

Designing and facilitating a Collaboratory – LiFT Course Curriculum

LiFT Leadership
for Transition

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This curriculum covers the following aspects:

1. Participants / target groups
2. Preconditions, prerequisites and levels of skill
3. Contents and resources
4. Learning goals and targeted proficiency
5. General learning approach: problem-based learning
6. Teaching and learning activities (template)
7. Phases and elements of the training prototype
8. The Eliademy learning platform
9. Reflective report about the LiFT Summer School
10. Evaluating results, feedback and reflection papers

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Designing and facilitating a Collaboratory – Course Curriculum

Introduction – background, aims and overview

This course curriculum is based on LiFT's experience and database of know-how on running Collaboratories gathered between 2014 and 2017/18.

It has been developed for the Collaboratory facilitator training (CFT) that was conducted for the first time in the context of the LiFT Summer School from July 2-6, 2018 in Vienna.

25 participants from 15 European countries have taken this training during the LiFT Summer School 2018. A detailed report of the school is available in chapter 9 of the LiFT Case Book and as an attachment to point 9 of this curriculum.

The **aim of this curriculum** is to spread LiFT's knowledge about how to design, prepare, conduct and facilitate collaborative cross-sector stakeholder dialog processes supporting the involved groups to make progress on solving wicked complex issues they are facing.

The **aim of the facilitator training** is to develop the capability to successfully design, organise, lead, facilitate and document collaboratories, as well as to coach trainees in fulfilling support and facilitation roles in collaboratories.

However, Collaboratory design and facilitation ultimately is an art rather than a "hard science"; it requires skills and experience that can and have to be built up gradually, deepening with every new Collaboratory experience.

Therefore, while the training is designed to take participants through all relevant steps in theory and practice, it also aims to create an awareness of the complexity of the format, as well as for the interplay of its various elements. Beginners and more advanced trainees thus get a sense of what level of skill they are at, and, based on this, what they can do and where they might ask for more professional support.

Since participants are likely to come into the training with varying degrees of experience and preconditions, the training is based on a model of **sequential levels of skill and expertise**, all of which are catered for in a comprehensive approach. It offers each participant a learning challenge that matches their respective degree of knowledge and experience by defining roles and tasks of various levels of difficulty and complexity.

In order to be able to offer the right level of challenge to each participant in a given group, it is necessary to explore the personal preconditions and expectations that participants bring to the training beforehand. As with the Collaboratory itself, most of the work connected to setting up a Collaboratory Facilitator Training therefore needs to happen before the actual training.

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1. Participants / target groups

This is a training for facilitators, trainers, educators, coaches, event organisers, innovation managers, and every other person interested in tackling wicked problems through a co-creative stakeholder engagement process that is activating collective intelligence and stimulating the completion of vision-to-action cycles. While this is a relatively broad demographic in one way, we are also conscious that this target group includes many people who were early adopters of new ideas, methods and paradigms in relation to such work.

In view of our training, we designed the invitation for participants such that it would filter out people more used to traditional methods for group work. This appeared to work quite well, as many participants had a great deal of experience in either subsets of the collaborative methods (e.g. open space) or related methods.

2. Preconditions, prerequisites and levels of skill

Designing and facilitating a Collaboratory is a complex challenge. Participants therefore need an **understanding of social complexity at the level of systems thinking**.

No specific degrees are required, but a previous education of at least BA or MA (that is **level 6 or 7** in the European Qualification Framework **EQF**) is very helpful. EQF'S eight common reference-levels are described in knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy. Also, it is preferable to have previous experience with facilitation and group decision-making processes when entering the training.

As part of this, the training asks for **basic leadership skills** and for either experience or at least interest in mindfulness and self-awareness practices.

In view of the **specific set of skills** required for conducting Collaboratories, we distinguish **five levels of expertise and proficiency**, each of which has specific prerequisites. The distinction these five levels provide is outlined in the table below.

Facilitating collaboratories professionally builds up across levels of proficiency through repeated and reflected practice like any other complex capability.

The training prototype covers the first 3 levels. The remaining 2 levels are modelled by partners involved in the LiFT project and serving as resource persons for the facilitator training.

