

LiFT Case Book

**LiFT** Leadership  
for Transition

# Hosting Collaboratories: Insights and learnings from different cases

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## 3. LiFT Collaboratory in Vienna (Austria) 2014 and one of its outcomes: the emergence of Evo- lution at Work

*By Christiane Seuhs-Schoeller; editing: Marius Lervag Aasprong, Elke Fein*

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#### **Hard facts:**

<i>Date:</i>	November 21st and 22nd, 2014
<i>Place:</i>	Vienna, Austria
<i>Location:</i>	Semperdepot and Impact HUB Vienna
<i>Topic:</i>	The Evolution of Organization in a Fundamentally Changing World
<i>Participants:</i>	110 participants on day 1, 70 participants on day 2
<i>Host:</i>	Zentrum für Integrale Führung (Center for Integral Leadership, LiFT partner)
<i>Facilitators:</i>	Christiane Seuhs-Schoeller, Richard Pircher, Katrin Muff, Karin Finnson
<i>Duration:</i>	1,5 days (afternoon of day 1 and full day 2)
<i>Time frame:</i>	1:00 pm to 6:00 pm on day 1 and 10.00 am to 5:00 pm day 2

#### **Specifics and challenges posed by the event:**

- Short time for preparation and organizing the event (about 2,5 months)
- Getting the right / important / sufficiently attractive stakeholders into the event
- No easily identifiable stakeholder group due to rather visionary topic
- Preventing participants from leaving after the first (conference-like) part
- The host also being the main facilitator on day 1

#### **Main Learnings in short:**

- Organizing and logistics require a lot of time and attention.
- Clarity of process needs to be established early, so unnecessary confusion can be avoided.
- As long as a sufficient number of participants choose to stay for both days, it doesn't disturb the flow too much if some only participate on day one.
- The Collaboratory "template" cannot be applied 1:1 in all contexts. Rather, each context requires a very specific workshop design that matches the respective stakeholder constellation and local hosting needs.
- The Collaboratory is a very flexible format that allows for creatively playing around with various elements and integrating other methods, as long as the overall process rationale is observed.
- Even if participants didn't initially come with an interest in finding answers to a problem, the method can still engage them successfully in a joint process of inquiry.

## General Introduction and overview of the event

This Collaboratory was organized as part of the Leadership for Transition (LiFT 1.0) project, funded by the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Program of the EU. The project had hosted two events in as a “Collaboratory” before (in March 2014 in Trondheim and in August 2014 in Stockholm). The intention was to further explore this method by applying it with different groups of stakeholders around various relevant societal issues. Another aim was for the host, the Center for Integral Leadership (ZIF), who was the local LiFT partner in Vienna, to create awareness and momentum and eventually make progress on a topic they thought to be crucial, namely the development of consciousness in our society and, as a consequence, the emergence of new forms of organizing and leadership.

The idea for this third public LiFT event was born during the LiFT team’s debriefing meeting of the previous workshop which was held at a beautiful and inspiring location, a study center on a small island in the archipelago of Stockholm. At this occasion, the successful experience of LiFT Stockholm was an inspiration to make a next step in applying the Collaboratory method to new, big societal challenges, and to experiment with novel formats and elements.

In this case, it was chosen to have a 1,5 day event where the first half day would be hosted in the form of a separate, conference-like format, giving a high-level introduction into the topic of new ways of organizing. By inviting some of the best known pioneers in the field to provide an overview over the latest developments they had co-created and/or responded to, the local host was hoping to mobilize substantial public interest, especially among her local network of colleagues who had been working on issues of leadership and organization for many years.

So the first half day of the workshop (Friday afternoon) was designed to give the participants a good overview of the most important developments in the field, looking at innovative movements for large-scale economic transformation (the Economy for the Common Good), action research showing a societal and organizational shift (“Reinventing Organizations”) and scalable innovative business practices (Holacracy). In this first part, three keynote speakers presented these initiatives, with only short sequences of sharing thoughts in small groups in between the speeches. At this point, before the actual Collaboratory on the second day, the time for interaction of the participants was intentionally kept short in order to build up interest and hold the tension for the second part of the event on Saturday.

The Collaboratory was then framed to offer an opportunity to dive deeper into the guiding question:

*What does it take for us as individuals and for the organizations we work in, to actively create a future we really want to live in?*

Even though at the time, we considered the Collaboratory itself to be the workshop on day 2, while (half of) day 1 was declared a “pre-conference”, in hindsight, it is clear that day 1 was an integral part of the overall collaborative process – all the more since the local host would insist that participants of day 2 had to be present on day 1 as well. Moreover, the experience of the pre-conference functioning as an “extended downloading and dialog” phase for the workshop on day 2 was one of the “ahas” of the LiFT team with regard to the flexibility of the Collaboratory format.

This case study therefore focuses on both parts of the event, as well as at its aftermath, that is, one of its immediate outcomes, namely the co-creation of *Evolution at Work* (EaW or E@W) which emerged out of this Collaboratory.



## A. The Context

### The topic and issue at stake

The main focus and goal of this Collaboratory was to further increase awareness for a new level of consciousness emerging within our society, which, among other consequences, is already leading to the creation of new ways of working and being together. Besides increasing that awareness, the intention was to support the growth of new forms of collaborative and transformational organizing and leadership by offering spaces to create appropriate initiatives and projects.

The title of the event was

*The Evolution of Organization in a Fundamentally Changing World*

It was intended to show that the way in which we decide to organize and to work together can have a huge impact on how we face and deal with the challenges of today's world.

The subtitle of the event was formulated as a question, which also served as the guiding question for the entire event:

*What does it take for organizations to become landing strips for a future we really want to live in?*

This question was meant to show that the event was about exploring, if new, very different forms of organization and leadership are just an aspiration of a few, or if real and tangible solutions already exist – and have the potential to inspire and change many aspects of our lives, assuming for the better.

### Hosting organization and network of actors involved

The event was hosted by the LiFT Partner “Center for Integral Leadership (ZIF)”, a business consultancy for organizational and leadership development, based in Vienna. ZIF has been specialized in the field of new forms of organizing and leadership since 2010 and was therefore well connected in this general field.

The “stake” that ZIF held with regard to the topic was its hope that the level of interest in the topic and the variety of input and information from the keynote speakers would give rise to new ideas and initiatives around which groups would form which could start initiatives and projects to spread the issue of new ways of organizing and doing leadership in the business world and in society as a whole. (In this sense, E@W which came out of the process as an organization was a perfect “materialization” of that hope.)

To some degree, the organization providing the venue for the Collaboratory, the Impact Hub Vienna, can also be considered as a local co-host, making the event known to their network of social innovators and start-ups. This was one of the reasons why it had been chosen by the local host (ZIF), and this certainly had a positive influence on how the event unfolded.

As in the prior Collaboratories, the hosting organization's team was split into two groups for preparation, one team for everything to do with logistics, including marketing, registration, venues, etc. and the second team for the design and facilitation. More precisely, in this case, hosting and facilitation came together on day 1 (which initially was not considered part of the Collaboratory) while they were distinguished and split up on day 2. So for the first time in the LiFT project, there was a different facilitation team for the two parts of the process. ZIF as a host took the entire responsibility for day 1 where two members of ZIF were facilitators. The second day was taken care of by two members of the incoming LiFT team, one of whom was the developer of the Collaboratory and the

most experienced facilitator of the method. While they facilitated the Collaboratory on day 2, ZIF could limit itself to hosting logistics – and participating itself in the collaborative process.

