

Collaboratory Facilitation:

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- Full transcript -

PART 1

What we are talking about is harvesting the facilitator's perspective on facilitation of the Almedalen event. The main focus and goal is to document the facilitators perspective going into the rationale behind the design itself, and going into some of the specific tools and the reflections made in hindsight about this specific facilitation.

Marius: I have been observing some of the tools during the event itself. I have some specific instances I want to ask you about. Mainly I want to focus on the rationale and what you believe is good to have in the bag of tools in order to make the best possible facilitation. That is one of the goals of the LiFT research project itself. If you could start by describing the rationale behind this facilitation itself by using the Collaboratory.

Jonathan: I hear a question related to why LiFT does this, and a question of how do we think about that in terms of applying the Collaboratory to this particular context and stakeholder needs and so on. Another level would be how that can apply in the moment when real things are happening and not imaginary planned things.

M: That is precisely the three bullet points I have: the rationale for this Collaboratory itself, the research rationale, and changes or adaptations stemming from the specific experience in Almedalen.

J: I would characterize the Collaboratory as a collection of large group facilitation methodologies. As such, it is a collection in a certain type of constellation that is loosely designed on Scharmer's Theory U model, to help take a group from what they are thinking and dig deeper into a sense of what wants to happen and then move them into action towards what they can do, once they see a new vision for what wants to happen. To use that as a tool to help multiple social actors make progress on complex social issues owned by them. That is the main rationale behind using the Collaboratory within the context that LiFT is designed to research it for.

What I experienced and learned from the first LiFT project, and carried forward in a deeper, more rigorous way of looking at, reflecting on and researching, is how many situations, approaches to social problems are done fragmentedly. Or that people lack a large enough awareness of the impact of that issue on different social actors, different segments of society... Sharing the value of trying to bring diverse people together, to listen to each other and their stories, to understand their perspectives and where they are coming from. We kind of have this built in trust that if you get a group like

that together and don't impose too much on them – a kind of structure and method and task – but give them more time to reflect and connect, that good things will come out of it. That is in a sense the overall premise behind using the Collaboratory in these kinds of settings.

M: There are two things you mentioned here that I want you to clarify a bit: you said social problems...

J: Or societal problems I could say.

M: Would you say that this then is more a political tool and not as much a technical tool?

J: If I think about it not in terms of politicians and political parties, but politics in terms of moving groups of people towards common goods, then I would say it is very political in that sense.

M: So there is a very normative aspect to the Collaboratory then?

J: Do you mean normative in terms of a social good that should be achieved and we are all going to head in that direction?

M: You saying the word 'good' implies that there is something that is regarded as better, and that we should strive to achieve that. That also implies the opposite, that we should not aspire to reach what we then would consider bad.

J: First, I think we are not going down this rabbit hole. Two, it reminds me of a short story. I was in a think tank in the Rockies in Alberta, six, seven years ago, and there was about 30-40 high level, interesting people brought together for three days at a retreat center. One topic was "What is the common good?" What came out of the three days was that people could not agree on it. In that sense, for me it is not normative because people could not actually agree on what that norm looks like. They had some vague sense that things could be better than they are now. That is probably the level of which it is normative. There was a directionality towards an improvement of the quality of life, whether a reduction of poverty or in this case the marginalization of segments of the population in relation to education. Whether that be immigrants, dropouts, bright kids who are bored by the system.

Whatever the marginalization, there is a societal challenge and cost that comes with that kind of issue. Therefore, people have an impetus to do something about it, and it often manifests in very localized, practical things. Like for instance, "I'm out of work" or "I can only get low paying work because I don't have a good education" or that we are paying a fortune out in social cost because these people aren't productive economic citizens and there's no tracts being generated. There's different, specific paying points and if you can bring people who are feeling that, who are sharing that collectively together, the norm is that people will want to do something to make the situation better.

M: That bridges quite nicely across the rabbit hole and into a question about the Collaboratory. One of the goals is to include as many as possible participants form various sides of the topic. If this is normative, without going further into that, there could potentially be a challenge within this, as the goal could be opposed by some of the participants.

J: Goals in terms of outcomes or in terms of the theme as in stated for an event? Are you asking do we invite dissenting voices saying “no we shouldn’t have addressed the issue of high school dropouts, let them be dropouts” or something like that?

M: In essence, that is what I am asking. In the Collaboratory it is more or less explicit that you want to include the dissenting voices.

J: My sense is that there is a spectrum of diversity. One end of the spectrum is homogenous, everybody thinks alike, and there was a certain amount of that in Almedalen. The people who showed up tended, in my view, to think in a largely similar way. The diversity was not that strong. How things are worked and moved is shaped by that.

On the other end of the spectrum, you could have a truly representative sample of society where you have really opposing views. You have this real diversity and contentiousness. Then it is much more difficult in any kind of time bound situation. There is always going to be those who will call out certain inequities and that until those are addressed, we cannot have a proper conversation or representation. It is much slower to move, because you almost have to move societal institutions to get into that level of diversity of conversation.

Somewhere in between those is a manageable amount of diversity where there is a coming together around something where it could be, as you termed it normative, in that people want to do something about an issue in a broad way. How they experience it, the particular piece of that they have hold of or feel tension around will be diverse, and not always converge that this is the right answer or this is the solution to it. I think that the **magic ideal balance point** is to have enough diversity where there is a questioning of assumptions and challenging people’s thinking and approaches, to broaden each stakeholders view and possibilities for action. Not so much that you cannot even get to the point of action or trying to do something, because it’s also an agile approach where you say “let’s try to generate some activities after this”. Something that people can try out and see what they learned from, and then reflect back and say “now what can we do once we’ve learned from those experiments?”

M: One follow-up from this. A very critical reading of the Collaboratory as you presented it now is that a group owning an issue or topic that has to be changed from the current state into something else, or better. In order to do that they recognize that they have to attain the experience and understanding from those on the other side of the table, so to speak, in order to actually move in that direction. The critical reading here would be that this is exploiting the opposition.

J: Or manipulating.

M: Inviting people from the other side of the table to make use of their understanding in order to further their own cause.

J: What comes to my mind is two things. One, I have the image of a round table. So rather than people on the other side of the issue, it is recognizing that people have multifaceted relationships to the issues, and helping create some nuance around that so that there can be an area of common

ground at some level, as well as an area of differences so the differences can be productively engaged. For me, this steps back into Heifetz' notion of adaptive leadership, which is explicitly political in what you are trying to do...

If we considered LiFT and its Collaboratory methodology as a container, what we are trying to do is allow people who have some desire to make progress on an issue, to hold that issue in the container. To invite other people into the container and generate enough heat or tension in it, so that new ideas and thinking, new connections and understanding can occur. People who may initially be perceived as on the other side of the topic or table find out that we actually have some things in common. Yes, we disagree, and why do we disagree? Maybe it is because we have a history or are representing a set of stakeholders. People can have a more reflective and nuanced relationship to this multifaceted aspect of their own experience, to question and reflect and these kind of things in a diverse enough space, but not too diverse that the assumptions or the stakes they have are so threatened that they can only be defensive. I think this an important part of the Collaboratory, that we need to create a space of openness and inquiry and curiosity, rather than a space of defensiveness and fear, because then it is very difficult to get the kind of movement we need.

M: I think we have discussed what may actually be a core assumption within the Collaboratory, though I have not seen stated explicitly. A result of this assumption is that the outer points are not the faceable situations – where there is too much diversity or too much homogeneity. Would you say that in terms of planning and facilitating, or maybe even pre-facilitating a Collaboratory, that the definition of the topic or issue must be somewhere in the middle of this spectrum?

