EU Aid Volunteers

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A guide to undertaking skillshares

Produced by ActionAid Denmark

February 2020

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1. Introduction

This short guide is intended to be used by anyone with an interest in running skillshare activities as a means to share learning and insight within projects or wider work. While the content of this guide can be applied to skillshares in a wide range of topics, it is particularly relevant to those working in the humanitarian field.

Skillshares are excellent ways to bring people together to share learning across projects and organisations as well as discuss challenges and solutions. They work best when people from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences take part and the process is seen as a journey over a period of time rather than a one-off event. When done well, skillshares can be a highly engaging methodology for the participants and can help embed new insights within organisations, being an important part of learning and change.

This guide has been produced as part of the GESHAVO project ('Gender Sensitive Humanitarian Aid Volunteering') which seeks to build the strength of women volunteers who are prone to humanitarian disasters and conflicts. It worked with ActionAid Federation members in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Kenya to support them to become certified to host volunteers as part of the EU Aid Volunteers programme, and for ActionAid Denmark to become registered as a sending organisation.

The GESHAVO project was funded by the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative (EUAVI), which is a long-term volunteering initiative for citizens and residents of EU countries to volunteer overseas to support humanitarian work. The programme provides practical support to humanitarian aid projects and contributes to strengthening the local capacity and resilience of disaster-affected communities. It was launched in 2015 and has since sent nearly 400 volunteers to countries throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America for periods between one and 18 months. Volunteers are hosted by a local organisation in country during their placement.

Examples of skillshares and links to other documentation and resources in this guide will draw primarily from the work of ActionAid Federation members, especially those who participated in the GESHAVO project.

2. What is a skillshare and when can it be used

A skillshare is different from training in that its primary content develops from the contribution and experience of the participants. Furthermore, the discussions tend to evolve and flow throughout the activity, rather than follow a predefined curriculum. Skillshares give an opportunity to build participants' skills and peer networks by sharing experiences and approaches from their own practices, allowing people to share their stories.

Perhaps the most common use of skillshares is to share learning within project or operational teams or within and between organisations. Sharing your own and using colleagues' actionable knowledge and experience is a strong source of learning. The process of identifying and writing down your own practice can be a significant source of learning through reflection about your own experiences. By sharing these experiences, it is possible to find and make contact with co-practitioners, and in doing so you can adapt their lessons learnt to your own context, and/or directly apply their learnings to your specific challenges. Much like a Community of Practice, it is crucial that a skillshare focuses on a clearly and narrowly-defined common interest, topic, or challenge. Equally, skillshares can be appropriate ways to celebrate success within projects, and share good practices. This approach was used in the skillshare undertaken as part of the GESHAVO project in June 2019 (see section 4).

Furthermore, if skillshares are combined with practice learning where good practices are shared and combined with a field visit, they can present opportunities to discuss and learn based on shared experiences.

When there is a wide range of views and experiences, a skillshare can be a useful way to help develop agreement and consensus on a topic and find the common ground or come up with a position statement. This process helped ActionAid develop an agreed approach to protection and resilient livelihoods in protracted crises in a workshop held in Amman in September 2017.

3. Tips for running skillshare events

Good practice in running participatory events and workshops will apply equally to skillshares and give them the best possible chance of being successful. However, there are several elements that can be more specifically related to skillshares:

(a) Start the process well before the face-to-face meeting

The core element of any skillshare will be the days that participants spent together face-to-face. However, the sharing should begin before the physical meeting begins, allowing participants to think carefully about their own examples they want to contribute and to reflect in advance on the learnings and cases from other attendees. Some of the benefits of starting this process before the physical meeting can include:

- Making more time for participant interaction and actual skillsharing at the workshop itself by moving introductory knowledge-building sessions into pre-course webinars;
- Linking and connecting participants before the event to build their excitement and readiness for learning;
- Creating a space for sharing stories about participants' experience before the event to support reflection and for documentation purposes;
- Giving participants access to online spaces to find other practitioners after the training (e.g. Q&A, problem-solving).