The ZIF team in charge of hosting logistics consisted of 5 people, 4 of which had participated in the Collaboratory in Stockholm some three months before. Among them, only one team member actually had experience in organizing similar events, which did create some stress, although the enthusiasm of the other members was a valuable substitute. Note that most of the local preparation work was done by organizing the hosting team in a holocratic way which added to its effectiveness.

In the course of the immediate preparation on site, the local team received additional help from the LiFT and facilitation teams to get the locations set up for the surprisingly large crowd of participants. As the character and the setup of the location for day 1 (see below) was a really important part of this event, the collaboration of the entire LiFT group and the willingness of everybody to help immediately when help was needed, played a very important role for the success of this event.

### Who were the participants?

The event attracted a total 110 participants including the LiFT team, which was a much larger group than the organizers had expected. There were no specific stakeholder groups – only individuals with interests in the topic and the issue in focus. What united many of the participants was a general sense that something needs to shift in the way we organize in our societies, and mutual curiosity around what this “shift” could be.

The participants came from many different countries and backgrounds. Besides participants from Austria, who naturally made up the majority, we had guests from Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Croatia and Italy.

Many kinds of organizations and fields were also represented: profit and non-profit, corporations, family owned companies, social businesses, NGOs, education, public services and also a number of business consultants. Furthermore, there were founders/owners of businesses, CEOs, social entrepreneurs, employees, volunteers of charity organizations and students.

This too made this Collaboratory different to the prior events of the LiFT project. There were no interest groups that signed up and attended together with a mutual interest in creating outcomes in the form of projects and initiatives for their organization or concerned group. It was a large crowd of individuals sharing a broader mutual interest in the future of organization and leadership from many different perspectives. So in this sense, the Vienna Collaboratory was both atypical (in that no specific stakeholder groups were specifically invited) and a very successful in bringing together a broad enough group of participants anyway who shared a sufficiently strong interest or even stake in the topic in focus.

### Degree of familiarity with collaborative methods and previous cooperation experience

In accordance with the various backgrounds of the participants, their degree of familiarity with the topic was also quite different – from curiosity, because it “sounded interesting”, to being personally concerned as an owner or leader in an organization, but not very knowledgeable. Some were very familiar with the topic since they were concerned by the shift of an organization, either from the inside or from the outside, as a consultant of an organization. The more knowledgeable participants had already heard at least in some way or read about the content that was presented by the keynote speakers, but very few were actually aware of the degree to which the practices presented in the

keynotes were already being implemented at that point in time.

Our assumption is that for many participants, terms like self-organization and self-management, purpose, wholeness, collaborative leadership and distributed authority were theoretical terms, and that few participants had a deeper understanding of the practical implications of these terms and of the fundamental shift in organizing and leadership they stand for.

The method of the Collaboratory as such was unknown to the participants outside of the LiFT group. With that and with such a diverse group, there was really no way of knowing before the event, if the method would work and if the event would therefore reach its goal, all the more since there had been only very few previous cooperation experiences between the hosting organization and some of the participants.

### Aspects of preparation

The pre-event activities undertaken by the LiFT team and, in particular, by the local team of the hosting organization revolved around three fields:

- Logistics
- Marketing
- Design

With regard to all three areas alike, some overarching challenges needed to be met: first, the extremely short preparation time of only 2,5 months overall. Second, there was very little experience around event organization in the organizing team, and many of the necessary activities around timing and coordination were highly underestimated. The fact that there was no way of estimating the number of participants put additional pressure on the organizing team.

The **logistical** challenges for this event therefore were significant, first, in view of the choice of venue. The organizing team was determined to find a venue that would offer an unusual frame to the unusual topic of the event, and thus, make sure that its setup would be very well suited for the specific challenges of this event (for more detail see below). The next challenge was finding suitable keynote speakers and convincing them to come to the event as sponsors and supporters. This surprisingly succeeded, and the team managed to commit three renowned international speakers (see below) to give a 20 min input each on day 1. At the same time, this increased the pressure to mobilize a sufficient number of participants. For the possibility of ending up with a small crowd, mainly consisting of LiFT members, was not something the team wanted to happen.

Therefore, **marketing** required a huge amount of attention for this event, as there were no partnering organizations that would join with their own network of participants. This implied contacting the broader ecosystem of interested individuals, attracting them to attend the event, one by one. A lot of energy went into communication through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Xing and of course the website and newsletters of ZIF. There was no direct interaction with or involvement of participants prior to the event. Yet, the high level of cooperation within the entire LiFT team especially in creating the title and the announcement of the event was very helpful.

In view of the workshop **design**, the (expected) various backgrounds and experiences of the group, the fact that very few people would likely know each other, and that there was a fairly low level of knowledge about the main issue and the Collaboratory method, presented the organizing and facilitation team with a unique situation. The team was aware that the design would have to be specifically adjusted to this. The diversity of the group of participants and the unusual setup over 1,5 days demanded a lot of specific attention for designing the event.

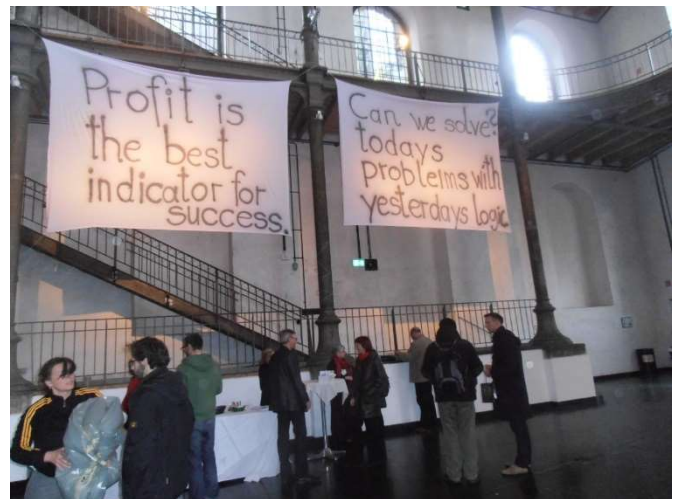


In view of all of these aspects, a high level of coordination was necessary between the organizing team and the facilitators. Ultimately, it appeared best to split facilitation roles between several team members on the two days, and using a different venue each day appeared as a suitable strategy to respond to the specific challenges of the event. At the same time, it increased the demand for coordination.

### Setting the stage: preparing the venue of day one

As the venue for the first day, the team chose the Semperdepot, a historical building with a huge hall and similarly huge entrance area. While this might have been an unusual venue for such an event, it was woven into an overall strategy to support the topic of the collaboratory. The venue provided lots of space to be filled with activity and ideas.

Moreover, the local hosting team partnered up with a couple of local artists and creatives who designed a welcoming area to fit the purpose, which immediately invited arriving participants into new kinds of perspectives. In the entrance hall, they hung up several large fabric transparencies with thought provoking statements around the topic of the event.