J: Yes, and I think to use the comparative contrast between Almedalen and the one coming up in Trondheim. Now we zoom into the specifics of the Collaboratory in Almedalen. The invitation was to come and participate in the week-long tent that was held in Almedalen, to provide a space for conversation and dialogue rather than just listening to speeches endlessly. That was their intention, they thought that our event could somewhat fit within that. That was one constraint. We were already stretching the balance of what they normally do in Almedalen, by doing a whole day session instead of hour-and-a-half long sessions.

Our local LiFT partner also recognized that they did not have a burning topic or issue that they wanted to address at a specific enough level. They therefore searched around and found Helena who had the 2022 sustainability initiative to try and speed up or advance Sweden's nationally proclaimed targets for sustainability. That became the local topic or issue.

The challenges I perceived with that was that the level of expertise or knowledge necessary to have an educated conversation about real issues around the topic was quite general and high level. It was not the average Joe on the street that could enter into that conversation. Yet we were inviting average people off the street to come into the tent and be a part of that. There was, for me, a sense of mismatch between how the initiative was formulated and who actually showed up.

In contrast, in Trondheim, what we try to do is find a local stakeholder/owner of the issue who has a very tangible, local, on the ground project. And who has a network with three or four other initia-

tives and projects that are very concrete, very local, very specific, but still reflecting this larger schematic. My sense is, and the target is, that this will more easily invite, maybe not *as* diverse as we would ideally like to take on, but a more diverse group of participants than we ended up with in Almedalen, or that we ended up with in Caux previously. I think Stockholm had the most diverse group of stakeholders in that sense.

A part of that has to do with the political savvy and network of the local host, who can show up and say that this issue is interesting enough that you might want to comment. Then formulate that in a way that gets people who are actually interested, who come from diverse sectors of society. Even if they disagree on the need to do something about the topic, their particular sense and experience of how the topic shows up in their domain of society is going to be different. People from the government or social sector will have one particular take on this. People from industry will have another take on it. People from higher education, people from civil society broadly will have their own stories and connections to it.

Our hope is to have the diversity of that level, but the commonality at this higher level of abstraction. That hopefully moves us more towards that continuum of diversity without getting so diverse that its unworkable or unmanageable.

M: I think that also poses a challenge that needs to be addressed in terms of pre-facilitation. What you called network savvy and connectedness requires quite a large local, possibly global, network and knowledge about networks that you can access.

J: Yes. What I see in the broader sense of the LiFT project is that we are trying to run experiments. What we did in our proposal is to say “here are people we know in our local communities who seem to have some relevant issue or need that we can identify. These are our experiments to learn if we can help with these things”. Ideally, if we learn to do this well enough, understand and document and frame it and so on, then other entities might come and say “that sounds really interesting, can you do that for us?” Then they have their networks and these things and go into motion to create that. Part of our job would be to help them understand the criteria of how you get enough diversity and commonality in combination to have the right mix to actually move things.

M: There is another assumption underlying the Collaboratory which you mentioned it earlier, trust. Trust in the participants, trust in the process. Trust is a two-way thing. We will get back to some of it, I think there are tools you use that are more or less trust based.

In terms of the facilitation of the Collaboratory, when you start working on the output part, the action part, there is actually quite, a large openness for the diverse opinions to undertake separate, even conflicting, actions.

J: Yeah, that’s right. Two things, I will speak briefly specifically to the design of the Collaboratory in relation to some of those points. That is, the endpoint is to create as much openness for emergence and innovation as possible. To get to that endpoint, the starting point is in a way “what do we know already”. A sort of **downloading** of what we know. The idea of having experts in the Fishbowl is also to scaffold and lift that conversation to a well-informed level. To not have it be any old conversation, but actually have it be a fairly charged, relative conversation around the issue. You are still starting with ‘what is our experience, what do we already know, how do we already see things’.

The next phase of the **dialogue**, I think, has a lot to do with the trust issue. This is where these different stakeholders get to meet in constellations with people they might never have met before or only know in a certain picture or frame. They get to hear them talk deeply about what has happened for them hearing this, and what is evoked in them. I think this is a trust building process. When people get to listen to each other, hear and understand each other in a deeper way, there is some ground that gets laid that can enable the risk of later taking up wanting to do the opposite, while both are feeling safe and that it is okay to put it out there.

M: That is also an argument for centering the participants. Because either extreme would challenge this trust building.

J: Yeah, and there is something else that has been in my mind as you are asking questions. What I think is that we need a sufficient center of gravity of people who are trusting the process and each other, and there can be a few outliers. If half the group holds it at that, it is very hard for the group as a whole to make progress. But a few outliers, that's okay.

I think another thing is that, through both the facilitation and the design and structure of the process, it is aimed to scaffold people. To help them experience and see and understand a topic at a level they would not ordinarily do. For instance, if someone of the street asked them they would have a response. Here we are trying to put them in an environment where their response, or at least what they are sitting with can be much richer, much more nuanced. At the same time, it also takes into account a higher level of perspective. That is part of the idea of getting key experts to start the conversations. Then people start thinking: "I haven't taken that into consideration" or "I see I need to think about this". This lifts people up a bit and that combination of scaffolding and having enough of a center of gravity of people that come with a certain trust, I think are key contributing factors to any kind of success.

M: Would you say then that this approach is backed or made on a framework of a certain theoretical position or understanding, or is it just a more open, general feeling that this is the way things should work?

J: I think this will be some of the things that will go into the theoretical foundations book. For me it clearly comes from a number of disciplinary lines of thought. I mentioned adaptive leadership, the notions of how you create holding environments for groups to question and reflect as a way of helping them learn together and make progress on issues. There is stuff about innovation and emergence from chaos theory and non-linear dynamics that open space represents. There are things about Theory U that inform the overall thing, especially when you get to the envisioning part of it, especially when it comes to the notion of helping people use imaginative rather than analytical faculties as a way of listening for what wants to emerge and having that inform what kind of steps they take. As the Collaboratory itself is a mix of methodologies about groups, it is a theoretical mix at a meta-level of a number of disciplinary findings about what works for helping large groups move in relation to these kind of things. What helps people reflect and challenge, what helps people feel motivated to take action; all these things have disciplinary and theoretical foundations.

M: So what you are saying is the Collaboratory is built on a theoretical framework or combination of theories that is very holistic or integral, both in terms of entry points but also ways of understanding and knowing?

J: Sure, what you are pointing at may be two uses of the term integral, which is of course implicit in LiFT, where the “i” is representing integral in a sense. Though it is not explicitly in the title, it is explicit in those of us in the project’s understanding of this. In one sense, integral is referring to a complexity of understanding of issues at a kind of meta-systematic level. The other is a more concrete or mundane thing of saying we want to integrate knowledge from different specialized domains and be able to find a way to put those together in service of some topic or issue or stakeholder group.

M: Would you say that this influences the choice of facilitation tools that are used in the Collaboratory?

J: I would say at this point, we haven’t gotten far enough to actually question deviating from the Collaboratory. Basically, the Collaboratory was received knowledge. Katrin Muff and her colleagues had been working with this and developing it, and presented it to us. We have taken the basic premise of that and done tweaking with it, but I don’t think we stopped to do a fundamental rethinking and say “are there other things we can bring in explicitly?” I think we are still in the phase of exploring “how do we make this work and what makes it work”, before going into saying “now do we want to plug and play and pry into different modalities?”

M: An example of this as I see it is that the Fishbowl is very heavily influenced by theory U, a clearly theoretical position?

J: It could be in the sense of downloading. It is also, in terms of developmental theory, providing scaffolding for people’s perceptions and perspectives, by having people who are well-informed and articulate lift the level of discourse initially. This so that the conversation does not go to the lowest common denominators, but tries to rise to the highest common denominator.

M: On the other hand, every iteration of the Collaboratory that we have done started with a short silent moment, some would call it a meditation. Is there any specific reasoning behind that?