A possible approach to developing this blended approach is set out in the table below:

	Four weeks before the workshop	**Two weeks before the workshop**	**The workshop**	**Four weeks after**
Knowledge gap assessment	Welcome email including assessment survey sent to participants	Introduction webinar serves also serves as a second assessment step		
Introduction to skillshare topic		Online intro-webinar to course topics key insights	Brief recap of intro	
Connecting participants with each other + wider network and support options		Invite to online group tool (Facebook group/Podio)	Matchmaking component to pair participants in peer groups (duos/trios) Coaching concepts introduce and tried with peer groups	Invite for facilitated peer coaching meetings online (meeting space and guiding questions supplied but no facilitator presence)
Support reflection and documentation	After introduction email, send pre-course assignment (share on Networked Toolbox)	Use online meeting to highlight stories shared on Networked Toolbox Encourage comments on participant stories		

This approach was applied in ActionAid's skillshare on 'Tax Power Reflection Action' in June 2017 at TCDC in Arusha, Tanzania, to allow participants to share inspirational practices. In advance of the

meeting, facilitators developed an 'Inspirational Practice Guideline' which was distributed to attendees. The guideline was designed to make it easy for people to document and share their own learnings and experiences as well as to assist them about how to find and learn from colleagues. This used a standardised and structured format (a request from previous events) to capture the necessary information to make the knowledge accessible for practitioners across the ActionAid Federation. By proposing a set of specific questions, the goal was to make capturing and documenting as easy as possible for participants. In order to ensure that important knowledge, experience and lessons were captured in the process, people were asked to include a wide range of information, such as pictures and videos, alongside written descriptions.

(b) See it as a journey rather than as an end point

Just as the preparation before a skillshare is important, the period afterwards is just as vital. Facilitators should follow-up with attendees to give them the opportunity to continue to share and learn from one another and themselves in the weeks and months after the physical meeting. This can be undertaken through webinars, peer-to-peer mentoring, and email contact. Seeing skillshares as a continuous learning journey is an important way in which participants can be supported to get access to colleagues' knowledge on a daily basis, rather than just at physical meetings. This can form a practitioners network based around a defined topic.

ActionAid's ReflectionAction.com website is a good example of a platform which can be used to supplement face-to-face meetings and share experiences on an ongoing basis (see section 5). This is also available to partners outside of the ActionAid Federation.

(c) Document learning and insights

This applies to all stages of the skillshare. The learning and insights developed as part of the process – before, during, and afterwards the event itself – should be recorded and shared with participants and other key stakeholders. This can be through guidelines and templates as outlined above, but can also be done by creating case studies, identifying next steps, lessons, and recommendations, and recording discussions visually and in more traditional methods. The key element is that insights and learning can be shared and built upon during the skillshare journey.

(d) Hold practical field visits

If possible, visits to communities and partner organisations can help bring a skillshare to life during its actual delivery and help participants apply their knowledge to a practical example and contextualise their understanding and insights.

(e) Bring together practitioners with different skill sets and experiences and practice learning

The value of a skillshare is maximised when attendees can contribute different experiences and perspectives, bringing diversity to the activity. Careful consideration should be given to who attends and what they can contribute, both in terms of best and worst practices.

4. Examples of skillshare events

This section includes several examples of successful skillshare events held by ActionAid in recent years, which can help provide an idea of how they can be used and the kind of content they can address.

GESHAVO skillshare (June 2019)
Harare, Zimbabwe
One of the key activities of the GESHAVO project was to run a skillshare focused on sharing learning from the project and the wider work of the project partners. It was held towards the end of the project implementation period so as to maximise the learning that could be shared. The skillshare was held in Harare from the 15th to the 19th June 2019 and hosted by ActionAid Zimbabwe. Five members from staff from ActionAid Zimbabwe, ActionAid International Kenya, and ActionAid Zambia attended, plus the volunteer Inspirator from ActionAid Zimbabwe.

