



When you feel included and engaged, do you do a better job? Do you think teams in which people work well together produce much better results? Have you noticed the best ideas often come from unexpected sources? Do you want to work at the top of your intelligence in a group of people and give the same opportunity to others? These questions have led us through a **labyrinth named** “employee engagement and cultural change” ... and to exploring the underlying structure of liberation. Asking, “how can we truly include and unleash everyone in shaping the future?”

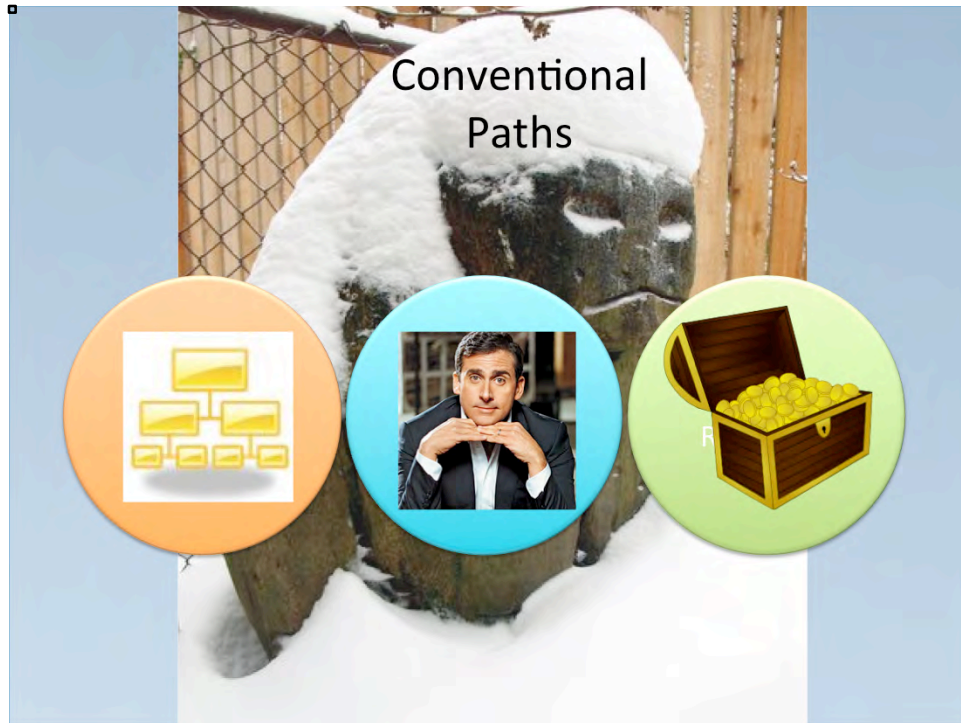


Pictured: Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz.

However, our journey did not start with wide-eyed enthusiasm but rather despair over the how often we miss the mark.

We began with fire in our bellies... with the goal to thaw a frozen landscape. The deciders and doers are miles apart. Buy-in only works until the money runs out. The vast majority is being ignored... and culture is eating strategy for lunch.

Two **beliefs** guided our path: the future is here but very poorly distributed (we have nearly everything we need to succeed!) and liberation must not be only for special occasions.



