From Complexity to Interaction Design

Designing for Emergence with Liberating Structures

Martin Günther

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Welcome



What to expect from today's session



Keith McCandless
and Henri Lipmanowicz

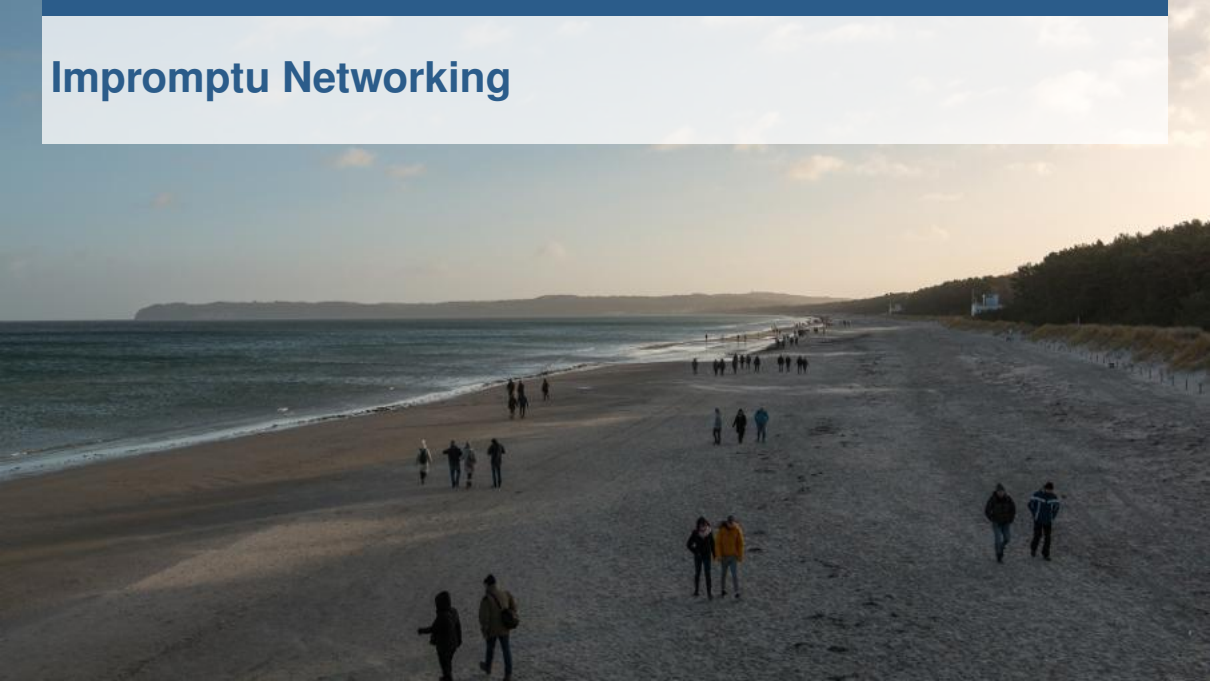
- Experience Liberating Structures in action.
  Understand some of the basic concepts behind them.
- We experiment and learn together.
  There is no right and no wrong here today.
- It may feel a little stressful at times.
  That is part of the design.

Don't stress yourself

- I am not an expert in systems thinking or complexity science.
  Liberating Structures are rooted in complexity science.

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Impromptu Networking

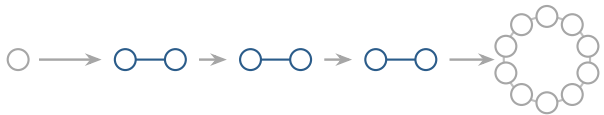


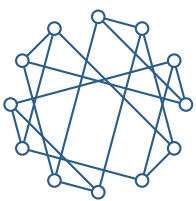
Impromptu Networking

Rapidly Share Challenges and Expectations, Build New Connections

Principle: Engage in Seriously Playful Curiosity

"What challenge brings you to this session? And what do you hope to give and to get here?"