The overall aim of the activity was to bring together all the three implementing countries in the GESHAVO project, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to:

- Share key learning and tools used in the implementation phase of the project, with a specific focus on women's leadership in humanitarian crises;
- Discuss some of the challenges experienced during the project;
- Share wider learning about volunteering and gender-sensitive approaches to humanitarian work;
- Inspire each other on best practices they've used to ensure gender sensitivity in humanitarian settings.

By the end of the skillshare, the participants expected to:

- To share and learn experiences from the different countries on the implementation of GESHAVO and from their wider work outside of the project.
- Share change stories and best practices as well as tools they have used in GESHAVO implementation.
- Learn how different countries have contributed to the CHS (Core Humanitarian Standard) and how they have influenced AA Humanitarian Signature into GESHAVO and any outcomes on how GESHAVO has contributed to shifting power.
- Understand more about good practices in the engagement of young people in GESHAVO.
- Sustainability of GESHAVO/lessons and skills gained before and after deployment.
- Challenges of implementing GESHAVO in the different countries.
- Improve their understanding of monitoring and evaluation systems within the different countries.

The skillshare involved the following sessions and activities:

- Evaluating the GESHAVO project Implementation phase and discussion of key outcomes;
- Exploration of challenges during project delivery and country-specific challenges experienced;
- Key Learnings and what worked well in the project, with each of the three countries leading a discussion, including descriptions of the different tools they used throughout the project;
- Discussion of the women in emergencies framework and how it could be applied to the work of the organisations;
- Exploration of the value of having a gender sensitivity to humanitarian work and programming;
- Presentation of the work commissioned by ActionAid International Kenya which examined community-based early warning systems that could be applied to humanitarian responses;
- Presentation of ActionAid Zimbabwe's response to Cyclone Idai, and specifically how they had built in a gender lens to their work with communities;
- Discussion of recommendations for the remainder of the GESHAVO project and the wider humanitarian work of the three organisations.

Defining our Approach to Protection and Resilient Livelihoods in Protracted Crises (September 2017)

Amman, Jordan

ActionAid ARI hosted colleagues and partners in Amman to define ActionAid's approach to protection and resilient livelihoods in protracted crises going forward. The workshop brought together 22 staff and partners representing nine countries and IHART to discuss good practice in building community led protection mechanisms and resilient livelihoods in protracted crises, focusing on the role of women and young people. The overall purpose was to inform ways of working in future protracted crises and identify actions needed over the next year including strategies, frameworks, and capacity building to strengthen our protracted crises programmes.

