leadership may be a worthy direction and focus for you. (Doug Paxton)

1. Introduction

This book presents and discusses the entire range of experiences the LiFT partnership has encountered and the learnings it has gathered during its work with the Collaboratory method over a period of four years. It is targeted towards readers who are interested in using the method themselves in their own contexts. The book explains to how to navigate through the potential diversity of Collaboratory settings in view of optimal outcomes by looking at each specific typical challenge step by step.

1.1 The LiFT experience and the purpose of this book

The Leadership for Transition (LiFT) project has started out in 2013 as a Grundtvig Learning Partnership between 5 partnering organizations from Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Austria and Sweden. This partnership had set itself the goal to exchange and deepen experiences with **facilitating transformative learning** in a series of workshops focusing on collaborative leadership. Our aim was to combine action research with action learning, i.e. to experiment with how stakeholder involvement processes around burning complex issues of our times can best be facilitated based on integrative (integral) methodologies. As a tangible instrument and methodology, we chose to work primarily with the format of the **Collaboratory** which had been co-developed by one of our partners, Business School Lausanne (Muff, 2014), in various contexts and settings. Therefore, we decided to purposefully conduct Collaboratories in very different places and settings, in order to be able to harvest, analyze and meta-reflect the diversity of our experience in a comparative way.

During this first project phase, LiFT has hosted **four transnational Collaboratory workshops**:

1. on [“Co-creating Collective Intelligence for Complex Challenges”](#) in Trondheim (Norway) in Feb/March 2014
2. on [“Why School”](#) in Stockholm (Sweden) in August 2014
3. on [“The future of organization\(s\)”](#) in Vienna (Austria) in November 2014 and
4. on [“Trust & integrity in the global economy \(TIGE\)”, Impact Leadership Track](#) in Caux (Switzerland) in June/July 2015.

After completion of this first funding period, LiFT transformed into a Strategic Partnership (Erasmus+), now including two more partners. The second LiFT partnership hosted **another six transnational stakeholder workshops** in six countries:

1. on kicking of the “[Benelux Pop-Up University for Transition](#)” in Luxembourg in November 2015 (held mostly in Dutch and French)
2. on “[Making Politics more Collaborative – ideas to accelerate sustainable development](#)” as part of the annual Almedalen Forum in Visby (Sweden) in July 2016
3. on “[Adaptive Learning and Job Creation in the Context of a Digital Revolution](#)” in Trondheim (Norway) in September/October 2016
4. on “[Growing up in community/Aufwachsen zwischen Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft](#) “ in the Ecovillage Sieben Linden (Germany) in June 2017 (in German)
5. on “[Education for Sustainable Communities](#)” in Šibenik (Croatia) in September 2017 and
6. on “Social Entrepreneurship” in Vienna (Austria) in July 2018, as part of the LiFT Summer School and [Train-the-Trainer course](#).

Besides these ten funded events, the members of LiFT have also conducted a number of Collaboratory workshops outside of the project itself, for example:

- on the refugee crisis in Rastatt (Germany) in February 2016 (see chapter in Case Book)
- the Indo-German Dialogue on Green Urban Practices in Chennai (India) in March 2017
- a mini Collaboratory at an academic conference in Rotterdam (Netherlands) in September 2017
- a Collaboratory on the integration of NEETs for an EU working group in Tartu (Estonia) in November 2017
- a large number of events conducted by Business School Lausanne

Added up, these activities form an extensive **source of experience and database** of comparative knowledge with regard to designing and facilitating Collaboratories in differing settings. For more detailed information on most of the above-mentioned events themselves, please take a look at our **LiFT Case Book**, which provides “thick descriptions” of how the respective Collaboratories have been planned, designed and conducted, what we learned from them and what were our reflections in hindsight.

The present book takes a more **comparative analytical perspective** and discusses the whole bandwidth of our experience in a more systematic way, focusing on specifics and learnings. Our goal here is to help users and practitioners to navigate through the potential diversity of Collaboratory settings, and to equip themselves with the necessary tools and knowledge for planning, designing and conducting Collaboratories themselves. As mentioned earlier the Collaboratory method is used here as one possible and efficient way to facilitate transformative learning in large groups, by inviting participants into an experience of collaborative leadership.

We have found that for running successful Collaboratories, a number of **preconditions** need to be in place. These include, among other things,

- a good choice and definition of the **setting**
- intensive **preparation** work, ideally together with the local host and/or topic giver
- the right **design** to match the context in question
- a number of **skills and competencies** on the side of the facilitator(s) which allow them not only to implement the design, but also to deal with unexpected situations and make ad hoc changes if required.