Experienced coaches/facilitators can possibly merge two levels in one and the same loop of reflected practice.

Levels	Relevance	Prerequisites
Introductory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For persons interested in learning more about co-creative stakeholder involvement in general and the collaboratory methodology in particular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience as a participant in at least one collaboratory Motivation letter
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For persons interested in learning how to apply the collaboratory methodology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of and experience with basics of facilitation, coaching, team work, diversity management, interviewing and academic writing Positive peer assessment of introductory level performance
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For persons interested in learning how to implement collaboratories that address a specific key issue of a diverse group of stakeholders 	<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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For persons interested in leading the creation, facilitation and documentation of collaboratories 	<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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For persons with the vocation to spread a culture of co-creation and a new practice of responsible leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained as a coach or similar Several years of facilitation experience Contributions at expert level recognised by peers

3. Contents and resources

The following contents, components and aspects of designing and facilitating Collaboratories are covered intensively or touched upon in the training:

In the prototype training, the first two sections A and B were provided as resources. For reasons of time and due to our focus on PBL, we didn't cover them comprehensively in a traditional sense, but rather made them available as background readings. In a more extensive training setting, for instance as part of a university course, there could be a stronger focus on theoretical background and other foundations of what happens at a Collaboratory.

A. Foundations of integral responsible leadership

(resources: [LiFT Foundations & Resources Book](#), [Five superpowers for co-creators book](#))

- What's integral about leadership?
- How integral leadership goes beyond more traditional approaches
- Elements and dimensions of integral leadership
- Addressing grand challenges / wicked problems as a leadership challenge
- The need for boundary-crossing, experimental approaches
- Collaboration and inner growth as prerequisites for leaders to facilitate a culture of co-creation
- Five superpowers for co-creators based on the LiFT experience

B. The Collaboratory as an integrative methodology of co-creative stakeholder involvement

(resources: [LiFT Methods Book](#) and [LiFT Case Book](#))

- Underlying resources: Theory U, Design Thinking and Appreciative Inquiry
- What is a Collaboratory and in which contexts is it a suitable choice and tool?
- How contexts may differ and how to adapt the design to the challenges of each context, setting the scene
- How to define meaningful topics for running a successful Collaboratory
- typical design options and methods for each phase of the Collaboratory (see section C below)

C. Facilitation, framing and scaffolding challenges, resources and options in different contexts

(resources: [LiFT Case Book](#) and [LiFT Methods Book](#))

- Planning and debriefing in the facilitation team
- Inviting and engaging diverse stakeholders, experts and participants
- Setting the stage and holding the space
- Choosing and wording a meaningful issue
- Dealing with tensions, interruptions and conflicts
- Supporting the emergence of prototypes with great potential
- Harvesting and documentation, what are "good" projects?
- Closing and follow-up

Each of LiFT's intellectual outputs covers specific aspects of these contents and serves as a resource and background reading to the respective course contents.

Besides the intellectual outputs produced by the LiFT project itself, LiFT's members provide additional materials and publications about leadership, facilitation and the Collaboratory format for use in the training.

4. Learning goals and targeted proficiency

Depending on the previous knowledge and prerequisites that participants bring to the training, we define the following learning goals for each level:

Levels	<i>Learning goals, targeted proficiency</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Introductory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 ▪ Positive peer assessment of introductory level performance
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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

At the training pilot during the LiFT Summer School in Vienna, we used four different **application essays** coming in by our candidates to get an initial sense of the level of complexity of their thinking about complex social problems. Also, we inquired into their **previous experience** with facilitation and decision-making processes, as well as with the Collaboratory format as a whole.

The group included beginners, people with some experience, as well as professional facilitators.

5. General learning approach: problem-based learning (PBL)

The training has a strong emphasis on **experiential and problem-based learning** in a co-creative peer community of practice, which is complemented by targeted readings of concepts, cases and methods supporting the reflection of the experience. In particular, the training fosters an awareness of the multiple dimensions of hosting, preparatory conversations and holding the space in a context of large degrees of human diversity.