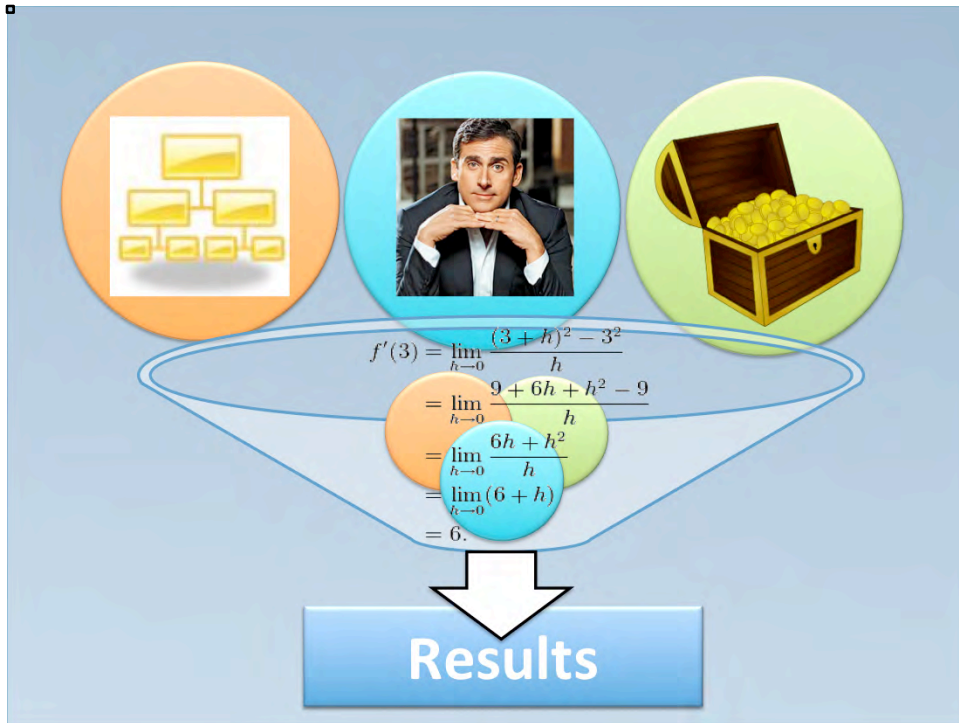
A conventional mindset maintains the frozen landscape: to make a BIG progress toward a more engaged innovative culture... we must make BIG moves. Invest cash or other assets; get new people or upgrade the people we have; rearrange the structure of the organization.

We keep trying the same conventional strategies, expecting different results. Insanity?!



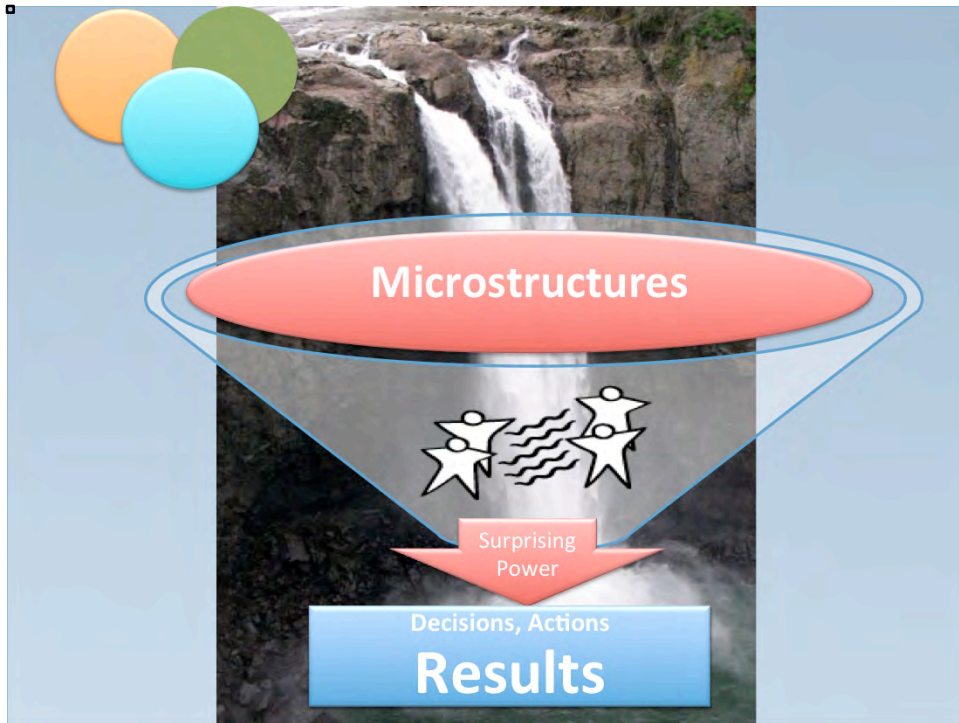
Macro Structures are frequently tapped to guide engagement and cultural change.