So the way the foyer was decorated and the welcome process was designed, was set up to create an experience for the participants that would give them something to connect and to talk about right from the beginning. In fact, while people were standing at the welcome desk to receive their name tags and all necessary event information, conversations already started due to this decoration.

After registering, people had to walk over a large transparency, saying *“Attention! You are about to make an evolutionary step”*, in order to enter the hall where the event took place. At the end of the transparency, there was a wooden block, decorated with a red chain of lights, over which the participants had to step in order to continue to enter the event room. And – this was of course meant symbolically – inviting them to physically cross the threshold into a new way of thinking about leadership and organization. This created a lot of attention; it also helped to bring participants into a curiosity mode and kicked off meaningful conversations. So the design of the venue mirrored one of the core messages of the event and helped participants to practically experience what was at stake.



*“Already on the first day, there was an atmosphere of high interest and excitement. The unique location of the Semperdepot and the creative setup of the venue supported the atmosphere of being in a place where the issues are going to be new, interesting and unusual” (participant account).*

The main event room itself was characterized by the very functional architecture of an industrial building (a former decorations depot of the imperial academy of arts). It was large enough to create separate areas for the different parts of day one, supporting the way it was designed. Referring to the 2,5:1 rule expressed in the LiFT Methods Book (a Collaboratory venue should have space for 2,5 as many participants as you would normally squeeze into the same size of room) was even outperformed here: It would rather have been enough for ten times the crowd. – Was it too big? Rather not. It was simply spacious – which aligned well with the purpose of the event, to make space for innovation.



One area of the room was set up in a rather conventional conference style for the first part, where the keynote speakers would present. Rows of chairs facing forward, a beamer and place for the speaker to stand in front of the participants. A second area was decorated as an (artificial) open fireplace to gather around, inviting participants to sit on very basic benches, mostly made of boxes and raw wooden planks.



These two different settings supported the distinctly different parts of that first half day: first listening and collecting questions, in the rather classical conference setting, then gathering around the fireplace for deeper sharing of questions and answers, in a not at all typical setting. This difference was also aiming to underline the tension between how organizations traditionally still function today and the new, fundamentally different forms of organizing that are emerging.



The local hosts had done their best to make sure that as many participants as possible of day 1 stayed on for the Collaboratory on day 2. Of course, the well-known keynote speakers contributed a lot to attracting a crowd of over 100 participants to the first day, not all of whom could stay on. But inversely, the host did not accept participants on day 2 who had not been part of day 1. So while both were in some sense independent workshops with their own respective setup and rationale, day 1 clearly served to substantially prepare the ground for day 2.

### Preparing the venue of day two

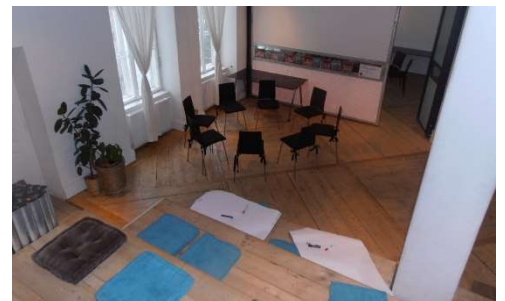
On the second day, with a slightly smaller crowd, as expected, we moved to the Impact HUB Vienna. The Impact HUB is a global organization and is home to the young startup and social business generation – the generations that will ultimately sustainably change the way we work. For the organizing team, the Hub seemed to be a perfect location for the second part of the event, with a process more like other Collaboratories before.



In the Impact Hub, we had a full floor available to the event, consisting of a welcoming area, a bar, café and catering area where people could grab a drink in between, a large meeting room and several other areas which we could use for breakout sessions and group work.

These options were a great asset of this venue, allowing for flexibility and dynamic, moving between different settings in each part of the process.

On both days, we had caterers who came in. On day 1, a local wine treater provided an evening snack after the closing of the event at Semperdepot, and on day 2, a simple lunch was brought into the Hub to allow participants to stay together at the venue and engage in conversations over lunch.



## B. The Collaboratory process in detail

### General remarks

The reason why the organizing team had chosen the format of 1,5 days was to have more space for input around the issue at hand, thereby offering a good degree of general orientation to participants. Since a diverse group was going to be present at the event, this allowed for if not bringing all of them to a similar level of understanding, but at least offering some common ground for later discussion.

While the announcement presented the first part as a half-day conference with the Collaboratory as a deepening workshop on day 2, we soon came to understand that this was in fact an enlarged Collaboratory format, which better served the specific setting and the diverse range of participants/stakeholders at this event. Kicking off the conversation on day 1 allowed for opening up a broad panorama of issues related to the topic, seeded by the keynote speeches and the following small group conversations which could then be “digested” and integrated overnight. In this sense, day 1 could be considered as an enlarged downloading phase, which helped to frame the ground and set the tone for the rest of the process.

The Collaboratory method has proven flexible enough to also work for a group that was not very well known before event, and even with participants who initially didn’t share the search for an answer to a mutual problem. For them, it was particularly helpful to have more input from different perspectives in the beginning. Later, the guiding questions that were offered to structure the process helped to even bring forward some very interesting ideas and initiatives as a result of day two. Nonetheless, in hindsight, it does seem that a group of stakeholders, which all have a strong need to resolve a wicked problem together, but don’t seem to manage because of the different perspectives to approach a solution, is probably a better suited audience for this methodology.

### Day 1

As indicated above, the hosting team gave great care to the **arrival and welcoming** of the participants. In fact, it designed and created an experience around arriving at the venue about which the participants could connect and talk about with each other (see section on preparing the venue above).

The event was opened by LiFT partner Christiane Seuhs-Schoeller as the main host and Elke Fein as the initiator of the LiFT project. The initiator of the Austrian AHA conferences, Richard Pircher, co-facilitated the first day. After the general welcome by the facilitators and the LiFT team, the participants



were invited to a moment of silence and breathing to become fully present. Next, they were asked to take a few minutes to share with their neighbor how they see organizations today and what they feel would need to change. The energy in the room immediately went up and discussions were lively. It was hard for the facilitators to bring the attention back to the process. Because of the size of the group, it was impossible to invite participants to share their thoughts with the large group at this moment.

Then the character and intention of the event was explained. The lead facilitator made clear that it was not about pointing fingers or blaming any one form of organization, or any people or leadership level, but that in many different aspects of our life, it seems that a new world is emerging, with values focusing on humanity living together in better ways. For communities shifting their focus towards more empathy and compassion, organizations could act as powerful systems to move our world forward, and thus, to support this emergence. To frame this, the facilitators used the famous quote by Richard Buckminster Fuller:

*“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”*

Another specific intention of the LiFT project in view of this event was presented in Elke Fein’s opening. In a circle diagram, there were 3 areas, a blue, a red and a green one. The smallest, green area was described as “What we know”, the middle sized, red area, as “What we know that we don’t know” and the largest blue area as “What we don’t know that we don’t know”. On this basis, LiFT framed the event as an invitation to dive into the blue area, the “sea of not knowing” – or of implicit collective knowledge, a tremendous amount of which could be put in service of better solutions for the world by tapping into the collective wisdom and creativity of all the people present in the room.