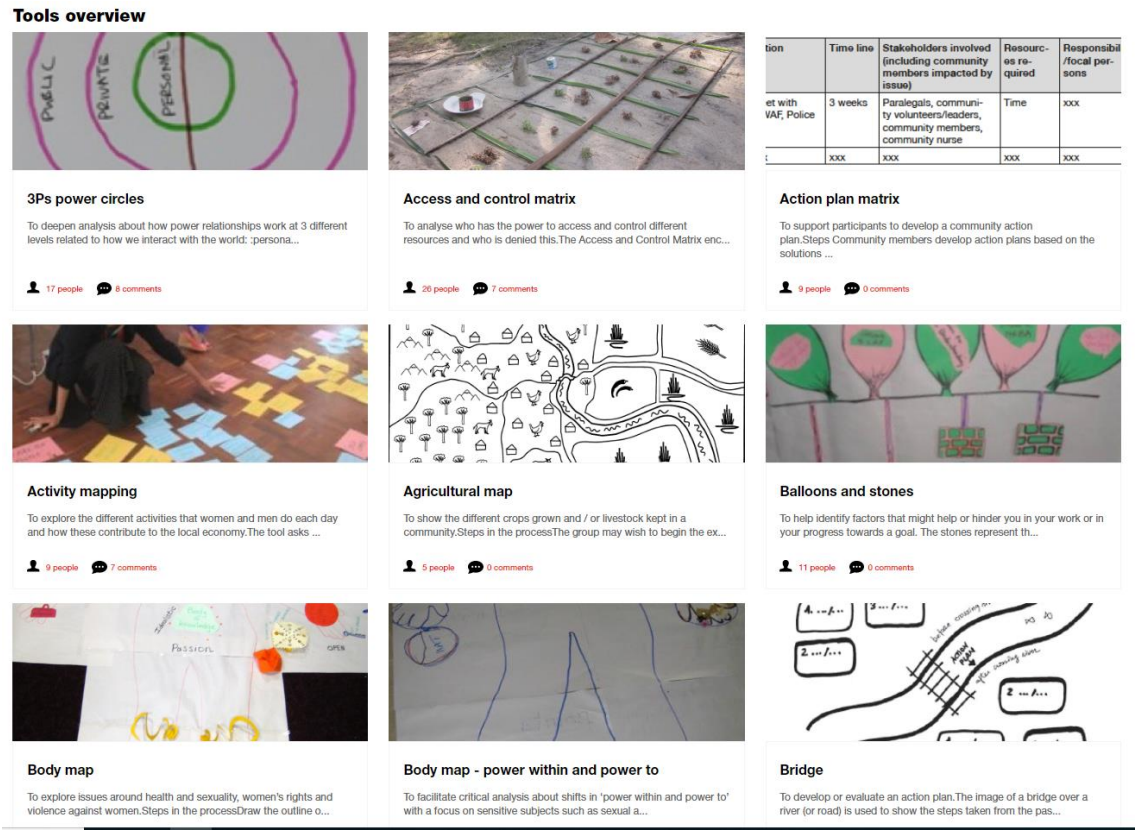
The workshop was part of a wider DANIDA funded project to build resilient livelihoods for women and youth and building women led community-based protection approaches in fragile contexts, managed by IHART.

As a result of the workshop, participants agreed the definition of a protracted crisis to be adopted by ActionAid, as well as a series of vision statements and approaches involving young people.

5. Resources for undertaking skillshares

The following resources can be useful for those running skillshares. While not all of them are specifically designed for skillshares, they nonetheless provide useful examples of tools and resources that could be used in skillshare activities.

ReflectionAction.com (ActionAid, 2016)
http://www.networkedtoolbox.com/
The Networked Toolbox is a place to share and access inspirational practices, cases and tools, and was launched in 2016. The Toolbox provides a platform for accessing tools, cases, inspirational practices and more, and discussing challenges and experiences with likeminded colleagues. It can therefore act as a mechanism to provide follow-up engagement after the physical meeting of a skillshare. The site also describes a variety of different tools that could be applied to skillshare events.