However, they are hard to change in the short-term and designed to give the organization continuity **not** adaptability. Macrostructures should remain the same for everyone, everywhere (e.g., the way you hire someone or budget for the next year's work should be consistent in every corner of the organization).



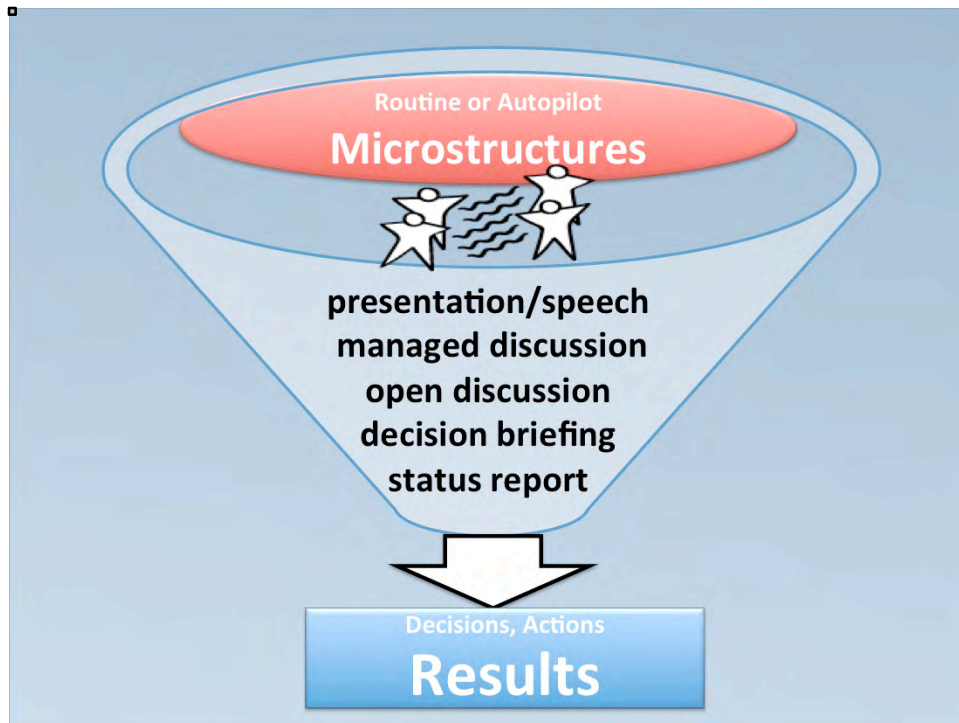
What captures attention in the news and business pages is the calculus of coordinating these three elements to get results for the organization.

Yet something is completely overlooked in this calculus.



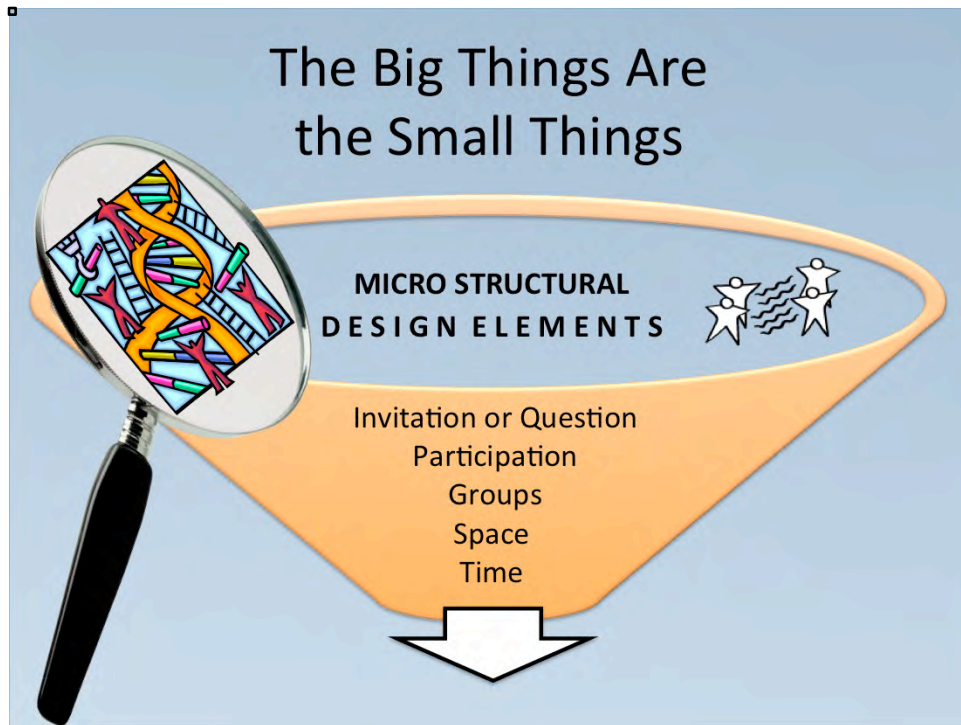
Before we get results, macrostructures, people, and resources are shaped by interactions **AMONG** people in the organization and the clients. Microstructures guide day to day interactions and relational coordination—the bread and butter of everyday life.