J: There is a lot of research into mindfulness for instance, and other cognitive, neuroscience, or neuro-cardiology that I am aware of, that really talks about the physiological, emotional and phenomenological benefits of a bit of silence and stillness. Simply put, allowing people to slow down and ground themselves in the present moment, so that they can be present to what is going on. To put aside all the things we carry with us in our lives, in our minds, in our emotions. The details in scientific literature and research bodies about the benefit of that takes various forms, but there is certainly a kind of high level awareness that is a good way to lay the ground, to prepare people for going on a journey. It builds a sense of commonness where we are all experiencing the same thing. At one level, it is silent, but we are also experiencing this diversity of our own phenomenological experience of that silence and what we are bringing to it and what is going on with it.

M: Underlying this, is it that doing complex thinking and communication, or at least absorbing that, requires a certain state of mind so to speak?

J: Yes, or in other terms, one of the activities we do in another context than LiFT, we use a video about working memory, the limits and scope of it. It is five you can hold in working memory at any given time. You can train that up a little bit, but under stress, you probably can't hold as much. So we say that roughly five things. People come into an event and they have got other things on their mind, shopping list for later in the day, a fight they had with a friend or some stress about a project at work. Their working memory is busy. Part of the idea of a mindful silence is to invite people to actively clear out some of their working memory. If we then are doing something to scaffold the level of discourse by initiating a higher level off conversation, there is space for that to land. There is space of working memory to engage, to take and do something with it.

M: Following from that argumentation, one could conclude that complex issues actually require free random access memory, so to speak.

J: There was an interesting video talk we watched with James Snowden. One of the phrases he used, is that you need higher levels of abstractions for creativity and innovation because what happens when you can free up working memory by chunking a bunch of things that are at a more tangible and concrete level, and represent a higher level abstraction, you free up a certain amount of working memory. Like algebra frees up arithmetic from having to put specific numbers in for x , you can suddenly do so much more with algebra and calculus than you can with arithmetic. The notion is that being able to collectively or individually create a bit of space like that, by seeing for instance that "these three details are representative of the same thing" and gather those, then we can add some other factor in that is hard to do when the five pieces of detail are taken up to understand this one theme. When our cognitive working memory is tied up with the five details, we do not have room to innovate or think around it. If we list how we represent those up to a higher level of complexity/abstraction then there's this cognitive space that emerges at that level to take in something else. Then the kind of diversity that that enables and the kind of cross-fertilization from different domains of experience and thinking, is the natural ground that cultivates innovation and emergence.

M: Maybe too critical a question, but what you said now could be interpreted as an after-the-fact defense of including both the meditation and the visioning. You can find good arguments for having them included. Some would say the proper way would be to find good arguments and then see which tools fit it.

J: I get you on that. What I do not know is how much Katrin and her colleagues use that approach. What we trust is that there is a certain amount of intentionality in the original design, that we as implementers of that for our research project are trying to understand. In this interview, you are prompting me to explain things in a much more elaborated way than we may have done intentionally and consciously beforehand.

M: Why I am going so into understanding the specific tools, is in part is to see how these tools can be used by less experienced facilitators. You have been doing developmental work for a long time, and I have seen you use similar techniques or tools before. It seemed to me to be very natural for

you to see the value of these tools. For somebody who does not have that experience, some of these tools might be more difficult to handle because of a lack of knowledge about the foundations or the reasoning behind.

J: I think what you are pointing to is why we got the grant in the first place. It is to make this explicit and transferrable to the degree that we can. To make it not the domain of some tacit knowledge of people who have a lot of experience, but can actually be a process. For instance, the curriculum design that Markus [LiFT member Markus Molz] has been working on uses Dreyfus & Dreyfus' model of five levels of mastery in this, from novice to apprentice and so on up. What does it look like at the different levels and what are the components used to learn at these levels, and what kind of experiences will help with that. The book on theoretical foundations is aimed to help people understand what some of the conceptual understanding and research behind either designing and/or justifying this particular set of activities and methodologies are.

M: Let us go more concretely to the Almedalen event. If we are looking behind the scenes, before the Collaboratory itself, this is not public as the Collaboratory is. This is behind the scenes and maybe the most difficult to grasp for those who wish to undertake doing a Collaboratory themselves. What would you say are the most important pre-facilitative activities?

J: Let me set the context for how I understand that first. What happens, I believe, in any kind of back room pre-event activity is a number of contextual factors. One is that we are thinking about the Collaboratory as a whole, we have put that in the center of the research project, so we are not going to go doing something else, that's a given. The local setting then is taken into account in terms of who are the stakeholders, what are their needs, what can we learn about the setting in concrete terms. In this case, we found out as we got there that you felt seasick when you walked in, because the whole area was sloping. There were all sorts of different details that we try to gain knowledge about. What are we walking into? What will we have to take into account that during our planning in an ideal setting, we haven't thought about. Some of that goes on.

Then there is picking who is interested in taking what kind of role for what purpose, and what level of support might they need. This time, it was Björn's first time. He attended the event in Vienna, but he had not participated in the facilitation. We had to find "what would be appropriate for you to do, what support do you need?" We are looking at the matrix Markus has put out and say "can we anchor this with someone who has significance experience with this and knowledge, and to some people who are moving into this?" To create a kind of mentoring and apprenticeship. There is a certain level of building capacity that is going on, as well as the insurance that somebody has been there before and knows what they are doing, in case it goes south in the project and you need to do a course correction in the moment.

All of that is going on in the planning. Then it is really about: what are the time constraints, what are we able to do in terms of specific improvisations, or emphasizing certain components of the Collaboratory more than others.

In the case of Almedalen in particular, there was the group of us with Björn, Alexandra, Elke and myself. We looked at this, I had the most experience, Elke had some, and she had a type of role that she wanted to take. Björn and Alexandra found roles where they could do specific things and we

would work on almost scripting things in a way so that people knew what they were going to say, how they were going to approach it. And if they needed to improvise at least they had something to fall back on or improvise from.

M: I think that is a very good description of the facilitation of the facilitators, and what some of the things that you as a facilitator notice and take into consideration.

J: What am I paying attention to and noting, and what am I not thinking about.

M: You mentioned roles, and roles to me implies a certain division of labor. That there are some tasks that you free from your mind, by trusting others to do them. Which would be the typical or important tasks that you delegate and trust others to undertake?

J: I think what tends to happen is what I keep for myself, and find that people are happy for me to take on, is the kind of linking and weaving and framing at a high level. What was easier to delegate are things like when we are going to lead the dialogue group. We can think together, what are the instructions, how to design and how can we give these instructions. Then that person can go act on them. When they are in the moment taking that role and responsibility for that in the facilitation, they do not feel they have to come up with it and do it all in isolation. They are actually displaying a front to the group as a facilitator in that moment. They are representing the collaborative effort and collective intelligence and experience of the whole team of facilitators.

M: This brings us back to the trust issue. This type of cooperation or group sharing of a task, I would assume is also built on trusting that the others do their part, and that there is an openness that they can do their part as they are comfortable with.

J: In their way. If I was to make explicit what some of the demands are on anyone who is in the **role** that I have taken as kind of a **lead facilitator**, lead designer, is a flexibility when the implementation comes and you are in the moment. If they do something that you see is not quite what you imagined or quite what you remember or intended, that you find a way to build on that and adapt, rather than crash down and say “that was wrong”. Instead, “okay, that happened, now what do we do with it?” How do we innovate and improvise, and maybe it needs a bit of course correction and steering in some way, but not in an abrupt way. We also do not want to have participants’ sense of flow interrupted by suddenly noticing that “Oh, we weren’t supposed to do that that way?” You do not want that to happen.

M: So you would say that the coordination of the facilitators is more or less intended to happen backstage, so to speak?

J: Yeah, but not invisible in that sense. In Stockholm a couple of years ago, when we had quite a good team and did quite extensive work on the design. One of the participants’ experience and comment was “I felt so held, because it just flowed from one thing to the next, and I didn’t have to use any tension or energy on wondering what’s going on or thinking about why is this happening, or whatever. It all just flowed in a natural way so I didn’t notice the facilitation because I could focus on my experience.”