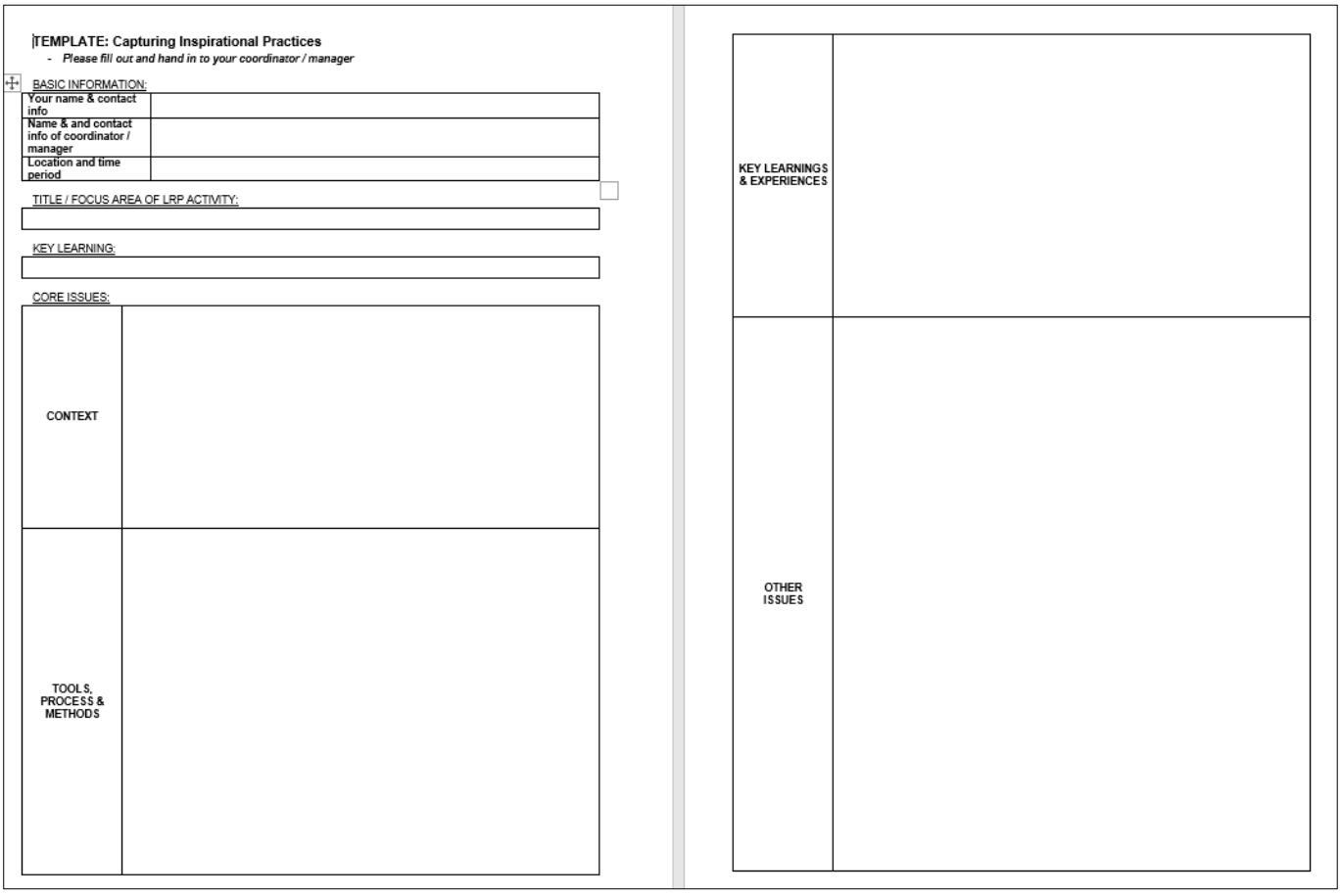
Tax Power Campaign Reflection-Action toolkit: 16 participatory tools to analyse and take action on tax injustice (ActionAid, 2015)
https://actionaid.org/publications/2016/tax-power-campaign-reflection-action-toolkit
This collection of tools are tailored for community groups and their local facilitators. Most of the tools target governments as being able to change the problem, while a few target companies (tools 12 and 13). Section 1 looks at local tax problems while section 2 looks at the effects of international

and national tax on local public services. Section 3 expands on national and international tax issues. Section 4 assesses our own work. The tools explore the following key ideas:

- Taxes pay for public services;
- Most of us are tax payers;
- The richer should pay more tax, the poorer less;
- Foreign companies don't pay their fair amount of tax.

Inspirational Practice Guideline (ActionAid, 2015)

This guideline was designed to help participants prepare for the physical meeting of a skillshare run by ActionAid in 2015 at TCDC in Arusha, Tanzania. It was designed to assist attendees document the examples of good practice that they would share when they physically met, thereby recognising that the process of sharing begins substantially before the physical meeting. The template below can be adapted and used to help participants document their experiences in advance.