Microstructures have a surprisingly powerful influence on results. So routine, they are easily overlooked.



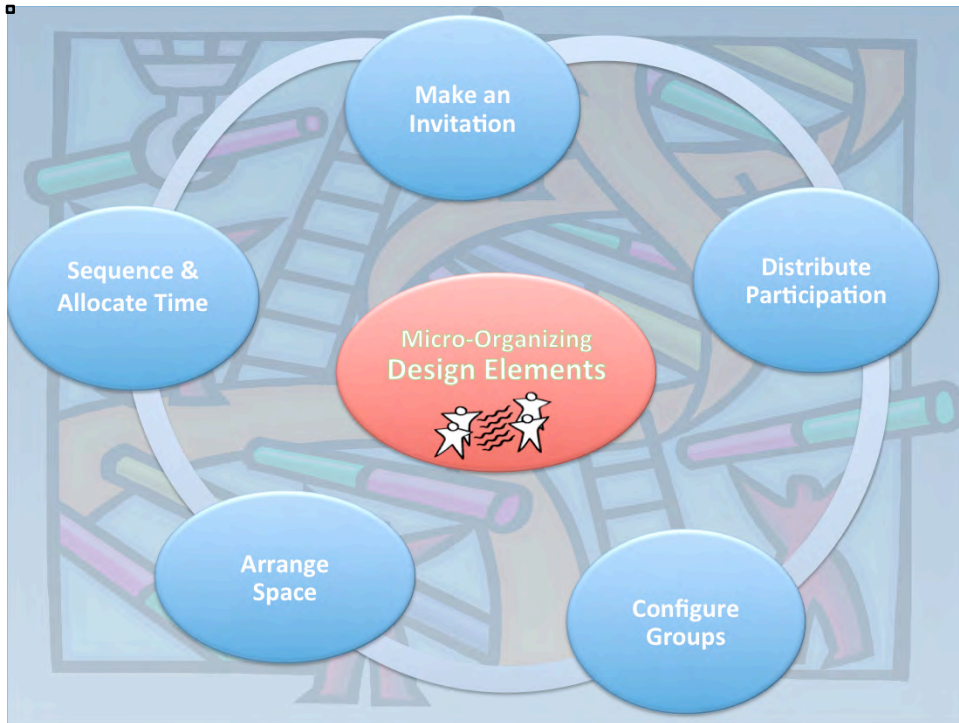
We dug much deeper into routine microstructures: they were so familiar--often operating on autopilot--that their structure was nearly invisible.

The “big five” dominant microstructures include a presentation, a managed discussion, an open discussion, a decision briefing, and a status report.



We started to believe that everyday activities like presentations and open discussions were “designed.”

