FLOW SYSTEM

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

Distributed Leadership

Workbook 2: Complex Facilitation

getflowtrained.com/playbook/complex-facilitation/

Future Backwards

Future backwards helps leaders understand which entrained patterns and perceptions are influencing an organization's future direction.

The future backwards technique helps participants to generate energy within the group.

Some of the outcomes that can be expected from future backwards include

- Discovering entrained patterns
- Identifying multiple aspirations relating to the present and future
- Generating multiple turning points and decision points
- Generating anecdotes to help leaders

How to Facilitate

We will now walk through the steps to facilitate a future backwards session.

You're going to need some hexies (hexagonal Post-it® style notes) in seven different colors. Provide each group with these different colored hexies for each stage. We use this shape as they support what is known as tessellation (an arrangement of shapes closely fitted together, especially of polygons in a repeated pattern without gaps or overlapping). Assign a color to each category. Provide them with descriptions of each stage and get them to think as creatively as possible about each stage. See Figure 3.11.13.

The following activities help to guide participants facilitate a future backwards activity:

Future Backwards

🔴 **Summarize the Current State (CS)**

🟡 **Identify Key Events in the immediate past which shaped the CS**

🟣 **Heaven/utopia**

🟢 **Hell/dystopia**

🔵 **Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Heaven**

🟠 **Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Hell**

🟤 **Accidents or unexpected events on heaven or hell pathway**

Step 1

Source: https://cynefin.io/wiki/Future_backwards

FIGURE 3.11.13: Future Backwards Setup – Step 1

Now we describe the current state of affairs. Each group is asked to identify descriptions that for them summarize the current state of affairs (CS). Each of these descriptions should be written on a single hexi and the results clustered as shown in Figure 3.11.14.

Future Backwards

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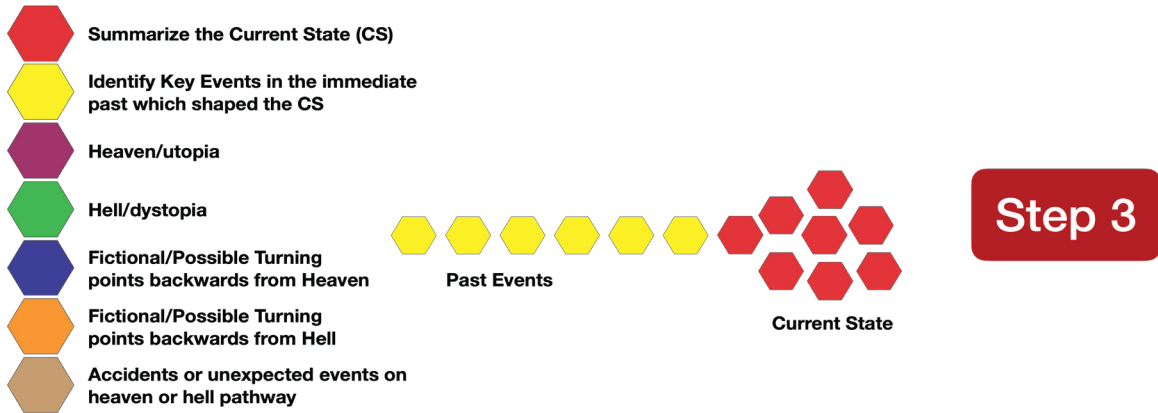
Current State