All of these points will be laid out and discussed in more depth in this book, inspired by our extensive experience, and will be illustrated based on empirical data and examples.

Before diving into a more substantial discussion however, let us take a moment to explain the **research strategy and rationale** behind the action research conducted by the LiFT project.

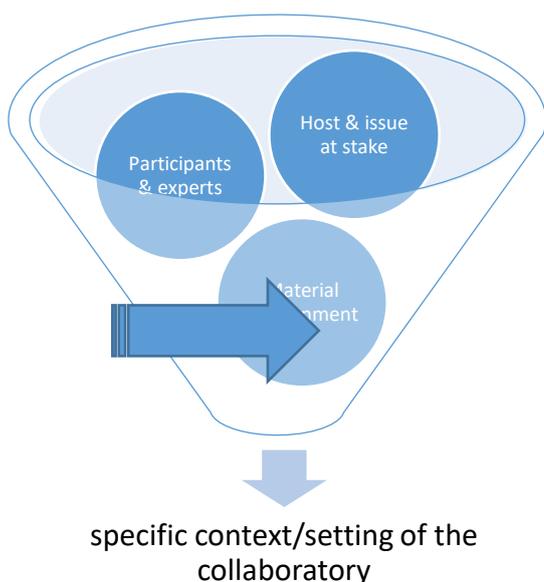
LiFT's main aim was to conduct an in-depth exploration and evaluation of the Collaboratory methodology in action in order to describe and blueprint it as a facilitation tool that others can use in changing contexts and settings. By hosting the above-mentioned series of workshops in very diverse settings, we were able to observe and study how two complex variables interact, namely context and facilitation. We assume - and have experienced – that each Collaboratory is unique due to the specific context and constellation of stakeholders involved, and that therefore no two events ever have the exact same kind of facilitation design. Rather, each contextual setting requires a unique approach to design and facilitation.

Our main research question was:

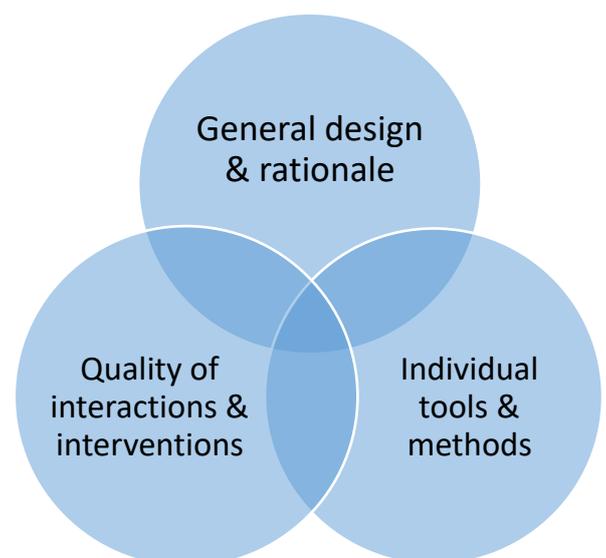
How does context affect (optimal) design & facilitation? In other words: How can and should a Collaboratory workshop and its facilitation be designed differently as contexts differ (in terms of available time, space, number and type of participants, topic at stake etc.) in order for a Collaboratory to achieve optimal results?

If we look closer at what “**context**” and “**facilitation**” mean in more detail, we see that both of them **are complex variables** in themselves. Each of them can be seen as a complex system of interrelated variables and skills which need to be explored in more depth in order to grasp all relevant elements that have an effect on an optimal facilitation design and result. In a nutshell, we see the most important aspects, dimensions and elements of each of these as follows:

Context:



Facilitation:



During LiFT's action research, we have put considerable attention onto exploring each of these complex systems variables in more detail. Moreover, we have studied a number of aspects within each of the components in every workshop we have hosted in the course of the Strategic Partnership (2015-2017). The following aspects have been looked at in particular – and proven to be relevant:

A) Context variables to be taken into consideration:

1. *The hosting organization and the issue at stake:*
 - What is the issue at stake? How general/specific is it?
 - Who owns the topic at stake?
 - What is the burning question behind that is in need to be addressed?
 - What is the host's position in relation to the topic/issue at stake and existing networks around it?