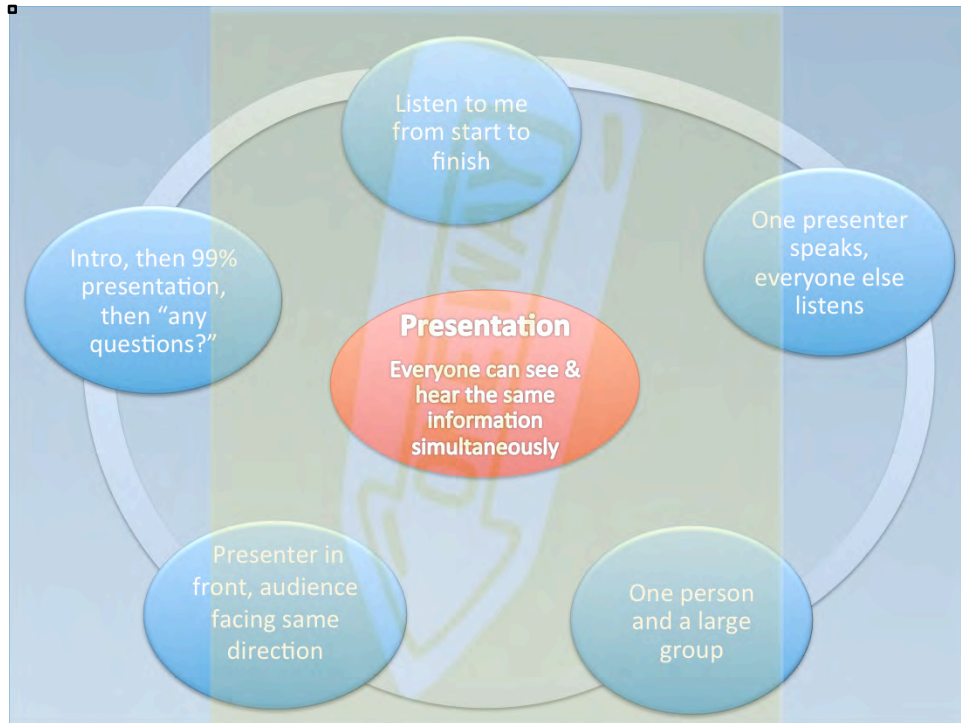
Very small, very subtle design elements had a big influence on results.
Microstructural design elements constrained and enabled what was possible.



The micro- *easy to overlook structure* included five design elements.

They include making an invitation, distributing participation, configuring groups, arranging space, and sequencing & allocating time.

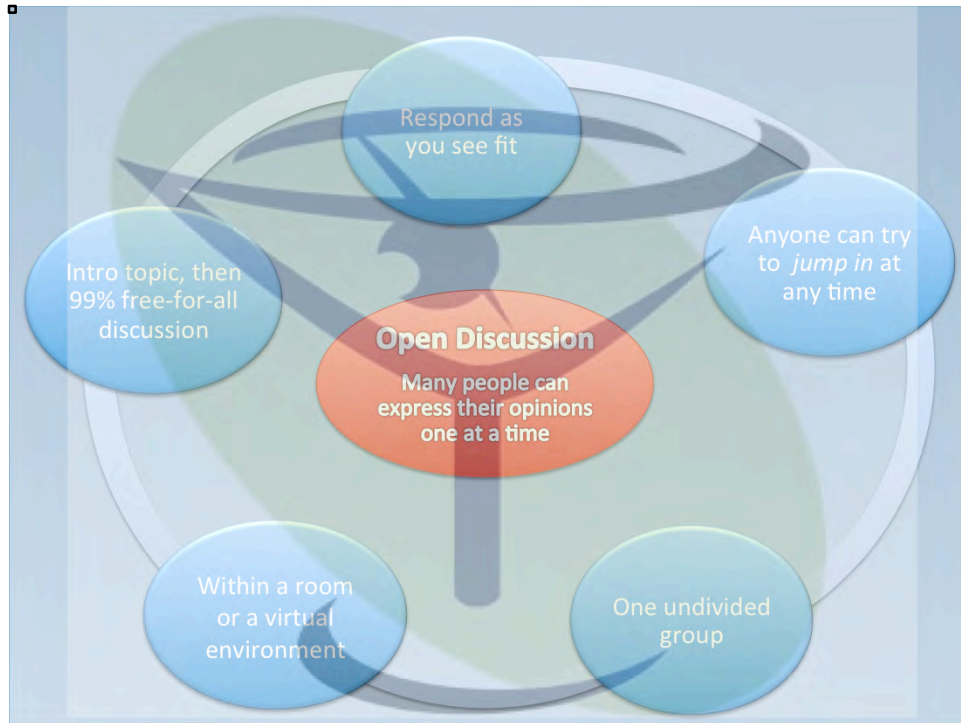
It felt a little like discovering the structure of DNA. The combination of these elements enabled **and** constrained what was possible.