Step 2

Source: https://cynefin.io/wiki/Future_backwards

FIGURE 3.11.14: Current State – Step 2

Now we add past events that led to that current state. Each group is asked to identify the most significant event or events in the immediate past which shaped the CS and describe it on a single hexi to be placed to the left of the CS cluster.
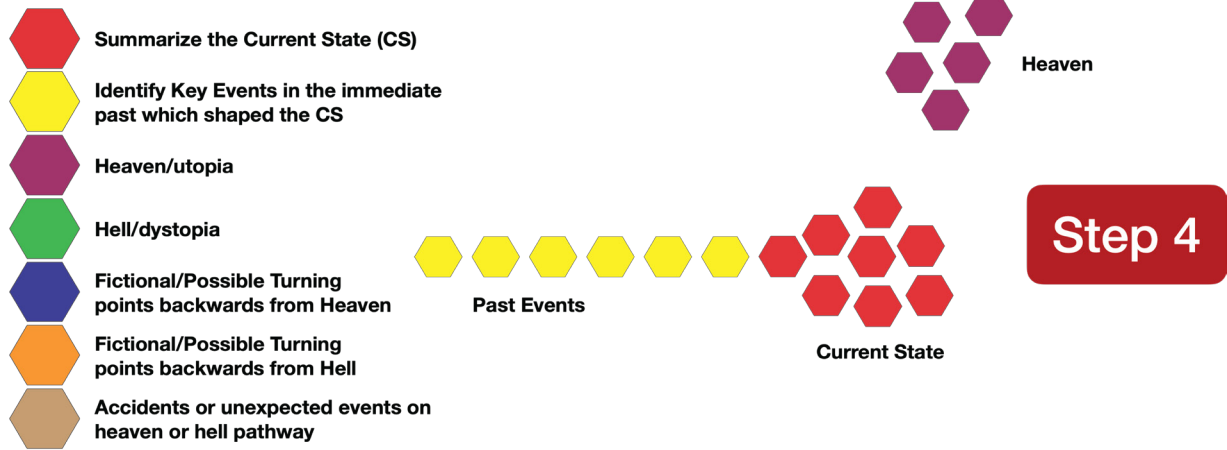
Future Backwards

Summarize the Current State (CS)

Identify Key Events in the immediate past which shaped the CS

Heaven/utopia

Hell/dystopia

Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Heaven

Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Hell

Accidents or unexpected events on heaven or hell pathway

Past Events

Current State

Step 3

Source: https://cynefin.io/wiki/Future_backwards

FIGURE 3.11.15: Past Events – Step 3

Each group is then asked to define their vision of heaven or utopia and connect it to a past event that led to the current state. Consideration of language is important here. Some terms can be offensive to some group members. We use heaven and utopia as well as hell and dystopia, but these terms can be changed to suit the group that is participating in the workshop.

Each group is asked to imagine an *impossibly* good future and describe the conditions or experience of utopia with hexies discussed and agreed upon by the group. It is important to note that they are describing utopia based on the **cluster of current state hexies** and not each one at a time.
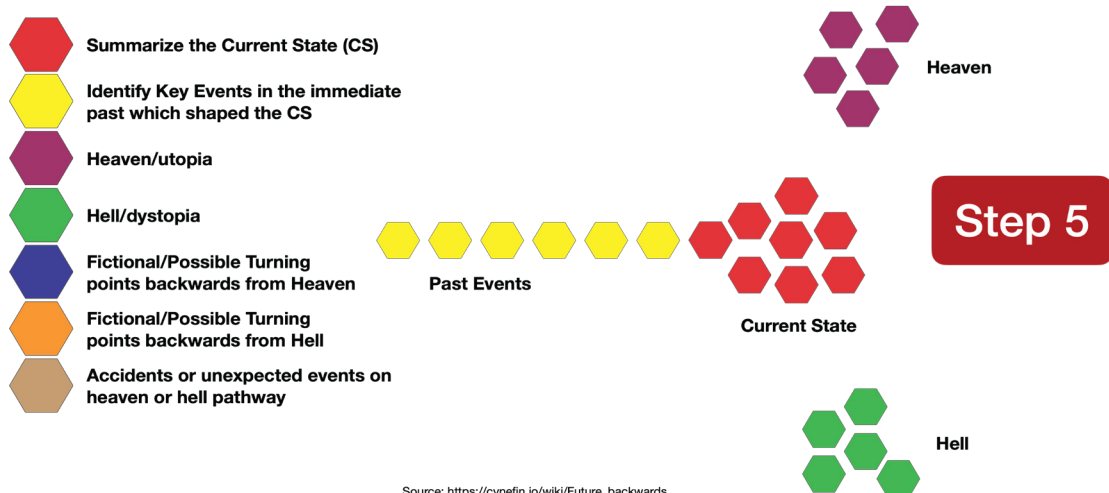
Future Backwards

Summarize the Current State (CS)

Identify Key Events in the immediate past which shaped the CS

Heaven/utopia

Hell/dystopia

Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Heaven

Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Hell

Accidents or unexpected events on heaven or hell pathway

Heaven

Step 4

Past Events

Current State

FIGURE 3.11.16: Define Utopia – Step 4

Mirroring the previous step, we move on to define the vision of hell or dystopia. The groups repeat the process for an *impossibly* bad future state describing the conditions or experience of dystopia with hexies discussed and agreed upon by the group. The results are placed in the bottom right-hand area of the work area. Remember the same as utopia, the dystopia hexies are assembled to represent the **cluster of current state hexies**. See Figure 3.11.17.