The **problem-based learning approach (PBL)** is a practical learning method which invites participants to engage in hands-on activities directly related to the subject of study. In this case we can speak of the training as a project and of project-oriented learning, because the training, as implemented in the LiFT summer school, happened 'on the job,' or 'in the project'. This means that trainees were tasked with designing, organizing and facilitating the arranged Collaboratory. Trainees mostly worked in small tutorial groups, not with traditional learning or 'lectures' as such, but rather with brief inputs initially to frame their tasks and later to respond to individual and specific questions arising from engaging in those tasks. Thus, using PBL for this summer school created an active modality of high-order learning, supported by substantial framing, orientation and guiding structures.

Our pedagogical design and approach provides **materials** covering the necessary knowledge to be acquired through covering background reading and autonomous self-study, thus partly leaving it up to participants to decide, together with fellow group members and with minimal input from facilitators, what knowledge and skills they would need, where to focus their involvement in tasks and what commitments to make for the actual running of the Collaboratory itself. On this basis, we are creating an environment where participants **directly experience the self-organizing principles underlying the Collaboratory** and the atmosphere of there being no right or wrong in most of the solutions they come up with. Trainees are personally engaging with the subject matter and the process. Relating to each other in small groups, they also fosters communication and collaboration skills.

Much of the work is done with peers and in small teams. It focuses on thinking critically about practical problems and on finding creative solutions to real-life challenges. Participants are studying and working independently in order to take in the provided knowledge base, as well as self organize with their working groups to make progress on the challenges they are given. In this process, they are both challenged to take responsibility for their tasks as well as supervised by tutors and assisted when necessary. Also, there is technical support from an **online learning platform**.

PBL is a learning approach with many advantages for leading a Collaboratory: It is all about the person of the learner, approaching tutors when help is needed and learning together in dynamic ways, gaining experience from trying things out and making mistakes. Participants can thus gradually grow into ever more demanding roles, and ultimately grow into assertive professionals.

PBL is also a way to allow **participants with different levels of previous knowledge and experience** to move through the learning materials at their own pace and on their own path. It helps them to take out of the training what is most relevant for them personally, rather than offering the same contents to everyone.

6. Teaching and learning activities

The following overview specifies the teaching and learning activities at each level, as well as ways to assess individual progress. The more advanced levels are including the less advanced ones and the tasks to complete them.

The table shows the **general template of our training approach**, which needs to be adapted to each specific context, available time frame etc. In a real life setting, where various levels tend to be mixed in one group of participants, the choice of activities will also have to be adapted to the composition of the respective group. Also, if preparation includes multiple sessions, for instance in an online preparatory course, the training can start at the introductory level and then move on as needed for participants.

At the pilot we conducted during the CFT at the LiFT Summer School in Vienna, we used the **online preparatory training**, starting 10 weeks before the on-site training, to expose participants to real-life challenges connected to the training Collaboratory, and thus, to get a better sense of how our candidates were able to engage with and tackle the given tasks.

We found that between a third and half of the participants actively used the provided self-study materials and completed their **homework assignments** during the first weeks. Based on this experience, we put them into smaller groups, each consisting of both more active and experienced people, and of less experienced ones, so that the latter could learn from the former. While in each group, some participants had difficulties in meeting the demanded requirements, all groups ultimately came up with results which we then fed into the next session for further discussion.

As to the **levels of proficiency** we predominantly observed the first three (introductory, intermediate, advanced) in the first cohort. Even though we did invite more general meta-reflections about certain design elements and facilitation tools, we observed that participants' focus mostly remained on the concrete level, applying a specific tool to the given challenge in the context at hand. This seems to indicate that the introductory and intermediate levels were predominant in the group.

While during the online training, participants mostly started by choosing working groups around topics they were somewhat familiar with, we found that during the on-site training, some stepped up to try something new, thereby actively going beyond their own 'comfort zone'. This was likely a result of their experience of finding themselves in a supportive and trusting 'safe space' where it was ok to make mistakes and learn from them. In fact, we ultimately had participants facilitating almost all of the training Collaboratory themselves, in groups of 2-4 people. Most of those who actually stepped up in front of the group in public were well prepared and did a (fairly) good job.