So, for example, a presentation makes it possible for many people can hear and see the same information simultaneously.

We make an implicit invitation (listen to me), distribute participation, configure groups, arrange space, sequence/allocate time.

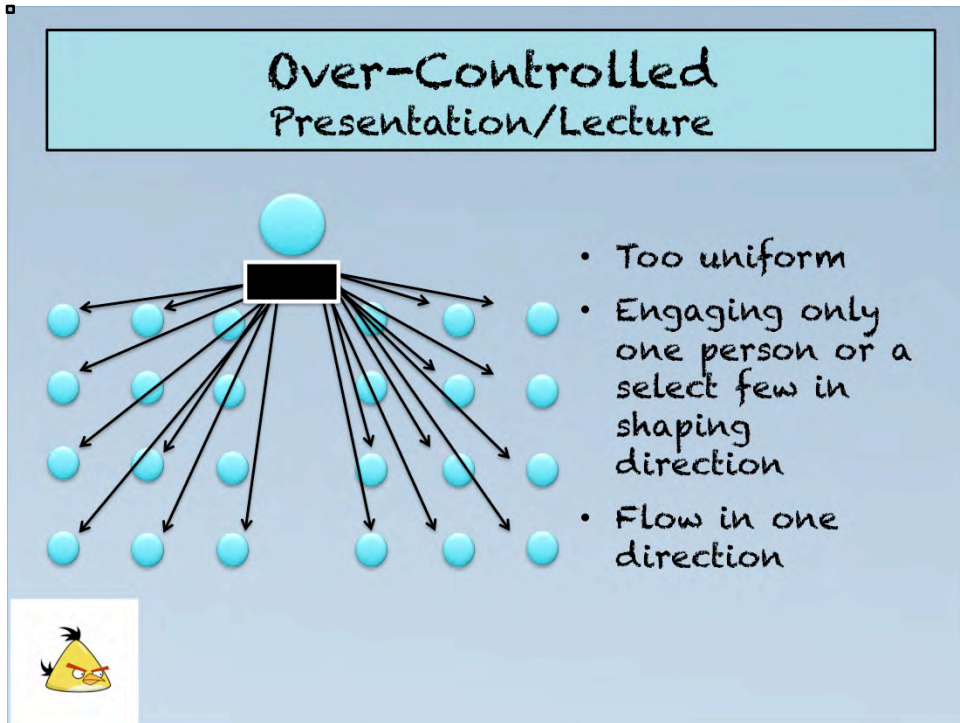
The overall message and flow is "ONE WAY."



Another example: an Open Discussion makes it possible for many people can express opinions one at a time.

Again, you make an invitation, distribute participation, configure groups, arrange space, sequence/allocate time.

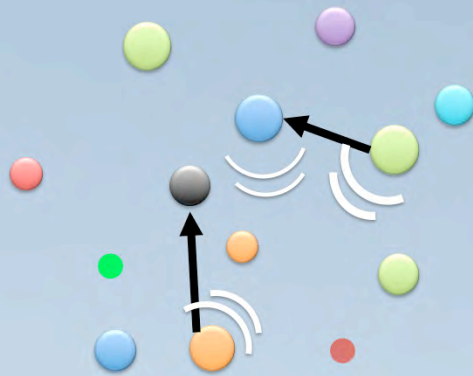
The message and flow is “anything can and will happen, HAVE ANOTHER MARTINI.”