## The keynote speeches

After this opening, introduction and framing, the rest of the afternoon was dedicated to the invited keynote speakers. They had been chosen to provide inputs starting with the rather big picture of



current macro-economic structures on the global level, then going to the level of organization and presenting a novel theory about what next stage organizations could look like, and finally studying one precise example of a next stage organizing model. Each of the speakers had about 25 minutes for their presentation, after which participants were repeatedly invited to gather in small groups and to share their thoughts, impressions and to capture open questions about what they had heard for a later Q&A session.

### Christian Felber

The first keynote speaker was Christian Felber, a well-known Viennese philosopher, founder and advocate of the economy for the common good movement. He is also co-founder of Attac Austria, the Austrian chapter of the international globalization-critical movement Attac. He is lecturer at the Vienna University of Economics and Business and author of several books including: “50 Suggestions for a Fairer World”, “New Values for the Economy”, “Let’s save the Euro!”,

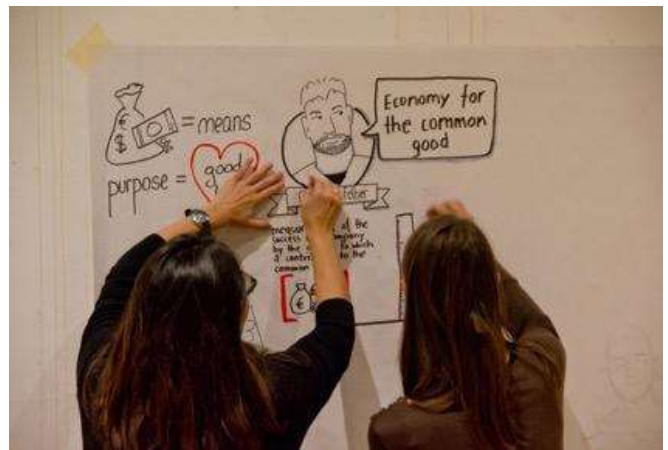




“Change Everything: Creating an Economy for the Common Good” and “Money. The New Rules of the Game”. Christian has also initiated the “Bank for the Common Good”.

In his presentation on *“Economy for the Common Good, Rethinking organizations and relationships in free markets”*, Christian started with a broad overview of how in most countries, serving the common good is actually a legally binding goal and purpose of the economy, which is anchored in the respective countries’ constitutions, including that of the USA. Yet, due to market dynamics in the current form of capitalism, this underlying purpose of economic activity has gotten painfully forgotten in most contexts. In this sense, Felber said, our current situation where priorities have been turned around (to societies serving the market instead of vice versa) is anti-constitutional.

The movement he founded has a very clear vision of what “new rules of the game” (or actually a return to the underlying constitutional foundations of economic action) need to look like and how this would shift current “The business of business is business” approach to “The purpose of business is the common good”. Obviously, this would need to shift the economy on the macro, meso and micro level towards the common good alike.



*Sharing and harvesting input and ideas after the first keynote*

### Frederic Laloux

The second keynote speaker was Frederic Laloux, a Belgian-origin, long-term business consultant with McKinsey and other companies who in June 2014, had published his book “Reinventing Organizations”. The book was the result of his frustration with the mainstream model of doing business and of his observation that a considerable share of employees have gone on “inner leave” for lack of purpose and motivation in their jobs. As a result of his research over many years, Frederic Laloux has found a number of companies that have actually been governing their organization in a very new way for a long time, some of them al-



ready for decades. His research shows that these organizations share some fundamental principles that he summarizes as: Evolutionary Purpose, Self-Management and Wholeness.

In this book, he describes 12 real life examples of how this new form of organizing expresses itself in different ways. Based on Ken Wilber’s integral model of cultural development, Laloux holds that these new forms of organizing, which have been emerging for several decades now, seem to be an expression

of a developmental shift of consciousness to the next more complex level of meaning-making in our <http://leadership-for-transition.eu/>

society. The book had been a huge success from the beginning and has meanwhile inspired thousands of people all over the world to explore this new model further. Today this is widely known as the “Teal Movement”.

### Tom Thomison



With Tom Thomison, third in the round of keynotes, one of the co-founders of HolacracyOne (of whom ZiF is a licensee) and co-developers of Holacracy, followed the invitation to be an inspirational speaker. Holacracy is an organizational practice that is one of the fast growing alternatives to organize. In the system of organizational governance developed by HolacracyOne, LLC, authority and decision-making are distributed throughout a **holarchy** of self-organizing structures, rather than being vested in a management hierarchy.

In his presentation, Tom Thomison introduced the practice of Holacracy as a concrete and scalable organizational operating system to self-organize the work in order to express the organization’s purpose. He showed how this practice has grown from zero to hundreds of organizations worldwide that have implemented it. He pointed out that the reasons for this success are mainly three factors:

- it releases leadership fatigue, through lifting the burden of personally shouldering ultimate or sole authority in one’s organization,
- it eliminates choke points, by replacing bosses with peer-to-peer processes that distribute authority and structure organizational work,
- it scales with confidence as it relies on a cohesive framework that evolves and adapts without diluting organizational purpose and passion.

Through inviting these three speakers, the intention was to present a structured picture of the topic:

- by giving an overview of what needs to change in our economy on the macro-level due to the big challenges the world is facing (global warming, financial instability, increasing gap between rich and poor, environmental issues, etc.), and by presenting some of the best known European movements that are contributing to that change,
- by presenting research based findings pointing towards a societal and organizational shift in our society and a variety of examples that show how this shift has already been emerging for decades,
- by illustrating what this shift can look like at the example of one specific innovative and scalable business practice which can be considered a state of the art expression of the new paradigm of organizing and leadership.

During the presentations the concentration was high, and it appeared that everybody was intrigued by what they heard. After each presentation, the participants were invited to gather in small groups, share their impressions and collect the most important thoughts and questions for the Q&A session at the end. These 10 minute sharing session were very lively and the energy in the room was high. Everybody seemed to be deeply engaged in the conversations.

One critical reflection in hindsight based on a feedback we received was that apparently, it was not made clear enough to all participants, where all this input and discussion should lead. At least a few seem to not have been aware that this first day was there to gather input and motivation for the Collaboratory on day two. So maybe facilitation was not clear enough about this at the beginning of the event and should have made more explicit how the various parts and elements were related to



each other. Moreover, how much and what kind of explicit “editorial” framing and explanation it needs in which context is an important meta-level question to be considered in advance.

### Dialog

The second part of that day was dedicated to sharing and exchanging perspectives and experiences and to enter a deeper and more interactive dialog about the inputs that had been presented before. For this part, participants were invited to gather around the stylized camp fire in order to create a casual, informal and friendly atmosphere. The keynote speakers from the first part sat in an improvised inner circle and everybody else found seats all around them.



The session was structured a bit by having the speakers answer a number of questions that were collected by the participants during the short sharing sessions in between the speeches. However, not before long, the speakers also started to comment on each other’s answers and gradually engaged in a dialogue amongst themselves. Since they had not known each other before and had also appreciated the others’ inputs, many participants appreciated this unplanned sharing among speakers, which gave additional insight to their different perspectives on the future of organizing.



This dialog and sharing session was wrapped up and ended after a good hour and a smooth transition was made to an informal reception closing the day. At the end of the program of that day, the participants were invited to stay for a glass of wine, which was sponsored by WineAid, an organization that sells wine and uses the profit to help children in need. Everyone was having a good time and enjoyed the opportunity to get to know each other better.