M: That sounds very difficult to master.

J: Yeah, but in that particular case we had three of us having a lot of experience sharing the facilitation.

M: Are there any specific techniques you use to identify potential disruptions to the flow, and how to deal with that disruption?

J: This is where I was saying that the art of improvisation is really critical. For instance, in Almedalen, there was this fellow, Goldman, who was desired to be there by the local stakeholder owner, but didn't show up until 1:30 in the afternoon. She desperately wanted him to have a say, but our design had no room. People were in small groups, sharing and discussing things that were after the visioning. There were very intense small group conversations going on. The challenge was how to adapt the emergent need and desire and say "we got a methodology and we can be strict about those, sorry you missed the boat" or "you can come later for the open space", which I tried to do. But then I had to think: Okay, it's not going to happen that way and what's wrong if we just create something that makes it look like it was a natural thing to go around and listen in and then summarize and feed back to people and make some comment and therefore have some moment in the spotlight and engage the audience. And in that not have it be disruptive. Then it was an intervention of improvising and saying "we've had a special guest appear, we have an opportunity", and simply framing it in a way that was not a disjuncture or disruption of their experience, but a natural organic emergent part of their experience.

M: So your approach to disruptions, in lack of a better word, is to see how you can include them into the facilitation itself?

J: I would say that there is a decision process around that. It is not automatic that it wants to get included. There may be times when it is just disruptive and you say "we have to put up a boundary here". I think it is not as straightforward as that you always just go with the flow. There are judgments and decisions. I think in this case, there was very specific things and there was the nature of the participants that were there, and where things were going, and how we felt about that. It was also more amenable to that at this point. It was not like there was a group that was heavily immersed in very concrete work and action and somebody was going to come in and make a half hour speech on a tangential subject. That would really disrupt the momentum, and then I think we would say no.

We talked broadly about the pre-planning behind the scenes and then we were bleeding naturally into talking about examples of how that showed up in the events itself.

M: I want to change a little bit of the scope. We are still on pre-facilitation. How do you as a facilitator relate to the local organizers and the more concrete physical organization of the space and issues relating to that?

And once again returning to roles, what are the important things that need to be in place in order to create a good setting for the Collaboratory?

J: Lots of things and a team of people. A lot of it has to do with what we have at hand. What are the constraints that the physical setting provides? How is the sound and acoustics, how many walls do we have to pin stuff on, and so on? Are the chairs comfortable, can we move them easily? In the ideal settings, we have a big enough space to have different configurations of space. In Sweden [Collaboratory on “Why School” in Stockholm, August 2014], we had theatre style. We had a concentric circle for the Fishbowl, we had little clogs of chairs all over for small group dialogues, and we had big open space for circles for meeting and talking.

In spaces like in Almedalen, where we had one space where only one constellation of chairs would work at a time, then it was important to have the chairs set up in a way that people could move in easily to find their place, and include orientation to help people understand why they are sitting like this. Because we had to move, we tried to include an element of mindfulness and ask people to be quiet and pick up a chair and move into a small group configuration for dialogue as an intentional way of keeping the quality of energy and flow with tension at this level without letting it disperse away into bubbly chitchat and distractions.

That was something we did for the first time in Almedalen, because we had somebody there who was quite well versed in that and had some experience and offered their help. So that worked really well.

There are also physical things like what kind of images, posters, and materials do we need to have ready for what purpose. For instance, how are people going to represent their Visioning, what kind of materials and how much do we need for that?

In Almedalen we improvised, we used a little section of the plastic wall on the tent. It was not a big group of people, so when we were pressed in time, we did not use a big process around it. In other situations, we need bigger wall space, more people are involved and it takes more time. All those kind of things have to be thought about and considered. How are we going to meet each transition in the Collaboratory, where we need people’s attention and support materials in different ways. How are we going to make sure that all attend? Who is going to hand out enough paper and pencils? Who is responsible for freeing up space on the wall and so on.

M: It sounds like the core logic in physical organization is maintaining flow during the Collaboratory.

J: There was a phrase I learned from somebody at the conference at the end of June. He studied cognitive ergonomics. I found that really helpful, because we think of ergonomics in terms of physical flow, and things on the assembly line or good furniture, all this kinds of things. Thinking of cognitive ergonomic, how our attentional energy is drawn. What happens, what are we thinking of when we encounter something? What signals are we reading into this, how do we think and stop or do we follow the momentum it is trying to really attend. I mentioned earlier somebody in Stockholm who pointed out “I didn’t have to think about the facilitation, it just flowed. My attentional energy was in my process and connecting in the group process. Not on the distractions of what are we supposed to do now.” It flowed easily for them.

M: It sounds like it takes a lot of familiarization with the area or space in which the Collaboratory is going on, and perhaps modification or adaptation of that space.

J: Sure. We try to do a walkthrough with the whole crew the day before an event, because there are many little details that you do not think about, or have to make an on the spot decision about. It is a lot easier to do that when the participants are not there.

M: A lot of conferences are held in conference centers or hotels that specialize in actually serving the need of the traditional conference. Would you say that for the potential facilitator there are any challenges in doing a Collaboratory in such a space?

J: Because we have not had a budget or money, we have been very creative about what we can get. That has led to some funky and innovative spaces that add some ambience and color. I think the biggest is not having that kind of local colorful ambience from a more traditional and neutral environment in hotel conference rooms. I think you would then need to decorate, whether with banners, posters or other things, to put a kind of feel and energy into it that would not be there from the original architecture of the space.

M: So there is actually a hidden bonus to the Collaboratory in that it perhaps could favor alternative low cost arenas?

J: It might. It is not always low cost, but it is often unconventional for this kind of thing. A conventional space could work. You need a sufficient size of space and the more space you have the more diversity and variability you can have, by being able to move people without having to stop and move chairs and such.

M: I have been a co-facilitator with you on several occasions, and I believe that has been helpful for understanding your mode of facilitation. I would see a potential challenge in using a venue or conference center that the organizer would assume that you wanted a regular conference, and that kind of issue.

How would you go about if there is an external organizer? What would you as a facilitator do in order to make that collaboration work as well as possible?

J: I think a key thing is that you need to have physical on sight, hands-eyes-ears in the communication. I have done different types of work in conventional settings like that, and it is often just working with the person. There are conference managers who are responsible for trying to adapt to the needs of different users. Simply connecting with them, finding the flexibility or adaptability they have. It may not be accessible on the surface. Engaging them in a creative way. That requires having someone on sight. Having that communication is critical.

M: I am going to address some of the specifics that I see as tools that you did during the Almedalen Collaboratory. It started with what I have called herding and setting the stage. It is a special context in Almedalen. There was an outside tent. People were walking by in a huge open space. It was a sunny, wonderful day. People were not cuing up to go in and sit at a given time. What was your approach to setting the stage and gathering the people?

J: This was unique, in that in most of the other Collaboratories, there have been people coming intentionally into a space to do that. Here, a certain number of people had been recruited or invited to come and were intentional. Then there was a certain amount of uncertainty, will people drift in off the street as well? There was uncertainty about when to start. Is it ready? Can we move people in or are we preemptively interrupting things? I think there was a sense of good conversations going on already, people connecting and meeting new people. You didn't want to disrupt that. I believe we started a little bit late, compared to the official starting time. We would gently nudge them, let them know we are getting ready to start. At that point, there was an awareness that the masses were not knocking down our door, we would not need to bring out extra chairs. We had discussed contingency plans ahead of time.

When it became clear we could fit everyone in the configuration and space that we had, we started to get them in and get started. My key feeling was that many of the other events at the Almedalen festival had a more assertive tone to them. We were trying to create a more conversational tone, so we did not want to start out with an assertive energy of getting everyone in and getting started. That fed into allowing things to be a bit looser in that sense.