2. *The participants:*
 - Which stakeholders and experts are important and available around the topic? What is their discursive position within the field in question?
 - Number, age, gender, etc. of "regular" participants...
 - What is the participants' background and how familiar are they with the topic and the methodology?
 - What is important about existing networks between participants and the hosting organization?

3. *The material environment:*
 - What is the impact of the physical setting: location, venue, interior design (and its changes)?
 - What is the impact of the temporal setting: available time (chunks/slots)
 - Is the workshop part of a larger event? If yes, which limitations (time & space wise) does this imply?
 - What are the available materials and tools on site? What might have to be added?
 - Other aspects

B) Facilitation variables (to be) considered based on the specific contextual setting:

1. *Facilitation design and rationale* (investigated via internal reflections and interviews):
 - Why did the facilitators chose certain elements and tools when preparing the Collaboratory?
 - How did they combine those tools and build them into the design in a specific way?
 - How did they evaluate which context factors were important to be considered in this regard?

2. *Quality of interactions and interventions* (relational aspects) during the Collaboratory (have been investigated via participant observation and interviews):
 - Which interactional dimensions appeared important?
 - How did specific interventions of the facilitators generate specific dynamics within the group and shape the process in a certain way? (observation field notes by participant observers)
 - What is the perspective of the participants on this? (interview participants)
 - What is the perspective of the facilitators on this? (interview facilitators)
 - Other aspects

3. *Individual tools and methods that have been used as part of the facilitation (micro level):*
 - What was the role of the inner state of the facilitator(s)? (interviews and observation)
 - Which specific methodological tools and elements have been used? How were they used, what impact did they have?
 - How could specific tools be modified and/or combined in response to differing contexts?

Based on this overall research design, LiFT has observed and reflected each single event in order to capture its most important features and characteristics systematically. A “thick” description of a number of our events, looking at the specifics and learnings of each setting, can be found in our Case Book. This book, in turn, is an **introduction to the methodology – the art of designing, hosting and facilitating Collaboratories**. Based on a comparative evaluation of our experience, it focuses primarily on the more practical needs and questions those readers might have who wish to hold a Collaboratory themselves. It will provide you with the necessary background knowledge for

- evaluating whether the Collaboratory is a suitable method for the endeavor you wish to undertake and, if yes,
- what aspects to be mindful of when preparing it, as well as
- a set of tools you can employ for designing the different phases of your Collaboratory.

At the same time, while LiFT is happy to share its experience and encourage others to make use of the powerful method of the Collaboratory, we also stress that **hosting successful Collaboratories is not merely applying a recipe** that can be put into practice right away by simply following instructions from a textbook. It is more of an art than an exact science, because no context and no setting is ever the same as the previous or any other one. Rather, practitioners will have to intelligently adapt the method to their respective context with the specific challenges it might contain. This means that it needs both experience, thorough preparation, intuition and a good sense of skill to not only find the design that is appropriate for your specific context, but also to deal with the inevitable twists and contingencies that are likely to emerge during the process.

LiFT is therefore offering both background materials such as this methodology handbook and the other free resources provided on our [website](#) and a facilitator training to best equip you with the necessary knowledge and skills. The latter is designed to help those interested in learning how to use the method to build up their own experience and “grow into” practicing the Collaboratory work “on the job”.

No matter if you have previous experience or not, we believe that **hosting Collaboratories can be learnt**, provided that you are prepared to take the necessary steps. And, depending on the degree of your previous experience, our facilitator training provides you with the right combination of support, scaffolding and challenge to make your own specific next steps towards mastery.

At the same time, LiFT does not assert any property rights on the method, nor do we claim to be the only masters on the planet. Building up on the knowledge, experience and wisdom of many predecessors, we rather see our contribution in weaving together the manifold streams of expertise and putting them into a form that makes them accessible to a broader public. Dissemination is therefore deeply built into the rationale of our efforts.



LiFT is also eager to learn from your experiences. So if you have hosted a Collaboratory on your own, please do contact us and share any interesting insights you might have gained!

A few words about the design of this book:

After these introductory remarks and some explanation about how this book connects the LiFT series as a whole, we will present what could be called the **standard structure of a Collaboratory**. As mentioned before, no event is ever completely the same as any other one, yet all Collaboratories do have in common a certain general rationale and inherent logic, which can be translated into a specific set of **typical phases and building blocks**. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with this “template structure” and the rationale behind it first, before diving into the discussion about the multitude of options from which to choose when faced with a specific hosting context.