Later, the LiFT team gathered separately, reflected on the day and looked at the design for the next day, to see how it would best be possible to connect to and build upon the experience and momentum of day 1 and host the participants in a way that would enable tangible outputs. It was planned to go out for dinner after that, but since many were quite tired, the team focused on “first things first”, which meant to go to the Impact HUB in order to prepare the location for the following day.

## Day 2: The core of the Collaboratory

In the morning of day two, there were tensions in the facilitation and organizing team. Apparently, the organizing team had again underestimated the amount of work connected to hosting logistics. Many from the team had worked hard the evening before to set up everything for the upcoming day. Due to the experimental nature of the event and thus, the remaining uncertainty about how exactly to connect to day one, some also sensed a lack of coordination in the facilitation team. Thankfully, by the time the participants arrived, these tensions were dealt with, coordinated and done.

### Arriving and getting started

As the organizing team had anticipated, not all of those who had participated the day before also joined on day 2. This was partly because it was Saturday, and also because the keynote speakers had attracted some additional people who were not specifically interested in learning about the methodology of the Collaboratory. Yet, even though a certain number of these stayed away, there were still over 70 people present on day 2. And the quality of engagement at the event didn't go down either.

The Collaboratory was co-facilitated by Katrin Muff (BSL) and Karin Finnson (Initiativ Samutveckling) and started with an opening for welcoming the participants, giving an overview of the day (note that is a good idea to provide some structure with regard to timing and breaks in advance) and a short introduction to some principles of the Collaboratory methodology.



After that, the design dedicated almost an hour to some warm-up and ice-breaker exercises, inviting everybody to get connected and to get a better feeling of who was in the room. These practices also helped to form the group as such and seemed important because of the change of venue, the smaller number of participants and the different character of the event.

The ice-breaking session started with three brief constellations in the form of sociometric rows, inviting people to line up according to:

- the distance they had travelled to come to the event (local or non-local/foreign)
- the roles they were in (in decision making power – consultant, and everything in between)
- their sense of personal influence (high vs. low).

Next, participants were invited to form small groups of three people, who already knew each other previously, and share their personal learnings from day one. The individuals that had been invited to come in as “experts” in the following fishbowl session were asked to form their own group during this first part and remain together through all the exercises before the fishbowl. The same groups were then invited to share their thoughts about the question: What can I do about it in my role(s)? Organization(s)? Environment?



*Karin and Katrin preparing next steps*

After these exercises, participants were asked to leave the small groups, to silently find a “buddy” and to share about the question: What am I doing here?

Very soon, the level of engagement resembled that of the previous day. Conversations were lively and covered a wide range of topics. From work-life balance, questioning the size of organizations that could shift, being stuck in the traditional way of thinking, to the decision of learning more about what had been presented on day one.

It was a good start to take some time to (re)build momentum, trust and curiosity among the group, especially since people came together from very different corners and areas of activity, and to give them some opportunity to tap into common ground through personal conversations and connection. Even though it might appear counter-intuitive, this was the case especially since the Collaboratory format was run over (only) one day. For it appears that it is easier and more effective to produce meaningful results when working on the basis of a high level of familiarity and mutual trust.

### Collaboratory Phase 1: Downloading/The fishbowl

As mentioned earlier, a considerable amount of “downloading” in the sense of inviting a broad range of information and perspectives on the topic into the room had already happened on the previous day, even though this had not formally been part of the Collaboratory structure. In fact, it can be a useful and worthwhile strategy to have two consecutive and maybe differing downloading sessions in an event, especially if, as in the case of LiFT Vienna, there is a night in between to allow participants to digest and integrate the first day’s input. This usually allows to go a lot deeper in the following sessions. And that is exactly what happened in the given case.

So the next step in the Collaboratory design was a fishbowl session of about 75 minutes. It had been prepared by inviting an interesting mix of experts from different countries to kick off the conversation in the center of the fishbowl:

- a coach from Austria, who’s focus is to include mindfulness practices in his work around leadership,
- a former EU politician, who was leader of the EU Agency for Human Rights,
- an entrepreneur, founder and owner of a business for ecologically responsible fashion,
- a consultant from Sweden, focusing her work around conscious leadership.



These experts had been briefed to share the most important thoughts from their discussion around the points 2) and 3) of the “Arriving and getting started” phase, namely their personal learnings from day one and their thoughts about what they personally can do about their current possibilities of having a positive influence in their role(s), organization(s) or environment.

The sharing among the experts circled a lot around being caught in old patterns and how being scared of fundamental change slowed down transformation. There was also deep sharing about Frederic Laloux’ picture of how we only show up with a small part of ourselves at work, and how wholeness is a wonderful thing to move towards.

One expert commented on how in the mindset of our western society, there was no way for companies – or other structures – to die with dignity. And yet, why shouldn’t death be as much an unavoidable and necessary part of life for organizations, as it is for every living system in the universe? When



an organization dies, there is always the blame of failure put on individual actors, so it is no wonder that nobody wants to acknowledge that a company might have accomplished its purpose and that the time for it to die has come. This attitude would be a very helpful and even necessary mind shift in these times of transformation. The honesty about this and finding a good way to allow companies to stop their activities in a dignified way would spare a lot of pain for people that are part of these companies.



Another expert shared her experience of how the fear of change often seems to be based purely on the fear of losing one's job. Today there are many people suffering from psychosomatic illnesses, such as depression and burnout. People don't dare to show how they are suffering, because being vulnerable is translated into being weak, and that is something conventional organizations are not seen as having the capacity to tolerate – whether rightly so, or not.

One expert also voiced their experience that individuals feel a pressure when it comes to change that derives simply from the fear of not knowing if they would still be good at what they are doing and consequently, from a fear of losing their job. Yet, only pointing fingers at conventional organizations and blaming them for all the bad in the world, was claimed to be an unhelpful generalization. The endeavor for dialogue, mutual learning, and thus for creating a mutual understanding of the transformation needed and how it can function in a good way is not only deeply necessary, but it also requires the courage to open up and to share one's feelings such as fear.

The Austrian entrepreneur shared, how she brought wholeness to her organization. At first, the amount of freedom and responsibility and the invitation for openness created a feeling of being lost for many of her colleagues. The habitual patterns of working in a power structure seems to be just the right thing for some, and then again less for others. This difference creates a specific challenge when fostering transfor-



*"In the morning of the second day, when the Collaboratory started everybody was engaged from beginning on. Already in the fishbowl there was a deep sharing about the way Frederic Laloux's picture of how we only show up with a small part of ourselves at work and how wholeness is a wonderful thing to move towards to" (participant feedback).*

mation in an organization. It takes time, resources and deep commitment to create safe spaces for personal growth and development in the context of organizational transformation.

What became clear during this opening round was a common understanding that transformation in organizations needs to be part of a general cultural shift in our society; a shift towards a culture of humanity, community, empathy and compassion.