M: I was observing you when you were gathering and initiating the sitting down part. You walked around quite a lot, drifting between the participants, and sensing the mood or atmosphere. In order to do that you have to have somebody else take care of practicalities, if there are any. If somebody new were to do this, what are the key points you look for, to see if the atmosphere is right to start to initiate something?

J: That is a good question. I think there are multiple considerations. Part of it is a very soft gaze or focus of the hearing senses. Listening for the tone of voice, the quality of energy, how animated are the conversations, how flowing, how intense. Listening to the hum of the room. It is similar to a classroom where you have small groups discussing. You are trying to sense when is there a lull, when are they ready to be done. You are training the sense of listening to subtle clues. To try to find a point for the intervention, when to change from this loose structure to a focused attention.

M: It sounds like you need to have a clear state of mind yourself. I remember myself during some of the first organizations, being very stressed and trying to do everything correctly. In order to do that, self-listening or self-sensing have to be at a fairly calm place.

J: For me, I think that is one of these things that have been tacit or implicit, from years of experience. I would agree that if your mind is full of anxiety and nervousness about details, it is very hard to sense and hear in this kind of way. I think it is important to trust. There were many people given many tasks that morning. Trust that people are doing what they need to do. If it is not perfect or like I imagined, if they had some other idea, that will work too.

Part of it is creating this attentional space, clearing out and saying "that has been taken care of, my job is to focus here now". What you are pointing as a kind of baseline skill is mindfulness that allows a setting aside of stress or anxiety or worries or details, to create a calmness that allows this kind of sensing.

M: Would you say that this is part of the facilitation? That you are, by doing it that way, creating a specific atmosphere?

J: My favorite quote from the Scharmer's Theory U-book comes from Bill O'Brian: "the success of any intervention is primarily due to the inner conditions of the intervener". The story about that in Almedalen in particular was that as we got going into it a little while, I noticed unanticipated and unplanned disruptions. For instance, there was a gentleman who picked a seat in the inner circle, but was not intended to be there. He started telling a long story, because he is in a circle of people telling stories and he doesn't know that everyone is primed to tell a certain kind of story in a way pertinent to the conversation. There was a building up of frustration. I was trying to catch people's attention to get them to let him know to stop, or that he had gone over time.

Trying to avoid that sort of disruptive, assertive break, I recognize that also in the participants and the audience, and the experts were not all we were looking for, or what we were hoping ideally they would focus the energy of the conversation towards.

I noticed in myself how this kind of frustration arose. Things were not going the way I hoped they would go so that we could really have a good Collaboratory. So that we could produce the kind of progress for the local owner of the initiative that we envisioned and are capable of doing. When it became clear that we were not in an optimal situation like that, I remember talking to Björn and Alexandra about it and doing some kind of calming, seeing what is my inner state? And grounding and anchoring back into that.

What I noticed as the day progressed was that even though it was not what we imagined or wanted, for the people involved, it seemed to be very energizing and motivating, and they seemed to feel good about it. That they personally or as a group got something out of it. Whether the stakeholder Helena or the owner of the topic got as much tangible outcome as was ideally possible is hard to say. I did see that for myself, there was a correlation between my own anxiety/frustration, and setting that aside, to seeing things flow in a way where people were more satisfied, more engaged and so on.

M: That seems like very important insight. Perhaps especially important in doing a Collaboratory, which is based on trust, openness, presence. In another context, that type of facilitation might be more about personal preference. Would you say that type of facilitation is necessary for the Collaboratory?

J: I think that is part of the question we are trying to understand as we go through this in different situations and different stakeholders. It may not be necessary, but useful. It could be that things could be okay without it. It could be that at times the combination of participants, relationships to the topic, sense of ownership of it, motivational energy, combined with a good design, means that that more subtle aspect of the facilitation has less of a role or less importance in forming the holding environment. That people self-scaffold the holding environment and form their own motivation and focus. It could be that there are multiple contributing factors that vary in importance depending upon the constellation of these other aspects.

M: It is interesting to see how different demands and expectations meet that type of understanding and facilitation. One of the remarks from Helena (who was the owner of the topic) was that she would perhaps want to see more structured guiding and directionality. That it was a bit too unfocused in terms of outcome and energy, not entirely hitting the topic.

J: I would agree with her in that sense. For me, that was a result of the constellation of participants as much as anything. Any kind of principle of open space and getting people to take responsibility for action is dependent of their internal motivation. How they feel in the constellation of motivation, ideas and initiative. What motivates them to act in a specific way is really depended on many of those things and their relationship to them. More structure could produce more compliance; it could produce more agreeing and saying “this is a good thing”. In my mind, you are likely to produce less actual action later on.

M: Based on usage of integral theory or meta-theoretical approaches, my take is that even though you want a holistic approach, you have to set some direction or structure in which to apply that framework.

J: I think this can be misleading in some cases. I had this in other cases, in a client situation, where a group of consultants in a consulting business wanted me to intervene. What they found and said is “we see there is a method to your madness, but it’s not a tangible enough structure. We could use something that we could hold onto and recognize a little more.” I gave them a method to practice the next day, and they were so happy because it was more tangible. My sense of this is that there is a structure and intentionality to the design, but it is quite subtle. It is not overt and obvious. In contrast, in Stockholm, what we saw was that the success of it was 95% due to the design and the structure and the precise movement between one element and the other, the precise framing and instruction. That was what enabled the success. It was not because we were great facilitators. **The design and structure did the work. If it is really doing its work well, it is less visible to people.** They are immersed in their experience.

How interpret and understand it, more structure is often a call for more concrete, explicit, tangible, directive structure. The certain form or type of structure and move that we do in the Collaboratory is often not seen as structure.

M: I would say you are treating different types of structure in different ways here. You are saying that the structure which you recognize in the Collaboratory is directional. That that is okay, and should be the only structure, and other structures should be avoided.

J: Another way to look at it is degrees of specificity of structure and instruction. There is the continuum from saying “doing this in a loose open way and letting people figure it out”, to giving a little more instruction so that people understand what your expectations are, to even more explicit “it should look like this”. I think that might be a better way of doing this, and understanding where to draw the line of specificity. Allowing an intrinsic motivation to self-author and create their experience within a given structure. If we are too specific about it, they are just following a recipe.

M: At the same time, they are already the part of a recipe. My position would be that if we accept that too much specificity is problematic, would there then be other tools that are open enough, general enough, to ensure that if the Collaboratory gets too wide, too open, that you can put it back on some sort of topical track?

J: This is a question we have not addressed, because we have not tried different things in that way. One of the things we are going to use this time, that we didn't use in Almedalen, is flip-chart sized papers that give people a kind of structure to what should we be talking about and thinking about in our self-organizing groups. There is a structure of covering this and this and this, and is likely to create more satisfaction. There is a degree of specificity that we are going to try to implement. In Almedalen there was too short of a time frame to introduce that, because when you introduce a new level of specificity you need more time for people to figure it out and go through the steps. In Almedalen there was very little time for the open space.

M: I would say there is another distinction with Almedalen. There was a lack of individual structures coming into it, as opposed to the one we are planning in Trondheim. Here, there is a lot of people attending with personal goals or pre-structure in that they have a reason for participating. Getting directionality, if that is a goal, there is time issues – you said Almedalen was perhaps too short – and there is the issue of which structures are being brought to the Collaboratory from the participants themselves. If everybody comes as blank sheets, then you have an issue in terms of getting direction.

J: I think what you are pointing to or talking about is in this continuum between topics or issues being very broad and abstract. The first Collaboratory we did in Trondheim was too loose and open, therefore hard for people to personalize and take action on. It was similar in Almedalen where it was a very high level of abstraction. Even though there were goals, each of those things were the product of a large group of people doing a lot of work over time. They were not easily accessible in an impactful way for the participants.