When used to engage people, Presentations are **over-controlled**: it is assumed participants will receive information (and act on it) in a uniform or fixed fashion, only one person dominates how direction is shaped, and the flow of ideas is predominantly one direction.

Don't be surprised if *Angry Birds* happen!

Under-Controlled Open Discussion



- Unstable relationships
- Anyone can jump in
- Flow too random to shape direction

When used to engage people, Open Discussions are **under-controlled**. It is assumed participants need to ventilate individual positions. No attempt is made to coordinate how contributions are mutually shaped and ideas often flow in random directions.

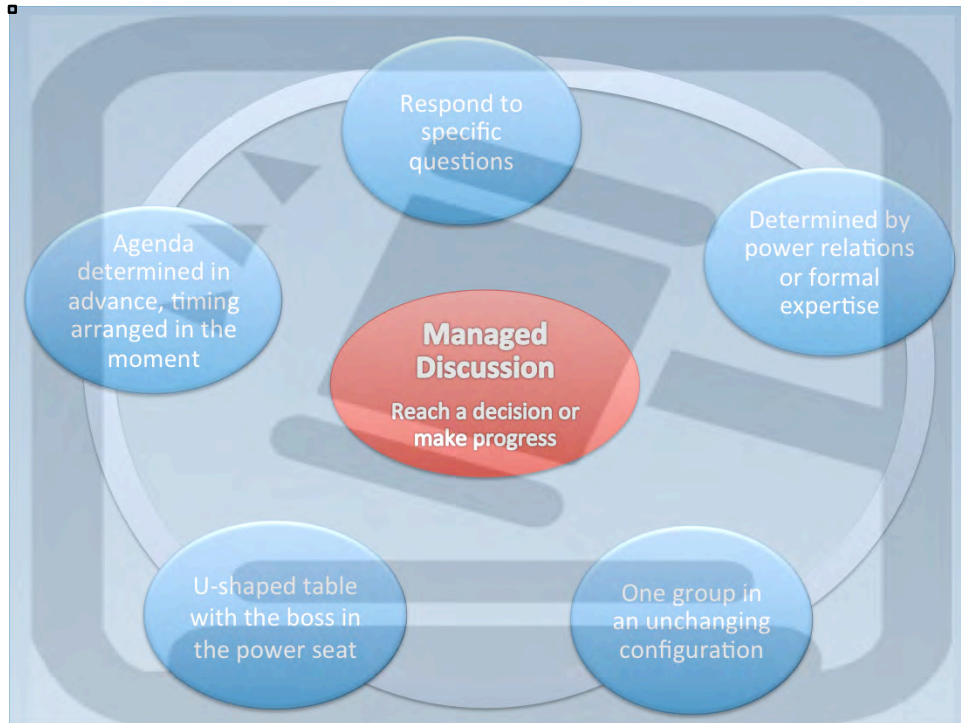
Conventional Structures Too Tight or Too Loose

- Presentation
 - Over-controlled, too uniform, engaging only a select few in shaping direction
- Open Discussion
 - Under-controlled, too unstable and too random to shape direction