After this expert round of sharing and responding, other participants were invited to move into the Fishbowl. This continued and deepened the conversation, asking, for instance, how to unlearn our familiar patterns and to learn new ways of being and working together in order to achieve transformation where we feel it is needed, and how to avoid falling back into old habitual patterns. Other important aspects were self-determination, self-consciousness, self-awareness and taking responsibility and how they could contribute to overcoming fear, in order to actively face the challenges of transformation. At the same time, the setting also provided space for participants describing their personal dilemma of being pulled back into the temptations of the safe ground of knowing. Several shared their experience of how hard it is to let go of the old, in order to let the new come in.

These examples show that there was a remarkable richness, depth and diversity in the statements during the fishbowl, which lasted all the way to lunchtime. Facilitation mostly let the flow of the conversation develop its own path without interrupting.

Towards the end of the session, there were also some strong comments about how to move forward, and even a certain impatience to move into action. Participants voiced the desire to make a difference and take responsibility. "There are 'seekers' and 'finders'. When you find something, grab it and do it, instead of seeking and seeking and never coming to the point of making a difference", someone said. Also, people started to voice ideas for action such as the suggestion that organizing for purpose could be a way to overcome fear and to change the perspective: "organizations are not serving us, but we should be serving the organization and its purpose. This will enable an organization to reach its purpose in the world."

With these already quite visionary ideas, the fishbowl was closed and participants invited to exchange and further share their perspectives about what had been said, over lunch. As mentioned before, the lunch break was organized for participants to remain at the Hub, with a caterer coming in and providing wraps and drinks. This way, the flow of conversation was not interrupted by people leaving the room and the joint space. This greatly helped to sustain the quality of presence, attention and focus on the issue at hand.

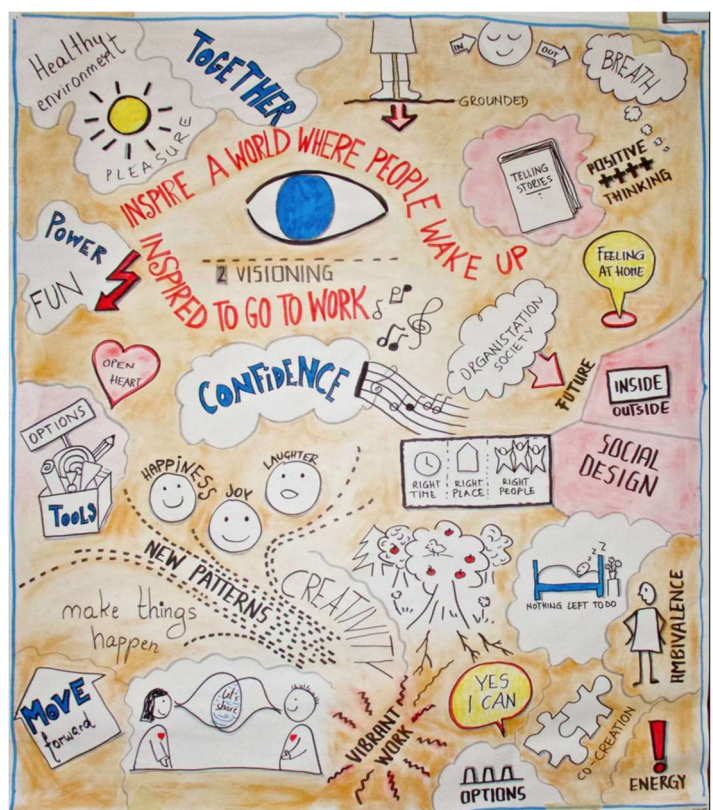
## Collaboratory Phase 2: Visioning

After lunch, the facilitator guided the participants through a brief visioning exercise, which lasted only about 5 minutes. It was framed as a meditative journey, focusing on the guiding invitation to:

***Imagine a world where everybody wakes up in the morning excited to go to work!***

Participants were asked to follow their inner pictures arising as the facilitator guided them through the visionary landscape, and to bring these back to the whole group afterwards.

The debriefing of the Visioning was touching. Participants spoke about mindfulness and empathy, expressed in terms like: "open hearts, ability to get touched; confidence in others and ourselves; curiosity; insight; trust;





organization and society to fit together; joy; positive thinking; love; grounded; loving the one you are; being brothers and sisters" and much more along these lines.

The individual visions were harvested both by gathering them in the large group, thereby condensing them into a collective vision, and by a graphic harvester who documented the whole event. By expressing and hearing everyone's visions, strong areas of overlap and common ground became visible – and a joint vision thus emerged which gained more strength with every new sharing.

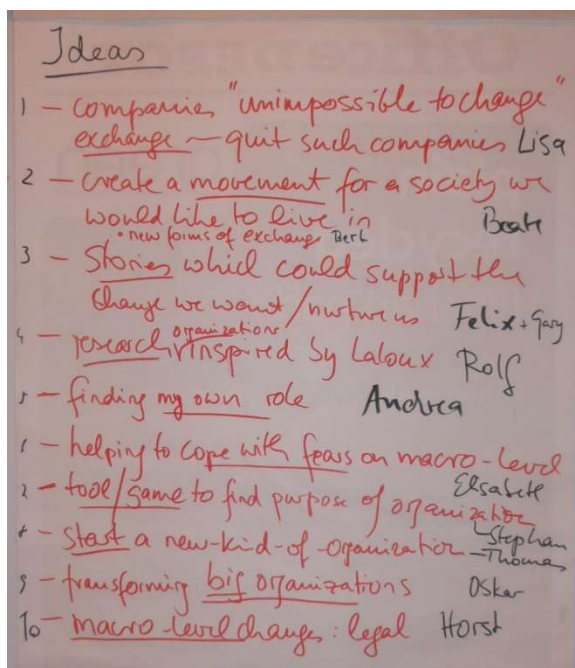
The visioning being the "bottom of the U" in Scharmer's U process, the next phase would be about bringing the collective vision into being through further condensing and developing actionable steps to get from the vision into a visionary future. Following the visioning exercise and the debrief, all participants in the large circle were therefore asked to answer the question: What does that mean for me?

### Collaboratory Phase 3: Prototyping & Open Space

For this phase, everybody was invited to stand up and present an idea or a question to offer as a topic for a group to work on. A number of interesting ideas for projects and initiatives were formulated. And fairly fast, groups formed around these ideas and discussions and co-creation began.

These are some of the ideas:

- Field research around the organizations Frederic Laloux describes, in order to find out what is the best starting point to become active.
- Find a fun way (tool or game) to explore the purpose of an organization.
- How to transform big organizations
- Start telling stories in order to support the change we want
- Start on the macro level – change the legal system
- Transform fear into positive energy



During the following working session, breakout groups had the possibility to gather around ideas that attracted everyone's attention and to figure out ways in which they could form joint projects around these and develop actionable steps to bring them into reality. The groups could spread out in the Impact Hub and find a comfortable place for working on their projects for about 1,5 hours.