As for the other end, you are saying what we are aiming for and believe we have here, is people coming because they are working on something concrete and specific. They have an energy and motivation, and want to connect with others and want to make progress on that. That will bring a structure in from the participants that contributes to motivational energy, contributes to the tangibility and specificity. What I imagine, when we get to the prototyping and self-organizing open space part here, people will have a higher degree of specificity in their initiatives and conversations for the self-organizing group. It will be more concrete and easier for people to connect to and to understand what is going on.

It could feel like there is more structure. At a meta-level, it is actually the very same structure. You could say that the context of the structure that people bring adds to that.

M: I think this is important in terms of getting to grips with the mechanisms and the factors that impact the Collaboratory, or any type of facilitation at large in a general way.

PART 2

M: Having done a thorough discussion about trust and structuring, the last thing we talked about concerned the impact that individual participants bring with them, and the impact on the organization of the Collaboratory itself.

Now we move out of the Fishbowl, and into the dialogue and the facilitation of that. Could you say something about reasoning – why we use the dialogue groups, and in that specific way?

J: One of the things we know, is that if we want people to learn and have things stick, they need to process it. As much as the Fishbowl tries to be an inclusive conversation, it can not help but make most of the people be passive listeners. What we want energetically and process-wise is for people to be able to do something with what they have heard, and connect themselves to it. What we invite people to do in these small dialogue groups is to take the time to share what is arising for them from what they have heard. This gives them a chance to verbalize their own meaning around it, the highlights they have heard, but also to hear that from others, which can spark different connection points, different meanings, different angles and interpretations. Ideally, after each person in the small dialogue group has shared something, a conversation can emerge that takes the whole thing forward a step. If they have listened and maybe participated a bit and there is a high level in the Fishbowl, then when they get into the dialogue groups they work with what they heard. They work by adding their own meaning, sharing their own connections, building common understanding in a small tight circle where everybody can participate.

Through that participation, we hope that people move forward in their understanding, and also move down that left hand side of the U in Scharmer's model, in that they get past just what they have heard, and start hearing more closely from others. Opening their heart up a little bit, seeing that "oh, that was interesting, that was your story, I hadn't thought about that experience or perspective". It is also a move to help open people up to be more receptive to the next phase. Getting people to use their imaginative faculty to envision the future. That is the basic function of the dialogue, both processing and trying to move people more towards and openness to emergence.

M: Is there a conflict between the openness of the Fishbowl and then closing in the smaller groups afterwards? Can that lead to a splitting up of the feeling of 'shared-ness'?

J: What we do is try to harvest some of the highlights from these dialogue groups in the whole group. That way they aren't left with only their small group conversation. There is a chance to share those so that the whole group hears highlights of what came out of it. It is not as thorough of a processing, but at least it is a way to touch back in to the collective consciousness of what is going on in the room.

M: My experience at Almedalen was that the Fishbowl had a lot of respect and honest listening, and that transferred to the smaller groups. You mentioned earlier that you had someone facilitate the transfer of such things.

In retrospect, I got a feeling of too much respect and not getting the honesty or engagement. It was rather a continuation of the humbleness and not so much development, influencing, using of agenda.

J: That's true, especially in a case like Almedalen. People did not have as much of a vested interest in the topic. It was easier to drift to things people had in common and agreed on. In a more ideal, true dialogue setting you get more interaction between divergent perspective and experiences, to try and highlight and reveal differences and assumptions, and see beyond them. Rather than everyone coming to some nice, polite agreement very easily.

M: What happened in my group was firstly a silence. Maybe 2.5 minutes before anybody decided to say anything. After that, the first topics structured the rest of the conversation. We ended up following a train of thought that focused on the virtual reality that technology perspective. We struggled to get the other perspectives related to that topic. That process in itself was also very much trying to please and not criticize.

J: One of the challenges here, is that for dialogue to really work you need more time and more vested interests. In that sense, any of this work is fractally scalable. Ideally, if you had a week, you could have a group who would spend the first day just getting their ideas out, and the second day just being in dialogue between small groups and different groups, the whole group and back. Trying to reveal these assumptions and get some perspective on them. If you had more time, you could do more justice to that. We are always experiencing a tension between what can we afford to do in the time constraints, the constraints of the participants that we have, their relation to the topic. All these things. The ideal of what that movement is intended to do in terms of helping people settle deeper into their relationship to the topic, get connect to it more personally, to connect themselves to the community of stakeholders that they are in with. They see that how they are linking this is not just to themselves and the few people they know. Many other people are thinking about this in interesting ways. In a way, it is not a true dialogue, but we use that term because of the structure of the conversation, in having one person talk, the others listening, not interrupting or having a discussion. It is intended to give people enough structure and aid so that they do not drift into casual discussion on the surface.

M: Given this type of time restraint, would you see any other options of facilitating this part? You mentioned that part of the goal is activating the individual and opening space for more individual activity, both to reflect and to use what they have just heard.

J: What pops into my mind is that you could just have people get up and do a walk-around, speed dating so to speak. You have five minutes to have a conversation, and then we split you up and you meet somebody else to have a talk to and share for five minutes. That could be one modality. That can put a lot of energy into a room. I think what our tendency has been, and the way we approach this, is to try to settle and deepen the energy. To create more reflective thought rather than more bubbly, sharing thought. We are trying to save that for the open space stuff at the end. In a way, we are trying to settle people deeper and prime them so that when the moment of open space comes, they are ready to jump in and eager to woo, and have lots of energy to do stuff.

M: Then that depending on time. If you postpone that activating, or shorten it, then that new energy, that activated energy will leave.

J: Or dissipate. If we think about it in another way, we are looking to scaffolding people's attentional awareness in relation to the issue. The Fishbowl is one way of doing that, by having people who have a good articulation of a well-informed experience can lift people up to see the issue in a bigger picture context. That is one part of scaffolding. Then, how do you help people maintain where they've gotten to? A high energy level may not be the way to do that. I think in part it is a way to say that the reason for trying to keep the energy focused, more gentle or sensitive, is to allow this integration of the scaffolding to find some kind of connection points or roots in the individuals.

M: This is in with the general assumption of the challenges of complex understanding. You mentioned in the first part the working memory and the spacing there. How letting the moments of thinking and experience connect to each other requires some reflective space. We talked a little about what could have been done differently. One of the things you use as a tool is self-organizing. Why self-organizing, why not moderate it?

J: For instance, one way we could have run things is to say "here's the initiative, here is the local host, these are the topics, please pick one and do something around it". Or, for instance, with the one in Trondheim we could say "here are these new initiatives and local stakeholders, join up with one of them and see which one you want to do". These are plausible and possible, more traditional ways of doing things. I think about how I as a participant would be energized or motivated – or not – in that kind of situation. What I imagine is that I get a set of givens and constraints. My own energy or interest may have come in some new random way through previous conversations and/or activities and hallway conversations. There is some kind of process going on in me, and it may and may not fit in the containers that are provided. The notion of using open space as self-organizing is to allow for emergence of insights and impetus that was not necessarily obvious, visible or present to begin with.

M: I am not talking about the open space; I'm talking about the immediate small group dialogue after the Fishbowl. There we also have self-organizing.

J: In the case of Almedalen, we let people self-organize because of time constraints, because of the simplicity and the participants. That is one thing in terms of choices. What I could imagine doing differently is give more intentional instructions. Invite people, for instance, to do another mindfulness exercise, like when we had to move the chairs in a silent, mindful way. We could have people stand up and move around in silence to find two or three people they do not know yet, and form groups on that basis, to form new random connections.

M: In my experience, there is a very narrow difference between pre-organizing in terms of interests you know exist, and free organizing. When a group of people enter an open room, most of them stand with people they know already.

In one way, open space and concrete structuring can lead to the same configurations. You said that using this type of openness or self-organizing is actually timesaving?