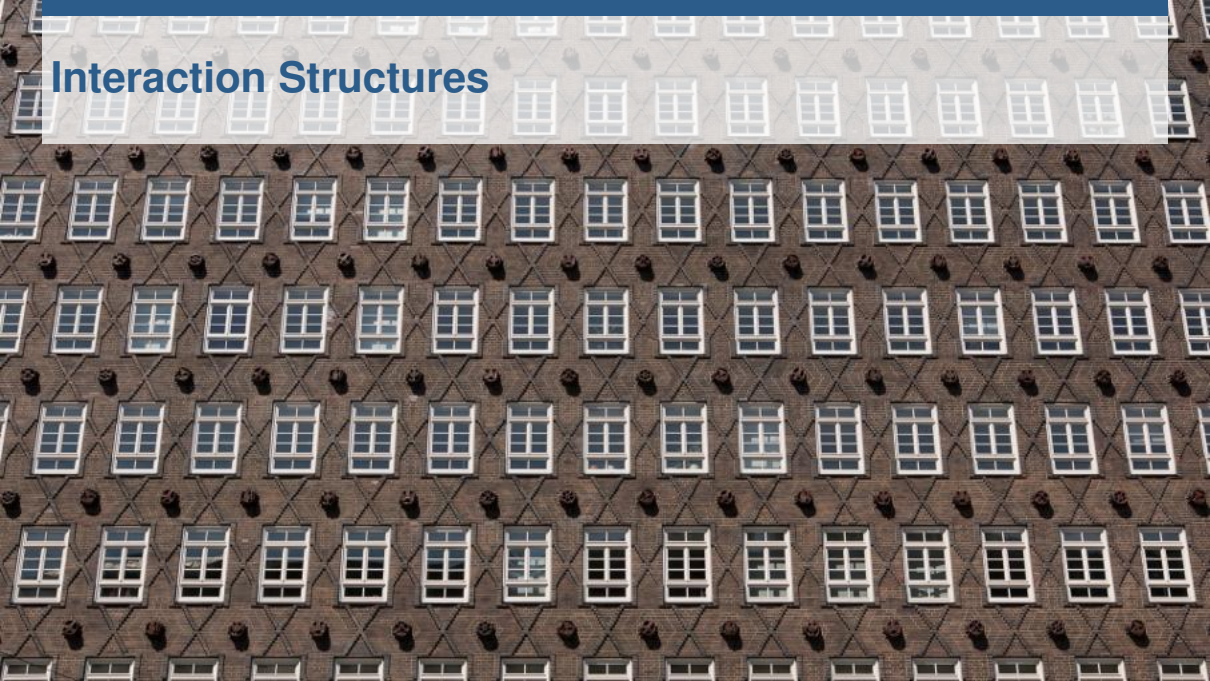
f. e. 12 people, 18 conversations

A new partner every round.

Today: three rounds of 3 min, no plenary — 90 minutes is 90 minutes. · https://www.liberatingstructures.com/2-impromptu-networking/

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Interaction Structures



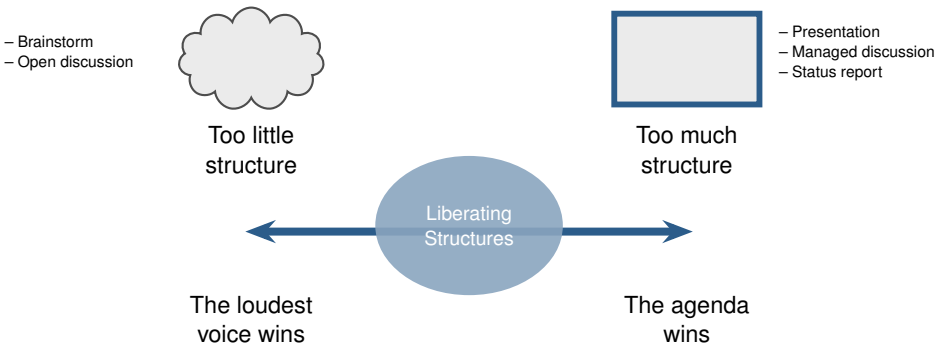
The conventional repertoire — the Big 5

1. Presentation
2. Managed discussion
3. Status report
4. Open discussion
5. Brainstorm

This is the entire repertoire most organisations have.

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Too much or too little structure?

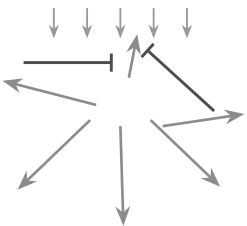


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Every interaction structure is a set of constraints

Too little structure

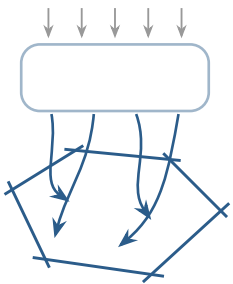
constraints that don't close



right for
a coffee break

Enabling constraints

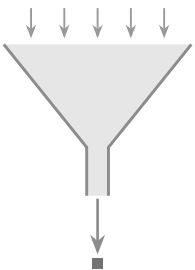
Liberating Structures



right for purposeful
co-creation

Too much structure

controlling constraints



right for passing
on knowledge

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A repertoire, not a curriculum

