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Media Review: *The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures*

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MEDIA REVIEW

THE SURPRISING POWER OF LIBERATING STRUCTURES by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless

2014. Seattle: Liberating Structures Press

Reviewed by Daniel J. Pesut

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Shifting cultures from domination to partnership is a challenge. So, most change agents are always on the lookout for innovative ways to make the shift happen and nurture partnerships that generate creative solutions to complex challenges.

People have grown used to lectures and presentations in which they are passive recipients of knowledge, being told what to learn and how to use the information. Partnership, however, invites us to reconsider the way we teach, the way we learn, and the relationships that we foster in professional development and group learning. Partnership invites participants to be active co-creators of the learning experience. Partnership calls for new models to promote learner participation.

For the past few years I have come to appreciate *The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures* (<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/>) - a book and web-based resource written by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless. Agents interested in developing partnerships will find the book and its companion web site a valuable resource for working with individuals, groups, and organizations in order to scale up transformative practices to realize partnership outcomes. The book and companion resources are licensed under a creative commons attribution, so they can be accessed for free on the authors' website.

The book and web-based resources offer a set of techniques and group process activities derived from complexity science that support engagement, interaction, and transformation. This past year I had the opportunity to facilitate two national conferences; Liberating Structures provided creative ways to structure the meetings.

As the author's note, when Liberating Structures are used as part of everyday interaction, it is possible to realize these partnership- compatible values:

- Include and unleash everyone.
- Practice deep respect for people and local solutions.
- Never start without a clear purpose.
- Build trust as you go.
- Learn by failing forward.
- Practice self-discovery in a group.
- Amplify freedom and responsibility.
- Emphasize possibilities: Believe before you see.
- Invite creative destruction to enable innovation.
- Engage in serious, playful curiosity.

The book describes a menu of 33 microstructures - design elements that can be selected to help people interact and work with others. For those new to Liberating Structures, the guide to matching and choosing a liberating structure with an intended purpose is most helpful.

The website uses field stories to explain how Liberating Structures have been used in a number of contexts and for a number of purposes. A user resource guide provides people with ways to get started using Liberating Structures. In addition, the website provides connections to workshops, trainings, and answers to frequently asked questions.

I have found that starting a conference with impromptu speed networking is a great ice-breaker. The “Wise Crowds” Liberating Structure is another great way to get insights and feedback from colleagues, peers and stakeholders. If a target audience seems to be stuck in old ways of thinking, I have found it useful to use the “Eco-cycle Planning” Liberating Structure. It offers a process to support the realization that innovation often requires creative destruction of old, rigid patterns.

If you are leading a longer workshop, you might consider using “Open Space Technology”, another technique built on a philosophy and practice that resonates with partnership principles. If you are an educator, consultant, coach, health and human service practitioner, or are responsible for managing and leading in any enterprise or industry, and you are looking for creative ways to build partnerships and invite people to co-create the future, check out this resource and begin to experiment with using Liberating Structures. Be prepared to be surprised!

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