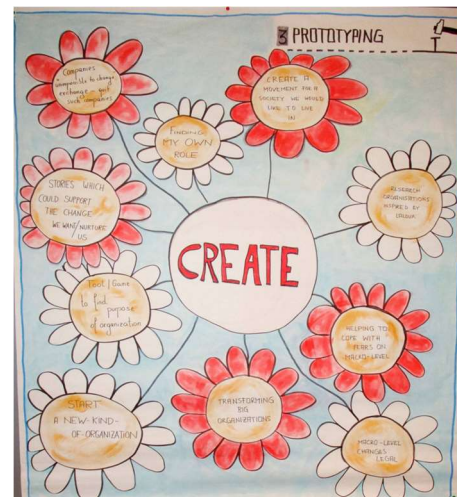
One of the about 7 groups that were formed during this Open Space session of the LiFT-Collaboratory consisted of Simon Schwarz and Stefan Faatz-Ferstl. Another one of the groups was dealing with the question of how an enterprise can be set up, that supports this new paradigm coming into the world. Part of this group were Monika Kletzmayer and Christiane Seuh-Schoeller, sorting out possibilities with other participants of how to leverage a new way of organizing

within the entrepreneurial world of Europe. This was the very beginning of what would later turn into a new organization: Evolution at Work (E@W).

The groups were supported by work sheets that had been prepared and available for them to work with. In the first part of these, there were some questions designed to support the groups in their creative process, such as:

- What is the dream?
- What are the enablers?
- What are open questions, the obstacles, the unknown?
- What can we do now? And who takes it on?
- What needs to be figured out? And who takes it on?
- What is missing?
- What do we want to commit to now?

The second part of this session offered space for groups to fill out their worksheets as a documentation of their process, in order to keep records of what had been discussed and which next steps they had decided to take. However, many groups soon found themselves were in such a degree of flow and creative energy that they decided not to use these worksheets, and rather trust that the energy will carry the ideas and co-creations forward beyond the workshop in to the future.



In view of what made this process possible, Stefan recalls: *“Mainly it was not the content of the event, but the attitude – a lot of people gained together with the same mindset, and the method of the Collaboratory allowed an open way of sharing and bringing people of the same mindset together.”*

For the last session of the day, all participants later joined again in a large circle after their group-work. All working groups were invited to present the output of the prototyping if they wished to do so. Three presentations by working groups followed this invitation. Actually, some of the groups that had initially formed later decided to merge and work together on a joint project or idea.

*“Throughout the day, a lot of the co-creation was around how to unlearn our patterns and learn new ways of being and working together in order to achieve transformation where we feel it is needed” (participant observation).*

It was thrilling to hear the groups’ results and witness the creative breakthroughs that had happened during the co-creation phase. Unfortunately, the LiFT project did not have the means to follow up with these projects in a more systematic way. Therefore, we have no knowledge about the further development of these ideas after the Collaboratory – apart from one: *Evolution at Work*, which will be described in some more detail below.

In fact, following up with projects developed during the Collaboratory is certainly a challenge worthwhile taking on for every local host, especially if the topic in focus of the Collaboratory has been a burning issue they brought in themselves. Yet, this task usually goes beyond what facilitators can do, especially if they are brought in from outside to take care of the process. Thus, what their role usually ends with is an adequate wrap-up and closing of the event, handing results back over to the host.

### Closing

After the working groups had shared their ideas and projects, a short reflection on the day's process was initiated. Participants were asked to take a moment to ponder about the question: What opportunities have emerged for me in these two days? and then share with their neighbor about what they found to be most important. Conversations then again became very lively, and it was even difficult for the facilitator to get the attention back from the small groups. When she did though, both the day's results and the energetic atmosphere it had generated was symbolically handed back over to the local host to carry on with and follow up on. The workshop thus ended in a joyful and lively way, with people mingling, laughing and admiring the images the graphic harvester had produced of the entire event.

## C. Feedbacks, reflections and learnings

As usual, LiFT had different channels and practices for getting feedback and reflecting the event. One was to gather feedback from participants via feedback sheets and short semi-structured video interviews. Both were taken at the end of the event, asking about their experiences over the two days. Also, the team would hold an extensive internal debriefing session for meta-reflecting its own experiences and learnings. This happened on the day after the public event.

### Feedbacks from participants at the end of the event

The most important remark we heard repeatedly from a number of participants at the end of the event was how inspired they felt, because so far they had thought to be more or less alone in believing that something fundamental is shifting and that deep transformation is needed. Now, after the workshop, they felt strong in believing they had been sensing something really important, and they knew there was a community they could trust in co-creating transformation.

We found a strong feeling of togetherness and identification with the topic and quite a few statements indicating that people wanted to translate this sense of “not feeling alone anymore” into some kind of action, in order to personally contribute to the endeavor of fundamentally changing the way we work and live together”.

### Meta-level reflections on the process as a whole

As indicated earlier, the Vienna workshop had been prepared in just about 2,5 months of time – a comparatively short time-frame for preparing a similar event. The fact that it turned out to be such a success has to be attributed mainly to the hosting, organizing and networking skills of the local team around Christiane Seus-Schöller.

<http://leadership-for-transition.eu/>



It managed to win the support of numerous other organizations and networks, as well as of a number of sponsors, which is remarkable even in comparison with most other LiFT events.

Among the latter were the wine caterer who offered the snack on the first evening, and the graphic harvesters, who offered their help and images to keep everything around the event alive. Furthermore, the usage of the venue on the first day was sponsored by the Academy of Fine Arts, the lunch on the second day was sponsored by SOL – the Society for Organizational Learning. Impact HUB Vienna supported the event greatly with marketing and the venue. The German magazine “Evolve” promoted the event, so did the Dutch online magazine “Leadership and Change”, which led to the high degree of international participation.

Our initial concern was that the event was probably not an optimal context for the Collaboratory, due to the diversity of the group of participants, most of whom had not been known to the hosts and were not representing specific stakeholder groups. Also, the two different locations, the shift in facilitation between the two days, and the limited experience of most members of the organizing team in some ways made this event quite a challenge to the LiFT team.

However, in hindsight, most of these actually proved to be just the right choices to turn this event into the success it has proven to be. In fact, the combination of topic, speakers and participants, choice of venues, duration and the design all seemed to work together very well. Moreover, one of the main learnings was that we need to let go of the idea that the Collaboratory “template” can be applied 1:1 in all contexts. Rather, it became quite clear that the exception is actually the rule – and that each context requires to come up with a very specific workshop design that matches the respective stakeholder constellation and the local hosting needs and constraints.

In this event, the group of participants initially had no obvious mutual “problem” to work on collaboratively in order to find solutions through integrating multiple perspectives. While a more self-evident way of using the format is for addressing joint challenges in the sense of obvious conflicts or visible “problems” that a wide range of stakeholders is aware and concerned about, the Vienna workshop rather focused on a potential joint vision. It turned out that this is just as powerful to bring a suitable group of stakeholders together.

One thing that made a tremendous difference during the preparation was the unaffected team spirit and the willingness of everybody in the LiFT team and the local hosting team to jump in and help. This also helped to gather a large group of interested people at the event who – as became clearer after the fact – did turn out to actually have some meaningful common concerns.

A feedback that dominated the event debrief of the LiFT team held on the day after the public Collaboratory was a strong sense of appreciation and gratitude – not just about the event itself, but especially about how the project team had repeatedly managed to create things that emerge and then get nurtured to be able to grow. This also seemed to have something to do with the purpose and the methodology of the Collaboratory itself, which is an instrument for inclusion and harmonizing.

## D. Results and post-event activities

The combination of the Collaboratory method, the inspiring topic and the group of people that had a common desire opened up new possibilities for several participants of the workshop in Vienna. Several follow-up talks occurred on local level, where wishes were expressed to continue with what had started at the event.