Future Backwards

Summarize the Current State (CS)

Identify Key Events in the immediate past which shaped the CS

Heaven/utopia

Hell/dystopia

Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Heaven

Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Hell

Accidents or unexpected events on heaven or hell pathway

Heaven

Step 5

Past Events

Current State

Hell

FIGURE 3.11.17: Define Dystopia – Step 5

Each group is then asked to make heaven happen. They trace backwards from the heaven cluster to a single point (one of the hexies) in the past that led to the current state. You are connecting utopia to a past event with **fictional or imagined events**. They must not trace the utopia back to the current state; **it must be linked to an event in the past that led to the current state**. At this point, the main error is to work forwards from a turning point to Utopia or Dystopia. It is critical to monitor the groups at this stage. See Figure 3.11.18.
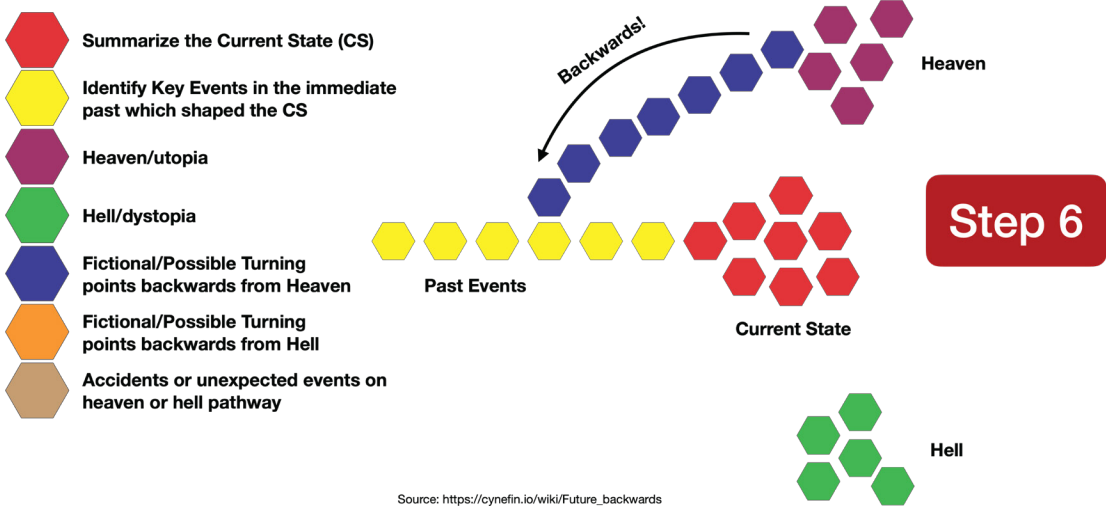
FIGURE 3.11.18: Make Utopia Happen – Step 6

Now repeat this approach to make hell happen. Trace backwards from the dystopia cluster to a single point in the past that led to the current state (a single hexi). It could be a different hexi than heaven, of course, creating two events in the past. See Figure 3.11.19.

Future Backwards

Legend:
- Summarize the Current State (CS)
- Identify Key Events in the immediate past which shaped the CS
- Heaven/utopia
- Hell/dystopia
- Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Heaven
- Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Hell
- Accidents or unexpected events on heaven or hell pathway

Backwards!

Heaven

Step 7

Past Events

Current State

Backwards!

Hell

Source: https://cynefin.io/wiki/Future_backwards

FIGURE 3.11.19: Make Dystopia Happen – Step 7

You are allowed a single accident or unexpected event on each path backwards to be represented by a different hexi. This could be a major event they imagined that changed the course they are describing or an actual event that occurred that they feel set this path in motion. See Figure 3.11.20 for examples.