Classic repertoire



New since June 2026

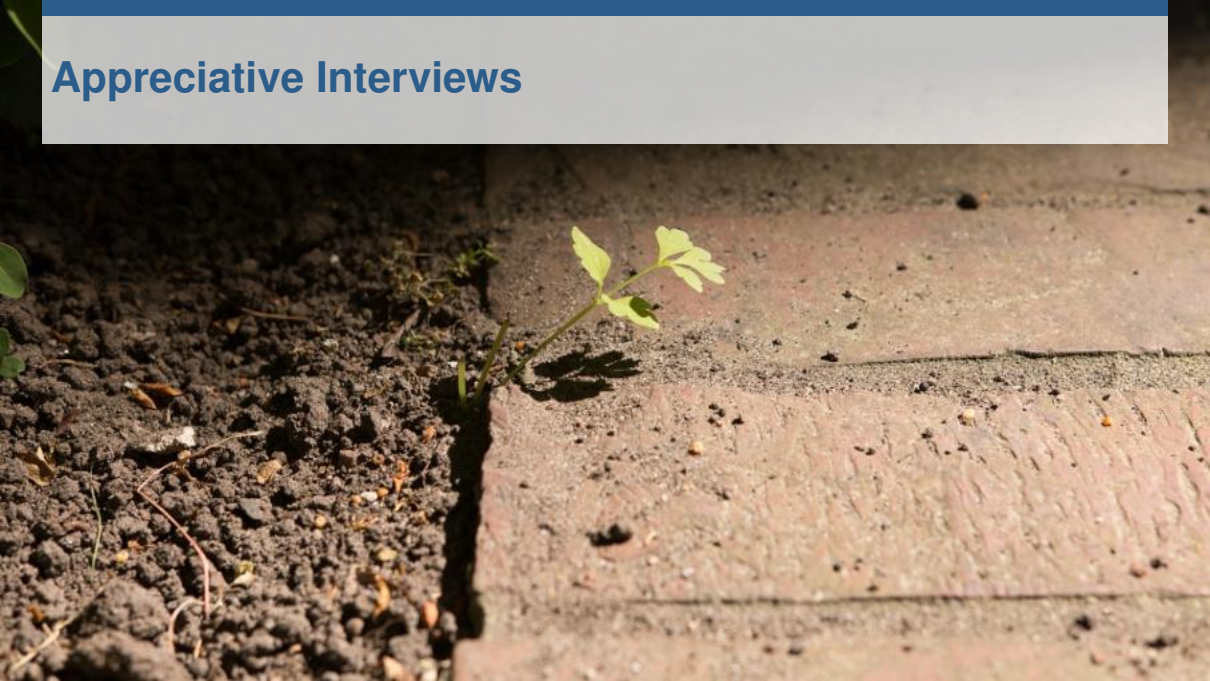


XxN Writing —
on neither list yet

Liberating Structures icons: Lipmanowicz, McCandless & Qua, https://www.liberatingstructures.com — CC BY-NC 3.0

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Appreciative Interviews



The Ten Liberating Structures principles



Possible success factors. Use them as a lens — or ignore them.

Verbatim from `https://www.liberatingstructures.com/ls-principles`

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Every interaction has five design elements

1. The structuring invitation
2. How space is arranged and what materials are needed

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#2 — How space is arranged



Fixed tables, one direction



Fixed seats

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#2 — How space is arranged



Chairs in clusters



Chairs pushed aside

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Every interaction has five design elements

1. The structuring invitation
2. How space is arranged and what materials are needed
3. How participation is distributed
4. How groups are configured
5. Sequence of steps and time allocation

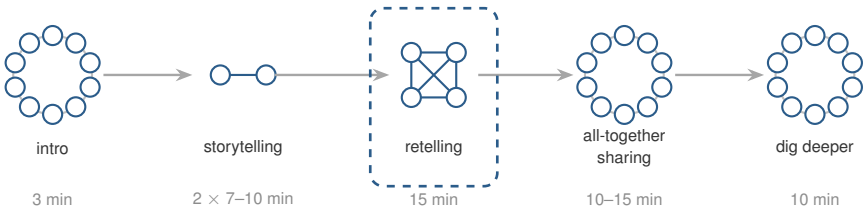
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Appreciative Interviews

Discover and Build on the Root Causes of Success

Principle: Practice Self-Discovery in a Group

“Tell a story about a time when you worked on a challenge with others and were proud of what you accomplished. What made success possible?”