Among the working groups that had come out of the process with more or less concrete projects, <http://leadership-for-transition.eu/>



one proved to particularly sustainable and will therefore be described in some more detail. The following section tells part of the story of the creation and development of Evolution at Work, a purpose-driven, self-organizing enterprise which was born during the LiFT workshop in Vienna. Actually, E@W's story provides a lot of connecting points not only to the two LiFT projects, but also to the topic of "Leadership for Transition" itself.

### The birth of Evolution at Work (E@W)

After the LiFT-Collaboratory, Christiane reached out to some of the people she had been working with in the breakout group sessions of the workshop, because they were very inspired by the connection that had been established during the two days. First, she met with Stefan Faatz-Ferstl at the Impact Hub in Vienna at the beginning of December. Stefan was really excited about these new topics and was ready for something new after his current "alone"-phase of working as a business consultant.

Monika: "I had the sense that I want to do more in the field of new ways of organizing."

Christiane immediately connected with that desire so they chose to follow up on their common inspiration. At the same time, Monika Kletzmayer met up with Christiane as well and had the same desire. There then was a joint meeting between the three of them where it got clear very quickly that something new wanted to emerge.



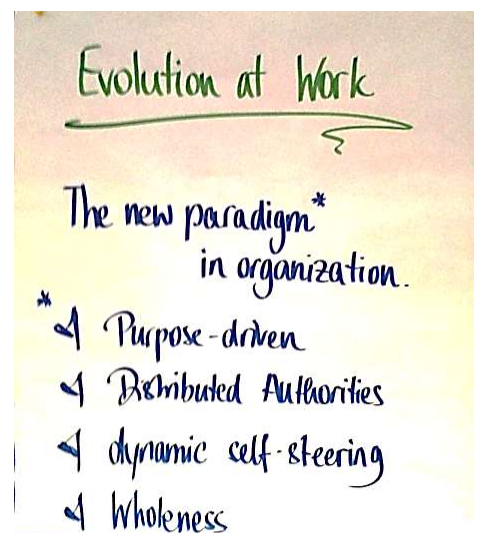
On January 29-30, 2015, Stefan, Christiane and Monika retreated in a hotel in the countryside for two days to investigate the common basis of their individual purposes and found it to be creating a new entity, to be named "Evolution at Work". The retreat was used to elaborate on this new entity, let its own purpose reveal itself and then take the project to the next level. The following three questions guided the purpose-work:

- What does the organization want to bring into the world?
- What does the world want from the organization?
- What is missing in the world, if the organization did not exist?

They defined the purpose as being to support and spread the new paradigm in organization, based on four components:

- Purpose-driven
- Distributed authority
- Dynamic self-steering
- Wholeness

In February, approximately one month after E@W's "birth-workshop", we gathered in the Impact Hub Vienna again with those participants of the LiFT Collaboratory, who also showed huge interest in being part of Evolution at Work. One of them was Ivana Kljakovic-Gaspic from Zagreb, Croatia who had come to the Collaboratory via her local Impact Hub. Christiane recalls: *The question that started us off was directly tied to the Open Space of the Collaboratory: 'How could we serve startups and create a funding model?'*







## evolution at work

The group then started crafting roles. Stefan, Monika and my own passion and the attracting energy brought others in too. Eventually, you can only connect to people when there is some kind of resonance and a mutual desire. Then it was about developing the Corporate Identity and Design.

An org-chart was developed for E@W, as well as the necessary roles for the work that was needed at that stage.

Ivana: *"The Vienna-Event in November 2014 was a changing point, a milestone. I met Monika and Christiane, Simon and Richard. It was my first step into a new world. It is something that will remain in my life as a very important point of memory – a turning point. I heard about it via the Impact Hub Network in Zagreb. At that moment, I was looking for something, but I didn't know what exactly. I asked Christiane if I can volunteer there. And then, somehow magically, one thing led to another."*

## The products and services

Within the respective roles, the profile of E@W took shape in the next months (2016). Most of all, the organization aimed to implement the new paradigm of organization itself. The offers of evolution at work all circled around its main principles:

- **Purpose-driven:** The Purpose answers the question of what the world wants from the organization and what the organization wants to bring into the world. The purpose gives orientation to all involved, connects the organization to the social environment and is the basis for all decisions.
- **Distributed authority:** The decision-making power is distributed to all members of the organization. Each and every one has the responsibility to take their own decisions in his/her field of responsibility. So decisions are made where they are executed. Common and clear rules allow participation by all stakeholders.
- **Dynamic steering:** Through the distributed authority, decisions are taken where and when they occur which allows the organization to remain rooted in reality. Every decision is linked to the purpose of the organization. Through that, the organization is able to evolve independently and self-controlled aligned with its environment.

*"The new paradigm of for-purpose organizations that function around dynamic steering and self-organizing, requires a new definition and therefore a transition of leadership."*

- **Wholeness:** The Organization provides a safe space for people to show up as whole persons. So they can unfold their creative potential and enjoy their work. Employees are in contact with their own purpose and aligned to the purpose of the organization.



E@W's main offer was going to be consulting – covering everything around self-organizing practices and especially Holacracy. We also gave lectures and speeches as well were planning on developing a learning program around self-organization, also deeply connected to Social Entrepreneurship.

At the next LiFT workshop which took place in [Caux, Switzerland in July 2015](#), Evolution at Work was present with five members. In between LiFT's Impact Leadership Track and collaboratory sessions, as well as the many other lectures and workshops at the TIGE-conference, there was ample opportunity to network and tell the story of E@W.

The E@W team received a lot of interest around the purpose of supporting organizations to step into the new paradigm. Some valuable connections were made, out of which evolved at least one powerful cooperation, which later lead to a new offer of evolution at work.

Since its founding days, E@W has known a couple of transformations and crisis, leading to changes in its profile, partners and offerings, but it is still up and in business three years after its kick-off at the LiFT workshop in Vienna.

### **Current projects and services of Evolution at Work in (2018)**

#### **PURPOSE ALIGNMENT – Retreats and Workshops**

Knowing the own personal purpose and the purpose of the organization in which we invest our energy, talent and time is a prerequisite to embody wholeness at work. Sensing alignment of our own purpose with the organization's purpose creates deep meaning through knowing that we are contributing to something that is larger than ourselves.

#### **LANGUAGE OF SPACES – Workshops and Coachings**

The Language of Spaces is the first and only methodology that has been developed specifically for people experiencing the transformational shift of the Holacracy practice – whether they are considering to implement it, are at the beginning of the journey, in the middle of it, or have already gone through the implementation.

#### **PERSONAL PATTERNS – Workshops and Coachings**

Personal Patterns is one of the most comprehensive and actionable methodologies available to help people make the transformational shifts needed in the new world of work. Based on the work of Dr. Linda Berens, it illuminates the ways we are naturally self-organized, motivated, talented, and more. Personal Patterns provides a framework and practices so you can better manage yourself and your interactions.

#### **MOVING INTO THE NEW – Retreat**

*Moving into the New* offers safe development spaces for people who are interested in, or are part of an organization that is radically re-inventing its structure, systems and processes and who want to align their personal growth with the transformation of the organization.