Future Backwards

Legend:
- Summarize the Current State (CS)
- Identify Key Events in the immediate past which shaped the CS
- Heaven/utopia
- Hell/dystopia
- Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Heaven
- Fictional/Possible Turning points backwards from Hell
- Accidents or unexpected events on heaven or hell pathway

Backwards!

Heaven

Step 8

Past Events

Current State

Backwards!

Hell

Source: https://cynefin.io/wiki/Future_backwards

FIGURE 3.11.20: Add Exceptional Events – Step 8

Different groups can work on each backwards path, but they must not see each other's work to avoid patterning or biasing.

Sharing the Output

When all the groups have completed their charts, a spokesperson may be elected from each group. They will then be asked to stay at their charts while the rest of the group circulates around the work area to look at other groups' future backwards creations. The spokesperson from each group will then explain their group's perspective to the circulating groups. See Figure 3.11.21.

Sharing The Output
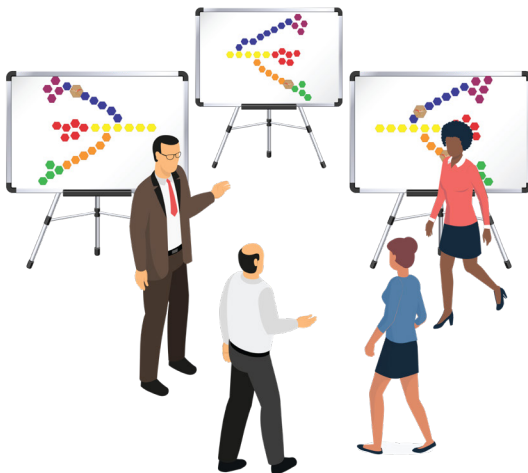
Have a spokesperson from each group explain their outputs. Visit each area to see what other groups created.
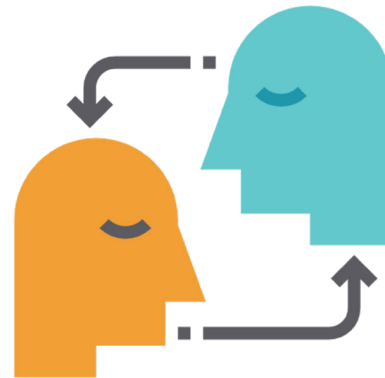
Acknowledge differences in perspectives as this aids in the process of organizational conflict identification and resolution.

FIGURE 3.11.21: Sharing Future Backwards Output

The revelations from these sessions can help plan future approaches that will avoid taking a bad path and may result in better strategic decisions being made. In the earlier complexity thinking section discussing complex adaptive systems, you learned that today's decisions are limited by our past decisions and that their history is co-responsible for their present behavior. The future backwards helps reveal how we got where we are, and how we might be able to choose better paths as we move forward.

Liberating Structures

Another approach you may consider is the use of liberating structures. They give you a similar group engagement but without a specific facilitator being required. In fact, a key idea is that everyone has a voice and is able to contribute effectively.

Liberating structures are a selection of 35+ alternative structures for facilitating meetings and conversations, curated by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless.
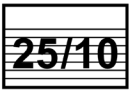
LS Menu	Wicked questions	What³ debrief	Min specs	Heard, seen respected	Wicked questions	Integrated ~autonomy
Design elements	Appreciative interviews	Discovery and action dialog	Improv prototyping	Drawing together	Open space	Critical uncertainties
1-2-4-All	TRIZ	Shift & share	Helping heuristic	Design storyboard	Generative relationships	Ecocycle
Impromptu networking	15% solutions	25 : 10 crowdsourcing	Conversation café	Celebrity interview	Agree/certainty matrix	Panarchy
9-Whys	Troika consulting	Wise crowds	User experience fishbowl	Social network webbing	Simple Ethnography	Purpose to Practice

FIGURE 3.11.22: Liberating Structures Overview

(Image courtesy of Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless) Learn more at https://www. liberatingstructures.com/).

Main Microstructures

In traditional group work, we tend to apply one of the five main microstructures as they are known. Presentations, managed discussions, status reports, open discussions, and brainstorms. The problem with these techniques is that they are either too constraining (in the case of presentations, managed discussions, and status reports) or too loose (in the case of open discussions and brainstorming sessions).