We hope that this book - together with the LiFT book series as a whole – serves you as a valuable resource and that it contributes to spreading collaborative methods across domains, sectors and decision-making levels all over Europe. By this, we hope to contribute to disseminate the collaborative paradigm to a wider audience and ultimately, to help pave the way towards a broader paradigm shift in business, politics, science and the larger society.

1.2 The LiFT experience and how to make best use of it

This book is an integral part of a series of resources providing the reader with a comprehensive understanding of what integral collaborative leadership can look like and how it can be put into practice in specific settings. The series comprises:

1. our book on **foundations and resources of integral leadership** (authored by Elke Fein with editorial support from Jonathan Reams),
2. our book on the **Five Superpowers for Co-Creators** (How change makers and business can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals), authored by Katrin Muff with support from Robert Quinn)
3. our book on the **Collaboratory methodology** (authored by Elke Fein with support from the whole LiFT team)
4. our book with **case studies** on six Collaboratories hosted by LiFT or its members, coordinated by Iris Kunze
5. our **train-the-trainer course**

The **Foundations and Resources of Integral Leadership book (1)** provides a rather thorough and comprehensive presentation of the concept and model of integral leadership used in the context of the LiFT project. It discusses this concept both with regard to how it relates to the broader academic field of leadership studies and to how it goes beyond more conventional leadership thinking and practice. The three presumably most important dimensions of the integral model, systematic perspective taking, vertical complexity development and inner states of consciousness and communication, are outlined in more detail for readers who wish to dive more deeply into the theory behind what LiFT and the Collaboratory is doing.

Our additional resource book on the **“Five Superpowers for Co-creators”** builds a bridge between this more general theory and what is happening during a Collaboratory process “behind the scenes”. Moreover, we see collaborative processes as spaces of transformation and learning for all participants. For transforming the ways in which certain issues and problems are seen and perceived opens up wholly new ways of dealing with and responding to them. Yet, much of what it needs to successfully facilitate <http://leadership-for-transition.eu/>

and implement transformation is not directly visible up front but needs a more thorough inquiry into the “soft”, implicit dimensions of Collaboratory hosting and design.

The present **Methodology Book (2)** takes a more practical approach, looking at the “how-to-do’s” and discussing why some of the more generally described theoretical insights and skills are important in view of dealing with specific challenges in the design and facilitation of a Collaboratory. It also shows how they can be translated into tangible settings and concrete actions.

While readers can also use this book separately, especially if they are looking for inspiration in a given setting, i.e. when preparing to host a Collaboratory, we recommend to take the more general context explored in books 1 and 2 into account as well. This appears particularly important for advanced practitioners, multipliers and trainers who wish to expand their understanding of the preconditions of and the more subtle processes that are at work in a successful Collaboratory.

In the LiFT **Case Book n° 3** we have gathered six case studies, each of which describes one specific Collaboratory in more detail than it is possible here, from the choice of topic and context, to the preparation phase, the actual facilitation design and implementation and possible outcomes and/or follow-up events and developments.

Finally LiFT’s **train-the-trainer course (4)** is designed to support practitioners at varying levels of proficiency to develop their skills around collaborative leadership, and ultimately to conceive, plan, design and facilitate their own Collaboratories. While a prototype of this training has been offered at our LiFT summer school in Vienna in 2018, the training is constantly being further developed. While it has a core content at the center, its more specific organization can be adapted to the needs of specific target groups of participants who wish to take it at a specific occasion. This means that the training can also be booked by institutions in the area of leadership and education and/or be integrated into existing or future curricula as a building block. If you are interested in either of these options, do not hesitate to contact us.

1.3 Overview of the standard structure of a Collaboratory

Each Collaboratory is an individual “piece of arts & crafts”, so to speak, because each context is unique and needs a specific way of setting up and designing the collaborative process. Why this is so and what this means in practice, will be discussed in more detail in the remainder of this book.

However, we think that readers should be equipped with at least a rough idea of what **an ideal-typical Collaboratory** would look like, even though in real life practice, such a thing might hardly occur or be implemented as such at all. So for the next couple of pages, we invite you to put yourself into the student-of-a-textbook mode and prepare yourself to take in some more theoretical “teaching”.

Generally speaking, the Collaboratory is based on the insights of Theory U as researched and developed by Otto Scharmer (2007), the essence of which is summarized here. It will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6 of the foundations & resources book.