TEMPLATE: Capturing Inspirational Practices

- *Please fill out and hand in to your coordinator / manager*

BASIC INFORMATION:

Your name & contact info	
Name & and contact info of coordinator / manager	
Location and time period	

TITLE / FOCUS AREA OF LRP ACTIVITY:

KEY LEARNING:

CORE ISSUES:

CONTEXT	
TOOLS, PROCESS & METHODS	

KEY LEARNINGS & EXPERIENCES	
OTHER ISSUES	

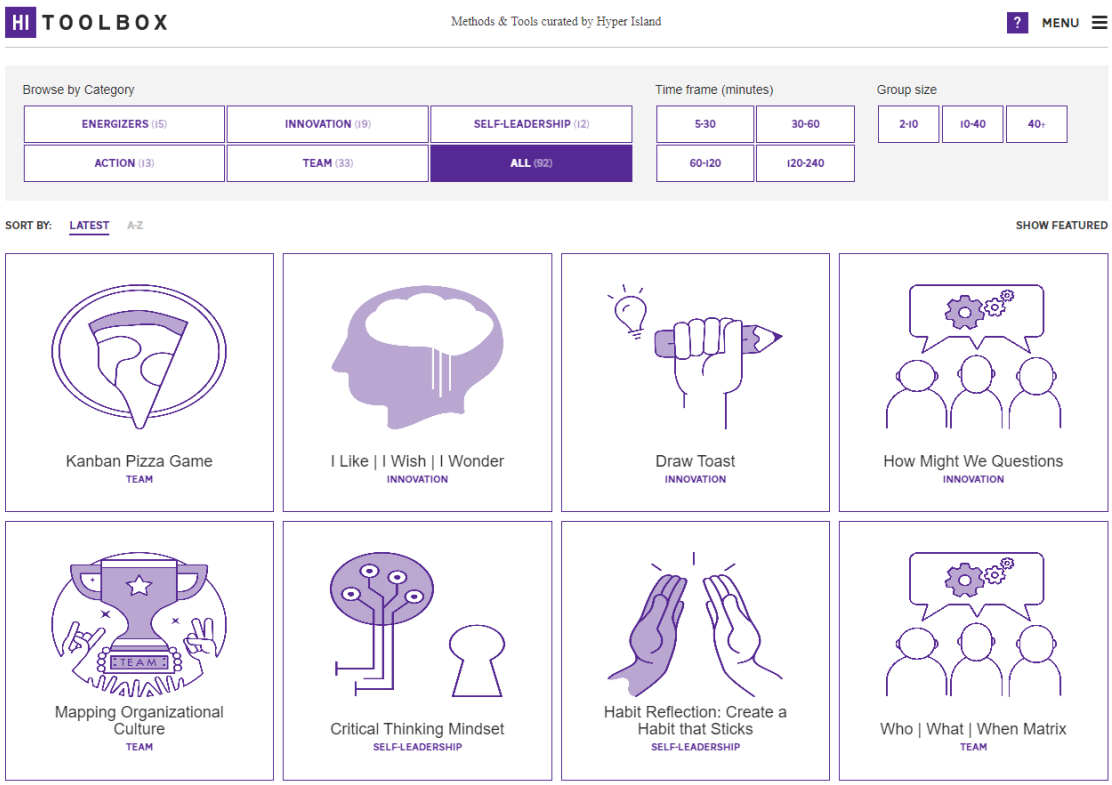
Hyper Island Toolbox (Hyper Island)

https://toolbox.hyperisland.com/

Curated by Hyper Island, this website provides an extensive toolkbox for anyone who wants to apply creative and collaborative methods to their events. It uses Hyper Island's methodology to develop these tools, which can be applied to different types of events. While they have not been specifically designed for skillshares over and above other forms of events and workshops, their participatory and engaging nature can usefully be applied to individual sessions within skillshare events.