Main Microstructures

Presentations

Status Report

Managed Discussion

Open Discussion

Themed Brainstorm

FIGURE 3.11.23: 5 Main Microstructures

Liberating structures are designed to embrace distributed control and include a fairer, or larger number of people in shaping the next steps. This results in more innovation, inclusion, participation, clarity, purpose, and hopefully fun.

Liberating structures do not require a facilitator; they are designed to be led by anyone. They are meant to be simple and easy to do.

https://www.liberatingstructures.com
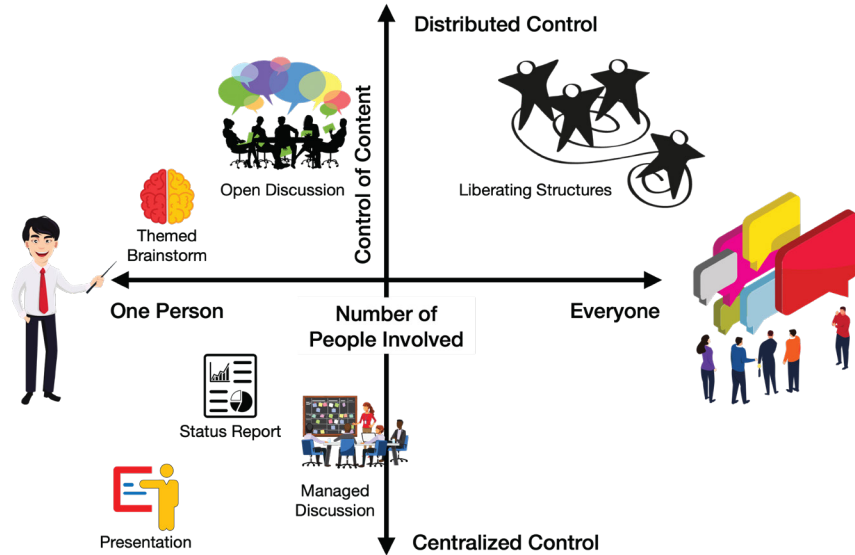
FIGURE 3.11.24: Liberating Structures – People vs. Control

In Figure 3.11.24 the X-axis plots the number of people involved in an activity, and the Y-axis the level of control.

Presentations, status reports, and managed discussions tend to have centralized control, often by a single person or manager. Status reports are also more commonly prepared by an individual (e.g., manager) and for an individual (e.g., executive). While a presentation is delivered to many people, the control and the content are typically contained to a single person, and control of the content is limited.

What we try to do with liberating structures is to involve everyone without any centralized control and provide an environment where everyone can share without judgment or fear.

Liberating structures provide a format that provides some level of control while also engaging all participants equally.

25/10 Crowdsourcing Example

Let's look at one of those liberating structures known as 25/10 Crowdsourcing.

With the 25/10 technique, you can help a large crowd generate and sort their bold ideas for action in 30 minutes or less! With 25/10 Crowdsourcing, you can spread innovations "out and up" as everyone notices the patterns in what emerges. Though it is fun, fast, and casual, it is a serious and valid way to generate an uncensored set of bold ideas, tapping the wisdom of the whole group to identify the top ten. Surprises are frequent! Everyone is included and participates at the same time, and everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute.

First, every participant writes on an index card his or her bold idea and the first step to achieving that idea. Then, people mill around, and the cards are passed from person to person. Milling and passing only. No reading! This is a crowd shuffling exercise to randomize the cards. See Figure 3.11.25.

25/10 Crowdsourcing

Big and Bold Idea

The first step to getting this started will be…

If you were ten times bolder, what big idea would you recommend?

Every participant writes on an index card their bold idea and a first step.

People mill around and pass cards from person to person. Pass only. No reading.

Examples: Prioritizing ideas and galvanizing the community. Illuminating bold ideas at the start of a conference or task-force meeting. Wrapping up an important meeting. Closing circle to share ideas and reinforce bonds among group members.

FIGURE 3.11.25: 25/10 Crowdsourcing Part 1 – Bold Ideas

When the bell rings, people stop passing cards and pair up to exchange thoughts on the cards in their hands, or another option is to read the cards with no talking. The participants individually rate the idea/step on their card with a score of 1 to 5 (1 for low and 5 for high) and write it on the back of the card. This is called "Read and Score."