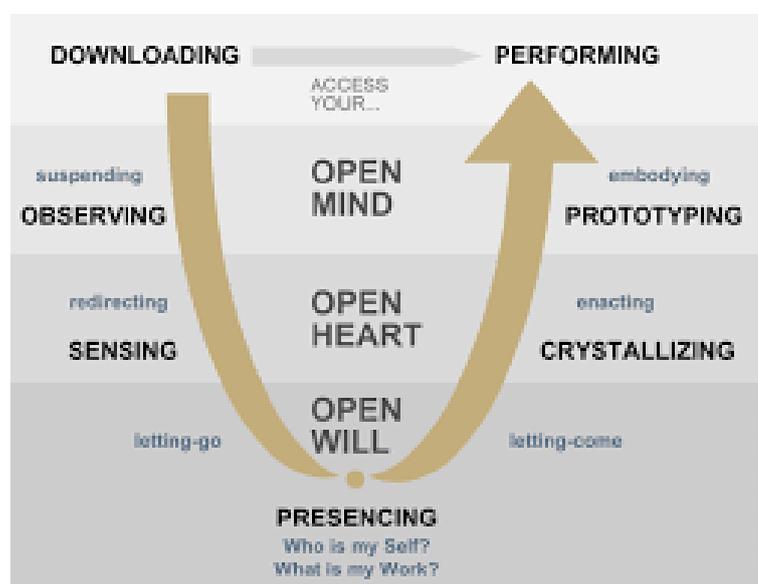
Scharmer’s theory distinguishes **three main phases** or parts of a successful process of exploring a problem in view of constructive solutions:

1. **letting go** of preconceived knowledge, assumptions, beliefs etc. (left side of the U),
2. **presencing** (bottom of the U) and
3. **letting come** novel insights and innovative ideas for addressing the problem productively (right side of the U).

With the exception of the presencing, each of the two other main phases can be subdivided into more subtle distinctions, where the quality of conversation and communication about the challenge in question changes in every sub-phase. As outlines in the text box below, the core (sub)phases of the Collaboratory process are therefore phases 1-5.

The Collaboratory actively draws on the **four fields of awareness** described in Scharmer’s model, using the four different listening modes corresponding to them: downloading, factual, emphatic and generative listening, which are later followed by a more action-oriented, co-creative part. The first and foremost goal of a Collaboratory is to take participants beyond what might be their usual mode of addressing the problem in question, into deeper fields of awareness, enabling new ways of perceiving the it. Therefore, its whole setup and structure is designed in order to enable

– and actively invite that shift to happen. More precisely, the Collaboratory set up gradually takes the group through all four fields of awareness, from mode 1 to mode 4 (presencing), one after the other, in a relatively short period of time.



In the third part of the process, it then re-designs the space several more times to take participants

from harvesting and crystallizing visions into prototyping and co-creating novel solutions as suggested by Theory U. In this sense, the Collaboratory translates the wisdom of Theory U into actionable steps which are elements of a comprehensive process. As an ideal type, the latter is designed to allow the collective intelligence of the larger field(s) that the respective group is part of, to unfold its full potential.

In each of these parts and sub-phases., the Collaboratory offers a couple of specific methodological tools and modes of framing the conversation. Step by step, this enables more of the existing knowledge, assumptions, beliefs etc. to surface and be integrated into a common, shared understanding of the issue in question (letting go phase). In the course of this, the quality of the conversation is gradually transformed towards ever deeper and more intensive listening and sharing between the participants.

Outline of an ideal-typical Collaboratory

Phase	Intention	Time needed
Preparation	Exploring context, adapting design to needs	3-6 months
0 - opening	Welcoming, intro, connecting, building trust	30-45 min
1 – Downloading, open mind	Get diverse knowledge and perspectives on the topic into the conversation	1-2h
2 – Dialog, open heart	Engaging participants personally, more deeply	1-2h
3 – Visioning, presencing	Use intuition and imagination to access vision of desirable future	15-30 min
4 – Crystallizing, open will	Harvest, represent and exchange visions, co-create a joint vision	10-45 min
5 – Prototyping	Co-create concrete projects to implement the vision	1-3h
6 – Closing	Sharing, summing up, closing ritual, back to host	20-40 min
7 – Follow-up	Support projects and working groups after the event	1-6 months or more

As the above text box shows – and as will be explained in much more detail below, there is a “before” and “after” the essential phases 1-5. Moreover, a good Collaboratory begins way before the actual event, by a good and thorough **preparation**, including carefully choosing the hosting context and clarifying the guiding question, as well as the *roles* that various actors or organizations involved in the event and its preparation assume. For more detail on this see chapter 2 below.