J: In the case of Almedalen in particular we had time pressure. We only had one day. Then it was simply a pragmatic choice. If we gave more instruction to organize in a more mindful intentional way, that in itself would add to the time it takes. Part of the decision was simply that we did not have enough time, and it did not feel necessary. Part of that choice was simply recognizing that the people

in the room, in the conversation, were not necessarily sufficiently, concretely connected to the theme or topic to generate the kind of meaningful dialogue around the theme that we were aiming for. I could imagine and almost predict that the kind of feeling-good conversations that came out and people expressed at the end was going to be what was going to happen. Rather than fighting the tide to make something happen, when the recipe ingredients weren't there, let it flow in an easy way.

M: Let me try an alternative explanation. In Almedalen, there were almost 10 different groups or organizations in the holding space. Is it possible that you chose to use this external mindfulness organizer out of some sort of politeness? To see what you could use him for out of respect of the others?

J: There was an explicit request to somehow include him, because he is the head of the mindfulness group that was a sponsor. Many years ago in Canada we did something like this and it worked very well. It was taking a gift that was offered nicely, being politically sensitive of course, and saying what could we do with this, what can we make of it? It was done to get people into the dialogue group. It was and is something I can imagine doing again as it worked well. It was an emergent thing; it did not come out of our preplanning intentions. That did not mean they had not brought it up before. They did not spring it on us the same day.

M: I am thinking about pre-facilitation and the facilitation. You have to be aware of these things, and this is a concrete example of that. Something that is not in the textbook about facilitation actually informed the organization of the Collaboratory itself.

J: Sure. We have that right now with the one in Trondheim – who are going to be the experts, who is going to be in the center of the Fishbowl? There's conversation about this, and I suddenly realized there are a lot of constraints and tensions, and there's a lot of factors that the people championing for certain people to be there are maybe not aware of. Implications of 'if you only have these kind of people or too much of this, or they do not meet this criteria, here is how it's going to end up'. In the enthusiasm, people make suggestions. Sometimes it is really great and works out, and sometimes you have to be thinking "is this going to be working out well, what do I imagine, what do I hypothesize, what do I need to do to guide or shape it in away so that it does go well?"

M: That also points to a facilitators skill in recognizing and doing that hypothesizing about what this will do to impact or what will happen if we do this or that. I think it is important to recognize, not the randomness, as there is structure. I think it is an important part of understanding why the different Collaboratories are the way they are. What are the impact factors or how do you adapt?

J: I think part of this is that this is a research project. We are experimenting and learning. What we are learning is how many things we do not know, or had not thought of ahead of time. It is actually in the reflective process of being interviewed and being asked about these things that I am thinking about them in some way. I may have thought about them in the moment, at the time when the need for adaptations arose.

The same when the Goldman guy came in. First, I said you can come and do an open space session, but then he only had this many minutes before having another thing. I thought “okay, how do we make something out of this, that pleases the stakeholder/topicowner, and with intentions for the outcomes”. There are all these considerations you are constantly juggling.

M: That also means that the facilitator group is in collaboration with topic owners, and have to decide on some priorities. In my perspective, many of these unconventional additions to the Collaboratory made it not work as well as it could have in that context. You have to priorities between the political goal and the functional goal of the Collaboratory.

J: At one point in the morning, I realized this wasn't going to be what we imagined or hoped. This was because of who showed up, the distance to the topic, or high level abstraction of the topic, the lack of concrete connection for people to it. It was not meeting some of our ideal criteria for what we imagined the Collaboratory to be a design for. It is an adaptation we are making. Then it is easier to give Helena – as the local owner of the issue – higher priority to some of her desires and wishes, like a virtual reality person and Goldman coming in. We can accommodate that, because we are essentially doing this for her and her issue.

M: Which can be more challenging if there are conflicting goals or priorities.

J: And there could be. I have heard many people talk about this. Many people approach this kind of facilitation work with a script, with an outline of what should happen and why. It is well thought through and well designed. Deviations from that are often met with trying to push the deviations back into the track of the design. There is tension, because sometimes the designers or facilitators know better, and deviations are drawing it away and you need to herd it back. Other times, how you can use those to opportunities to improvise and keep the energy flowing in a certain way, keep the energy or attention up. It might get them to consider something they have not thought of. There is also a need recognize that the participants do not know the designs and the details of this. For them these improvisations, if they are done in a way that they look like they fit in the natural flow, they think “that's just cool, look at how all that came together”.

M: That is the assumption of the naïve participants. It has been unique with all the Collaboratories so far that several people have been there because of interest in the methodology itself. That might lead to a higher awareness. However, several of the other people I talked to or interviewed after the event found many of these aspects disrupting, even close to manipulative.

J: I recognize that. One way is that the participants say “look how it all flows together”. On the other hand, they may say just “what a mess”. We have contrast in our experiences. The easy one is the one in Sweden where the day flowed really well and there were not anomalies. We did not have random people coming in off the streets as we did in Almedalen. We had a much more controlled and contained environment. In addition, a contained and well-designed set of participants. They were clearly connected and passionate about the topic. Their internal motivational investment was different. If we were to summarize contrasting events, Stockholm had an ideal mix of participants, closeness to the theme, physical setting with good and lot of space to do things. Whereas in Almedalen limitations of the setting, open to the street with trucks driving by, making noise, people coming and going,

and the intention of the event that people freely wander in and out. The issue was a bit far from people and so on. We had less than ideal conditions. At some point, as a facilitator, you say you are not going to try to force this into something. Sort of like in Caux, we had that tension between the issue and topic. What people wanted was actually more about the methodology. That brought in extra complications and factors.

It reminds me a little bit about what we've been doing with open space technology, where in ideal conditions it is super powerful and brings about tremendous progress and innovation. It often gets misused and applied in a generic type of setting. Here the conditions to really energize people's sense of inner motivation, sense of responsibility and passion are not generated. People just say something out of some superficial need or interest for attention or whatever.

M: I think that is very important in terms of developing the Collaboratory more in the direction of a toolbox, rather than a specific methodology, and identifying some alternative tools and when those are appropriate to use.

J: That is part of our goal. What we see is a broad movement we are trying to hold steady over the course of the different implementations. And have a varying ability at certain levels within that to see what other tools can aid in what settings in what way. It is really very exploratory research. To me this is a relatively rare instance of having this intense focus through interviews and observations in multiple instances of this kind of event. I do not think that happens very often.

M: At the same time, life in general isn't perfectly preplanned, and adaptations are fundamental to sustain such complex methodologies. Because it is very much a complex methodology.

J: Very much. That is part of what I understand as the Art of Hosting. They have done this kind of meta-methodology, with hosting as a large abstract concept that can utilize world café, dialogue, open space and all this. There are some meta-level things. In terms of a community of practice, I can imagine they are closest. For instance, Thomas Jordan, one of his comments about why we are doing this – why are we making another methodology? Why are we doing something different and re-searching it.

M: This gives me another reflection, because the core goal of LiFT is not refinement of the Collaboratory. It has rather chosen the Collaboratory as a tool to investigate the possibility for leading for change.

J: This is the case. We took it up as a modality or methodology in our first meeting, the first round of LiFT. We did that, and said we would like to continue, we enjoy getting together. The way to do that was to apply for funding. Then we had to have a more concrete focus, be more clear about what we were doing, have a methodology, and why are we doing all this. Then we become burdened with the expectations and constraints of the funding.

In a larger sense, those of us who have been involved for a long time in LiFT carry this larger narrative. We are talking about leadership for transition, and we are using this as an exemplar to try to understand how to support multi-stakeholder complex issues making progress. There are other ways you

could do that, but then you get into the danger of saying “oh this is our way, or we’re going to trademark it”, or that sort of thing. We know it is an open source thing in that one way. The simplistic approach can be to say “you do this this and this”. What we are trying to say, our experience even tentatively in the first round of LiFT, was to say “it’s not as simple as that” and “if somebody else wanted to apply this in a good way, what might they need to take into consideration?”