25/10 Crowdsourcing

3 Minutes

**Allow Cards to be
Exchanged for 3 Minutes**

1-5

1-5

**Pair and discuss cards and then score
the card you have in your hands.**

**5 Rounds then add up all
scores on the cards.**
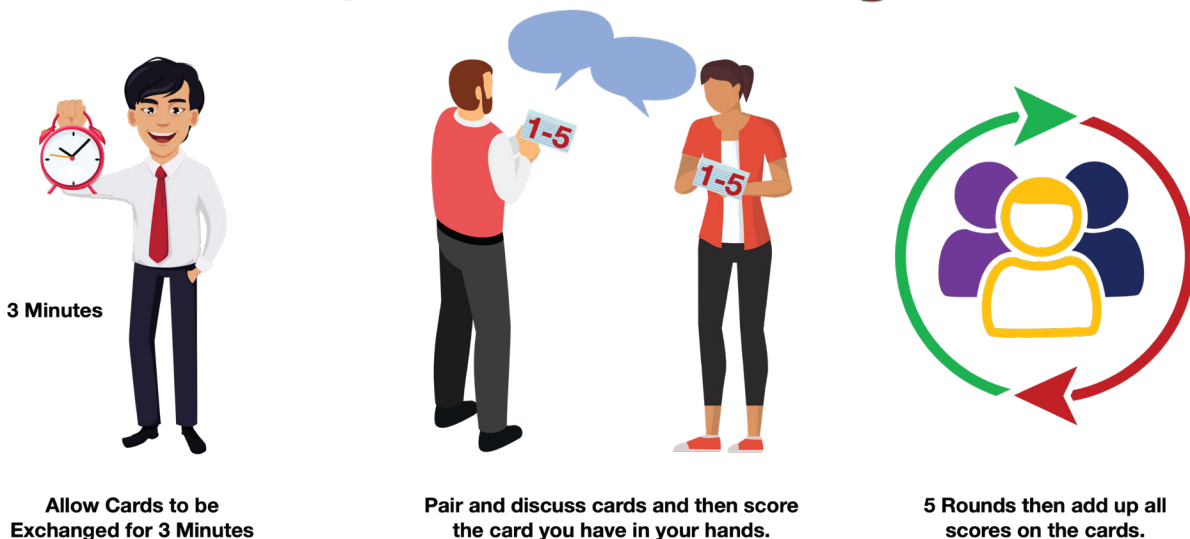
The ideas with the top ten scores are identified and shared with the whole group.

FIGURE 3.11.26: 25/10 Crowdsourcing Part 2 – Read and Score

When the bell rings again, cards are passed around a second time. Mill and pass until the bell rings and the read and score cycle repeats. This is done for a total of five scoring rounds. At the end of round five, participants add the five scores on the back of the last card they are holding.

Now find the best scoring ideas with the whole group by conducting a countdown. Ask, "Who has a 25?"—the maximum possible score. Invite each participant, if any, holding a card that scored 25 to read out the idea and its associated first action step. Continue with "Who has a 24?" "Who has a 23? Stop when the top ten ideas have been identified and shared.

Connect the Three Helixes:

Flow can only be achieved when the three helixes are interconnected. To identify how this could occur, the next exercise requires the reader to identify examples of different methods from each of the other two helixes (complexity thinking, team science) that might work well with complex facilitation.

COMPLEXITY THINKING **DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP** **TEAM SCIENCE**

?   Complex Facilitation   ?

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT   RESPECT FOR PEOPLE   CUSTOMER FIRST   RESPECT FOR HUMANITY   ELIMINATE WASTE

CONNECT THE HELIXES	
Select a scenario or problem that would benefit from complex facilitation.	
Identify three methods from complexity thinking that could work with complex facilitation. Give a brief description about how they complement one another.	
CT Method 1:	
CT Method 2:	

Connect the Helixes	
CT Method 3:	
Identify three methods from the team science helix that could work with or support complex facilitation. Give a brief description about how they complement one another.	
TS Method 1:	
TS Method 2:	
TS Method 3:	
Provide a description explaining which methods from each of the three helixes (with complex facilitation being the DL method) work best for the scenario/ problem identified earlier.	