Teaching and learning activities (general template)

Activities Levels	<i>Activities related to specific laboratories</i>	<i>Autonomous study</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Introductory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in at least one laboratory and makes contributions in each phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads materials from tab “The Laboratory in a nutshell” Online exchange with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation Reflective report
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes on support roles (incl. interviewing participants), makes observation notes and contributes to the documentation of at least one laboratory Participates in the meetings of the facilitation team - provides and receives feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads additional materials from tab “Background readings” and selected case studies Online exchange with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitator’s observations of the trainees during the laboratory Reflective report Contribution to the documentation of a case
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-designs, -facilitates, and –documents at least one laboratory Co-leads the meetings of the facilitation team Participates in individual or team coaching sessions for laboratory facilitator trainees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads selected chapters from integral leadership and methodology books, and selected cases from case book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observations of the other facilitators Reflective report Co-authored case
Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads the design, facilitates and coordinates the documentation of at least one laboratory Leads the meetings of the facilitation team Participates in peer supervision sessions Develops a series of laboratories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completes reading of leadership, methodology and case books. Explores (online) resources and contributes to methodological options and cases (through a reflective case study on a provided laboratory) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of the laboratory by the participants Case provided as main author
Multiplier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accompanies groups of learners through the curriculum Participates in peer supervision Exchanges with co-trainers and other trainers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads the curriculum guidelines and contributes to improving the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment by training participants Self- and peer assessment

7. Phases and elements of the facilitator training prototype (2018)

The LiFT Collaboratory Facilitator Training conducted from April to July 2018 consisted of:

- a) The **selection of trainees** in result of an online application procedure
- b) an **online preparatory course**
- c) the **on-site Summer School** in Vienna, including a public Collaboratory co-designed and co-facilitated by trainees, and
- d) an **evaluation phase** with written reflection papers.

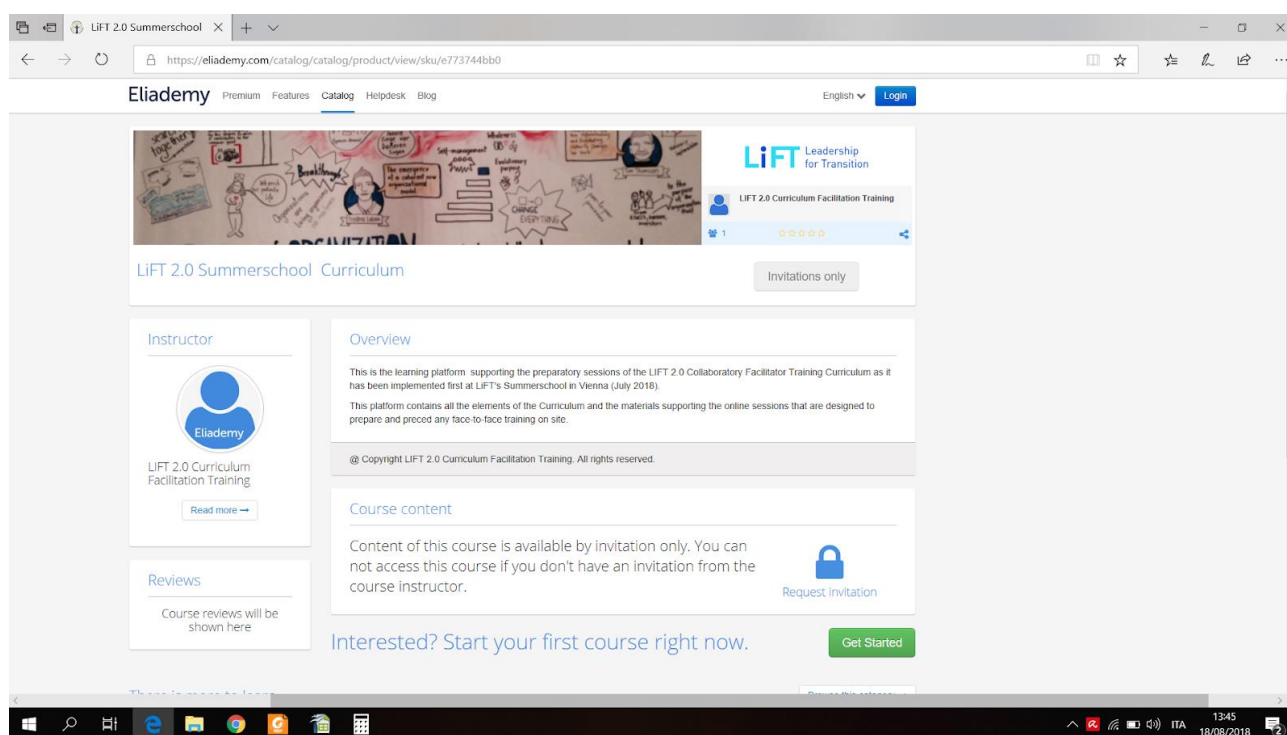
Phase	Timeframe	Contents & activities	Methods used	assignments
Preparation	Until January 2018	Preparing marketing folder and application materials, marketing	Networks of partners	-
a) application	January-April 1st 2018	Receiving applications, evaluating applicants' previous experience, setting up participant database	Application essays about 4 questions	Fill out application form and write 4 short essays
b) online preparatory course	April 15 – June 27	<i>Session 1:</i> general introduction <i>Session 2:</i> looking at the "case" for Vienna, building working groups <i>Session 3:</i> looking at aspects of the Collaboratory, working groups reporting back <i>Extra design call:</i> conceiving and going through designing an entire Collaboratory <i>Session 4:</i> feedback and fine-tuning working groups' ideas	2 optional dates per session Zoom conference, breakout groups Video interview with local host	Make entries in the forum on the learning platform Readings Prepare 2 design elements in small groups, readings Prepare facilitation outline for 1-2 design elements, post on learning platform
c) on-site Summer School	July 1-7, 2018	2 days of preparation 2 days of public Collaboratory 1 day of debriefing	Experiential learning, mock Collaboratory, working groups, reflection in plenary	Group work to prepare the public Collaboratory
d) reflection & evaluation	July 10-31, 2018	See attachments	Feedback sheet Reflection paper	Write reflective paper, answering 4 questions