M: Absolutely. I still feel that directionally has drifted towards the Collaboratory, and I think that has taken up the main focus. Thinking about the questionnaires and the research strategies we have developed, they are much more directed towards the Collaboratory rather than developing leadership for transition.

J: In a sense I agree. There are two things. One is that the Collaboratory is tangible enough, a concrete exemplar for us to do research on. Otherwise, I think it is far too easy for the larger question to be too abstract and be disconnected from empirical evidence. That is my sense of why it has naturally drifted in this direction. We can actually talk about something concrete here. If we talk about these larger issues, I am aware that we’re opening Pandora’s Box. We do not have access to social players who have enough of the wheels of power for us to engage. What would they need help to think about societal transformation and change? Or even how do we get transitional movement or people invested in this to even pay attention or listen to what we think about, or find that they’re interested in trying something new out? They have their things and they are doing their things. That is why I suspect it is a lot more difficult to hold the larger intention in each moment.

M: One final comment on this topic. Is there a possibility that we have parked the issue or the space where that transition actually happens with the local owner? We are saying that we are interested in gathering feedback about what has happened after the event, if there has actually been any change as a result of the Collaboratory. But that’s sort of goes outside of our actual research.

J: We have had to limit the scope of our research because of the degree of funding and access. It’s as simple as that.

M: Presentations after dialogue groups, when each group sends one person up to summarize their dialogue. What is the point of that?

J: I referred to this earlier. We want to have this dynamic between whole group conversation and individual/small group integration processing. The way to reconnect with the whole group is simply to have each group say something about their experience in the small group, some highlight, so the whole group hears a little bit about the other conversations.

M: Would you say that that has a greater effect, that you got different focal points in those groups instead of getting five of those seven similar stories out of that?

J: Of course, that would be more interesting. That would stimulate another level of reflection in people: “wow, they were talking about that, that never occurred to me.” More diversity here would offer

the possibility. You do not want such wide diversity that people can't connect to it at all. When there's too much homogeneity, it is not likely to be stimulating.

M: On the other hand, the experience that almost all the groups touched upon similar issues created a very strong feeling of interconnectedness and sort of belonging.

J: This is where I think my prediction, or what I saw happening is that what you end up with often is the group wanting to feel good. It is often because these are people who spend much of their time in an environment, which is not agreeing with them. Where they feel on the margins or outside with their perspective. They get into a room of people where other people are thinking the same, and it's so nice to hear somebody reinforce and validate my experience and my perspective. In a sense, what that does is create this sense of feeling good, feeling part of my tribe – I am with people who think like me and feel about the world like me. That can be nice. For actually making progress on a complex social issue, it is only a small part of that process.

M: We already spoke a bit about open space, you answered a lot of that already. What are your reflections of the use of the term experts in the Fishbowl?

J: If I look at it this way, in an ideal situation where everyone is on par with each other, then it would simply be some representative voices to start the conversation. In this instance, the term expert is simply a way to designate that this person has some experience and they have been further down the road on this journey, on this issue. They have some tales to tell about it that are worth sharing. I think that expert then gives many people a sense of credibility or respect. That they are worth listening to. They have something to say that would be valuable. In that sense, it empowers both the people in the center to speak, but it also hopefully creates an openness in listeners. In Almedalen it didn't necessarily work out, there was maybe 1,5 people in the circle that really would have met our ideal criteria. That can be an issue too. Using the term, when it is not necessarily realized, can create cynicism. There could be other experiences or perceptions of it. I am trying to articulate the ideal.

M: Another critique of it would be that it actually reinforces a sense of difference, rather than creating a sense of equality. Somebody is the experts and that means somebody else is not.

J: Sure, I think part of the whole methodology over the time is to move people from traditional modes of engagement, towards more participatory ones. You start out with experts, who often have something more to say, more experience, knowledge and perspective. Sometimes they just have their own perspective to say. By the time you get to the end, everybody is equal. Everybody who wants to come and host an open space session is welcome to do it. There is a move towards that equalization which I think in some ways reflect the transition from the typical stratification in society to a more participatory egalitarian way of engaging.

M: Would there be another word that could perhaps do both things without the difficulties?

J: I am not going to brainstorm about it right now, but if we could come up with one I would be open.

M: Personally, I think there are some issues with the word. I have not thought about it as a crucial issue. These types of power structures or authority structures will be present no matter what. But I think it might be important in terms of the pre-facilitation, especially the part of the local owners. You are finding people to sit in the initial fishbowl. Some would appreciate being called an expert and some would say they are not an expert on this.

J: We can look at that as something going forward. We have a young kid speaking in Trondheim, who won't see himself as an expert in some way, but we're seeing "you are an expert in having first hand experience with the issue at hand". That gives you a type of expertise that is different than these other people.

M: So there is a specific understanding or definition of expert?.

J: It is less technical, professional, and more saying "if you can give voice to an aspect or facet of this experience or phenomenon we are talking about, then you have a kind of expertise.

M: What are your thoughts and reflections about post-facilitation? After the event. We began this interview by saying a lot of the facilitation is that is visible is during the Collaboratory itself. However, there are a lot of things going on before that we talked about, identified and discussed. Are there similar aspects after the event itself?

J: I think part of the premise of how we have engaged is to be very explicit in that we take no responsibility of following up, hosting or owning any of the local things that come out of it. We fly in, do our thing for people and fly out. In terms of post-Collaboratory, we are definitely hands-off in that sense. We have heard stories about things that happened and the impact it had. I did have somebody from the one in Sweden contact me because they were invited to do a big thing for Greenpeace and said they would love to do this methodology, to ask if they could get some help with it. Beyond that, it is only possible, anecdotal evidence somebody heard. There has been no systematic attempt to follow up on tangible initiatives. It may be easier in this case, because now it is local, it is somebody who is in our circle of contact that will be carrying the tread of the initiative. It is probably easier to track the post-facilitation ripples. That is in this case coincidental or circumstantial in that the event is being hosted where we live.

M: In general, this Collaboratory was a part of a research project. We debrief and talk about things, and do interviews like and a facilitation discussion. Let us assume that it was not a research project, and you still had you and your facilitator group. What would you normally have done after such a Collaboratory?

J: Relax. What often happens for me physiologically is that I get very tired because you are holding your attentional energy in a high state for the whole time. When it is over, you realize how much energy you have been using. That is one sort of post-facilitation response. I think that is a common thing in a lot of settings.

If this as a scenario was a consultancy and a paying client, there would be expectations to following up, to see was it successful, how things were implemented. You build into a more hands on kind of

relationship and support for people taking what they have gathered and implementing it. That is what I could imagine, but it is a very different scenario from what we are doing.

M: What about in terms of reflecting on your personal skills and ability to be a facilitator, and the specific tools that you use?

J: In the context that we are trying to generate data for the curriculum, the intellectual output, the facilitator training, is how do you build an interactive cycle of learning. Part of it has been that in the past, we have gotten together and debriefed, and informally surveyed people about what did you notice, what did go well, what did not. We have done that on a small, informal scale the day after. Now in the second, funded event, we are able to have a more rigorous type of structured or at least semi-structured interviews with a group of people. We can gather data in a more systematic, meta-level way. We can interview Christiane about being main facilitator for the one in Trondheim. What was that experience like and how did that look? Then try to correlate data between what I have said and what she said about it. What overlaps, what differences? As a project group, we can reflect on what we see from those commonalities and differences.

As an individual facilitator, we have access to more sophisticated and rigorous reflections and feedback. It is good if you can go talk to someone who has been observing you, even setting up ahead of time to have that role of observing and witnessing, rather than directly participating all the time. That is a way to bring some intentionality to reflect and learn and get input on what happened.