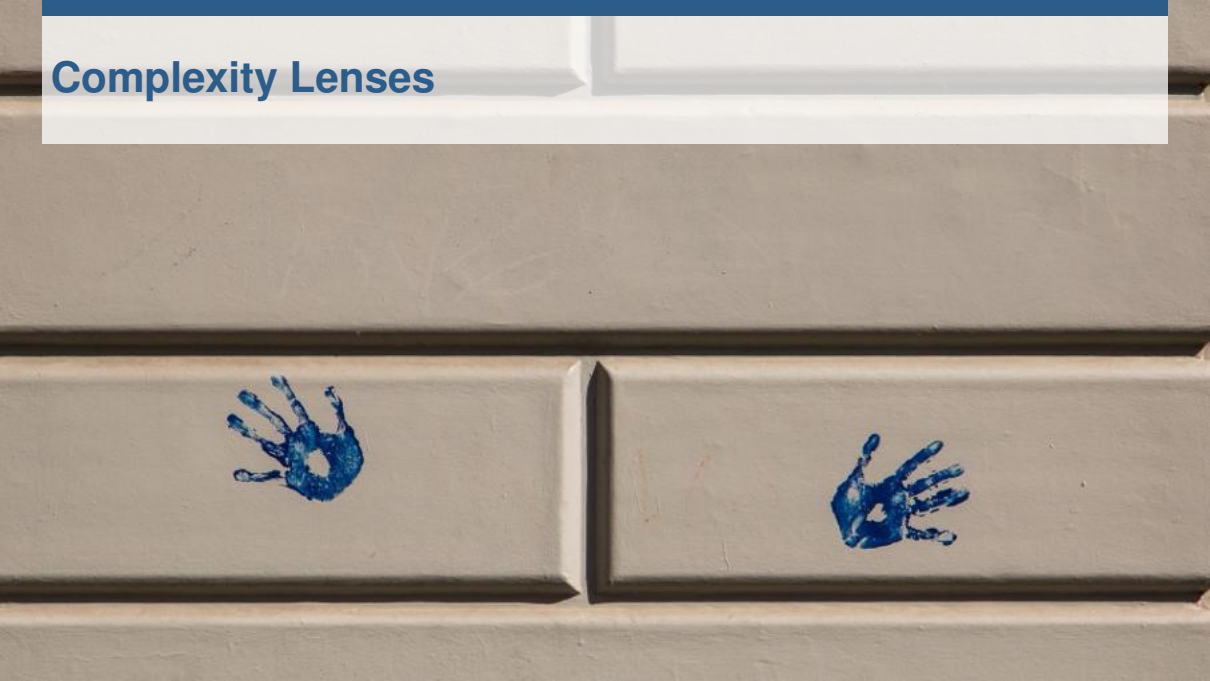


Each person retells their partner’s story. Everyone listens for what made the success possible.

55–75 min in total · https://www.liberatingstructures.com/appreciative-interviews

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Complexity Lenses



Five lenses — one example each from today

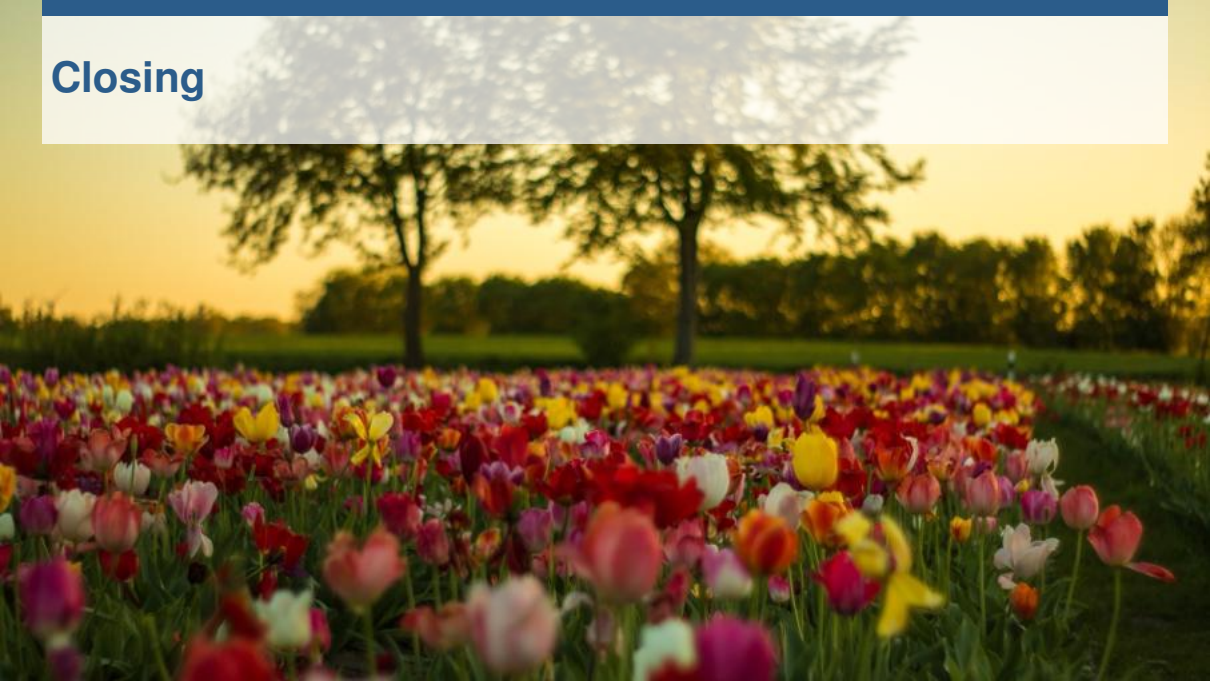
- **Simple rules**
  Impromptu Networking is three rules: one question, a new partner each round, a fixed time. That is the whole specification.
- **Distributed intelligence**
  You chose the stories, so you decided where the content went.
- **Self-organisation**
  Nobody assigned a single pair or foursome. Inside each round, the groups ran themselves.
- **Experimentation**
  Three rounds of the same question. Three chances to sharpen your own answer.
- **Emergence**
  Nobody brought today's answers into the room fully formed. They were built in rounds, by everyone.