Another important sub-phase before the actual U-process starts is the **opening of the Collaboratory**, including (a) a general welcome and introduction sequence by the local host and the facilitation team, giving the necessary framing to the event, and (b) a sequence where participants are invited to get to know each other a bit more before jumping into thematic work. The latter is crucial for a Collaboratory to unfold its power as compared to more traditional formats, because it invites participants from the very beginning to show up as themselves as whole persons, not just as stake-holders, perspective-owners, experts of whatever partial knowledge, representatives of whatever interest, function, role, task and so forth. This opening thus sets the tone for the whole event and, if successful, allows for much deeper and much more open exchange between participants than it is usually possible in more conventional formats and settings.

Important roles in a Collaboratory

- local host (providing the venue and mostly inviting participants and stakeholders),
- topic owner (can also be the local host),
- the facilitation team (the former should not be part of it),
- the funder(s) and
- other roles that are of local significance for the event.

How this phase can or should be designed largely depends on the context and will be discussed in more detail in the chapters 2 and 3.

Similarly, a good Collaboratory needs a well-designed and held **closing phase**, wrapping up what participants have come up with in their working groups (mostly presenting projects, project ideas and next steps they want to make towards implementing them). When all groups have been heard, it is a good idea to have some kind of closing ritual or ceremony – adapted to fit the group of participants in question – for recognizing, acknowledging and celebrating the work that has been accomplished together, and for handing the results back over to the local host, who will generally be in charge of following up with the working groups about the projects they have committed themselves to implement.

The **follow-up** itself can be considered as the last phase of the Collaboratory, taking place after the actual event. Sometimes this can also consist of hosting follow-up workshops or even entire follow-up Collaboratories for making use of the momentum and carrying forward the conversations and co-creative process that have been kicked off. Since LiFT has mostly focused on the facilitation role, it had less opportunities to also follow up with stakeholders of each event. However, we did follow up with the local hosts and interviewed them about what happened after “their” events, sometimes several times in a row. For more detail see the sections on post-event activities in this book and the chapters in our Case Book.

1.4 Overview of levels of methodological proficiency

Hosting, designing and facilitating a Collaboratory is a complex challenge, which demands multiple skills and a lot of experience. In this book we will try to break this collection of knowledge down into more bite-sized tasks and pieces. Also, we propose a system of gradually differing levels of proficiency that can be acquired in view of taking on this challenge. This might help you to get a better sense and feel for how well prepared you are to host and conduct a Collaboratory yourself and what kind of expertise and support you might need to invite from others.

In a nutshell, LiFT distinguishes the following 5 levels of proficiency which also inform our Facilitator Training Course Curriculum.

Levels	<i>Relevance</i>	<i>Targeted Proficiency</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Introductory	For persons interested in learning more about co-creative stakeholder involvement in general and the Collaboratory methodology in particular	Able to understand the rationale and workings of Collaboratories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience as a participant in at least one Collaboratory - Motivation letter
Intermediate	For persons interested in learning how to apply the Collaboratory methodology	Able to contribute to Collaboratories in vital support roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of and experience with basics of facilitation, coaching, team work, diversity management, interviewing and academic writing - Having participated in at least one Collaboratory
Advanced	For persons interested in learning how to implement Collaboratories that address a specific key issue of a diverse group of stakeholders	Able to run Collaboratories as a co-creative peer in a facilitation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of and experience with one or several relevant methods (e.g. Fishbowl, Visioning, Open Space, Brainstorming, Visual Harvesting...) - Positive peer assessment of intermediate level performance
Expert	For persons interested in leading the creation, facilitation and documentation of Collaboratories	Able to initiate, lead and document Collaboratories in all respects and across all phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior professional experience in coaching or facilitation (before/beyond the Collaboratory facilitator training) - Positive peer assessment of advanced level performance
Multiplier	For persons with the vocation to spread a culture of co-creation and a new practice of responsible leadership	Able to coach trainees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coaching training or similar - Several years of facilitation experience - Contributions at expert level recognised by peers

The Facilitator Training prototype held at the LiFT Summer School covers the first 3 levels. The remaining 2 levels are modelled by partners involved in the LiFT project who serve as resource persons for the facilitator training. Experienced coaches/facilitators taking the training can possibly merge two levels in one in the same loop of reflected practice.