Two tools that can be particularly good in our experience are:

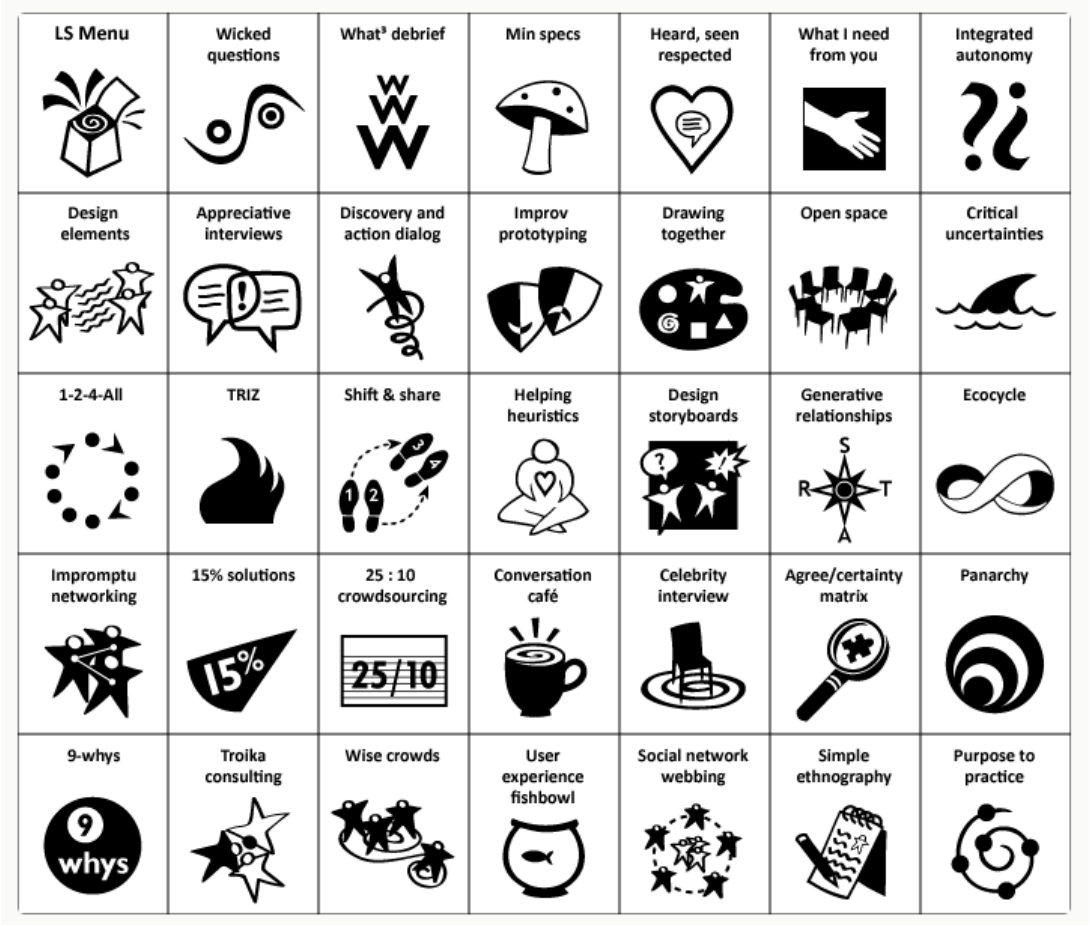
- The World Cafe
- Appreciative Inquiry: Discovering and Building on the Root Causes of Success



Liberating Structures

http://www.liberatingstructures.com/home/

This website offers what is describes as 'an alternative way to approach and design how people work together'. Like many of the other resources referenced in this guide, it provides a collection of tools (or 'liberating structures') which can be applied to meetings, workshops, and learning processes.



Two tools that can be particularly good in our experience are:

- 1-2-4-All
- Open Space Technology

The European Union with its Member States is a leading global donor of humanitarian aid. The EU helps over 120 million victims of conflict and disasters every year. With headquarters in Brussels and a global network of field offices, the Union provides assistance to the most vulnerable people solely on the basis of humanitarian needs, without discrimination of race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of ActionAid Denmark and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.