This five-way grouping is Barry Overeem's, *Liberating Structures Through the Lens of Complexity* (2026).

The canonical LS list has ten: `https://archive.liberatingstructures.com/design-elements/`

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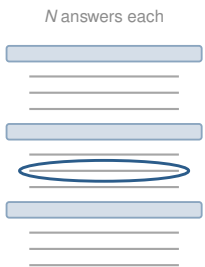
Closing



XxN Writing

Sharpen and Focus Thinking Along a Sequence of Questions, Deepen What Is Most Useful

A Liberating Structure in development





write, in silence	circle the ones that matter	share with a partner
X × 2 min	2 min	5 min

Nobody reads it but you.

total 10–25 min depending on X · today: 3 × 3, and a short round in the whole group at the end · https://liberatingstructures.de/xxn-writing/

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Where to go next

- All 43 structures, free:
  `https://www.liberatingstructures.com`
- *The Liberating Structures Fieldbook* (2026)
- User groups in 100+ cities:
  `https://www.liberatingstructures.com/user-group/`
- *LiSA*, the Liberating Structures app — free, iOS and Android:
  `https://liberatingstructures.app`

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Credits — Liberating Structures

- Liberating Structures icons: Keith McCandless, Henri Lipmanowicz and Fisher Qua, `https://www.liberatingstructures.com` — used under CC BY-NC 3.0.
- The ten Liberating Structures principles, with Must Do's and Must NOT Do's, quoted verbatim: `https://www.liberatingstructures.com/ls-principles`
- Definitions (emergence, fractal, min specs, adjacent possibilities): *The Liberating Structures Fieldbook*, 2026 — `https://www.liberatingstructures.com/glossary-of-terms`
- *LS Links to Complexity Science* and *LS Frontiers*, quoted verbatim: Lipmanowicz & McCandless, CC BY-NC 3.0 — `https://archive.liberatingstructures.com`
- *XxN Writing*, description and icon: `https://liberatingstructures.de/xxn-writing/` — CC BY-NC 3.0. The English purpose line on the recipe slide is our own translation and abridgement; there is no official English one.
- *LiSA*, the Liberating Structures app: Holisticon AG, `https://liberatingstructures.app` — free of charge.

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Credits — further sources and images

- The five-lens grouping used in this session is Barry Overeem's, from *Liberating Structures Through the Lens of Complexity* (2026) — not canonical LS material.
- *The adjacent possible*: Stuart A. Kauffman, *Investigations*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Photograph of Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz: `https://www.liberatingstructures.com/acknowledgements` — CC BY-SA 4.0, photographer not named.
- Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled* (1993), Tate (T14769) — photographed at Tate Modern by Martin Günther.
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Software architecture
Domain-driven Design
Collaborative modelling

Facilitation
Liberating Structures

Looking for a facilitator? Get in touch.

`https://martinguenther-consulting.de`

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Don’t design the solution.

Design the interaction.

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Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled* (1993), Tate Modern · Photo: Martin Günther



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled* (1993), Tate Modern · Photo: Martin Günther



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled* (1993), Tate Modern · Photo: Martin Günther

Thank you —

and for your next interaction:
try adding a carpet.

One at a time.

Happy experimenting!

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