8. The Eliademy learning platform

In order to structure and manage our resources and contents, as well as our communication with the trainees and their assignments professionally, LiFT has used an online learning platform called Eliademy that was put in place before the start of the online preparatory training. The platform also allowed to gradually build and make available the learning materials supporting the online training, and leading all the way up to the Summer School.

The cover page of the course can be viewed here:

<https://eliademy.com/catalog/catalog/product/view/sku/e773744bb0>



Eliademy has been chosen from among a number of possible learning platforms by the responsible team member because of its user-friendliness (intuitive, not overcomplicated), the responsiveness of its helpdesk, its reasonable costs, and the general ease with which uploads etc. are possible).

The structure and the materials that the participants have been working with on the course on the Eliademy platform have been copied, while all the personal comments and sharings have been taken out.

In order to access the course, please sign in to the platform Eliademy. Then you can access the course materials that were used for the online preparatory training and during the Summer School.

If you have trouble signing in, please send an email to info@leadership-for-transition.eu for assistance.

9. The LiFT Summer School – reflective report by Stian Haugstad and Even Elias Edvardsen

Two Norwegian participants of the Summer School have engaged in **participant observation** throughout the week-long school in Vienna. They have written a detailed **reflective report** about the facilitator training as part of their university assignment which is available as a case study in the [LiFT Case Book](#).

10. Evaluating results, feedback and reflection papers

The Summer School has been evaluated in various ways. First, we have had a full day of **debriefing** the public Collaboratory together with the trainees. This also included a reflection of the school itself.

Second, we have gathered **written feedback** from our trainees in two different forms: a) a **feedback sheet** which they filled out right after the end of the summer school, and b) the invitation to write a structured **reflection paper** for those who wished to earn credit points for the training. Twenty of our 28 trainees have filled out the feedback sheet, and eleven followed the invitation to write a reflective report.

For a summary of the responses in the feedback sheets see the attachment to this output.

Third, the facilitation team has recorded a **reflective conversation** about the LiFT Summer School and learning approach shortly after the school which can be accessed online on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWtPJw-eu7c>

If you are interested in taking or hosting the LiFT Facilitator Training, please contact us at:
info@leadership-for-transition.eu.