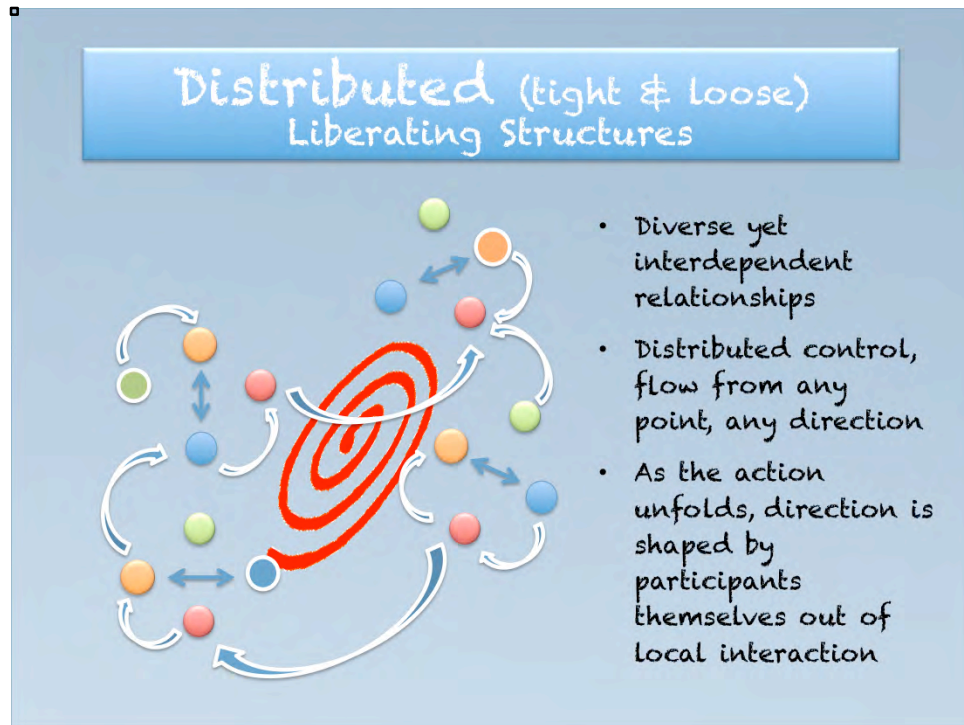


While they have their place, it is easy to see how Presentation and Open Discussions exert too much or too little control on how results are shaped.

By design Liberating Structures distribute control so that the participants can shape direction themselves... as the action unfolds.

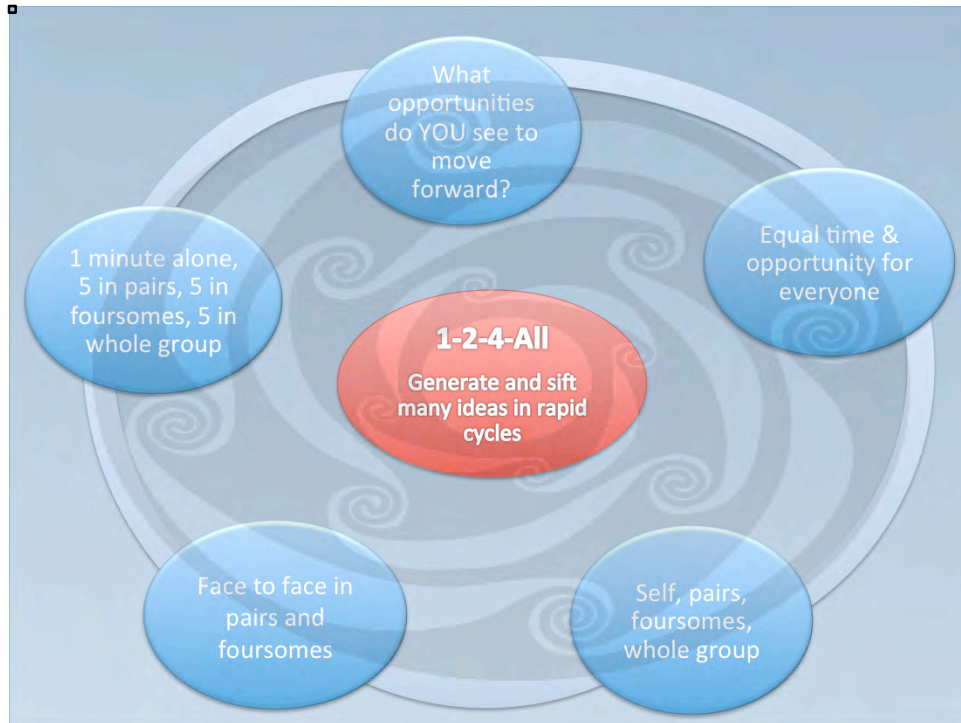


When a Presentation or Open Discussion fail to engage people and transform the culture, Managed Discussion often follows. Managed Discussion gives control over to the formal leader or expert facilitator. They shape direction on behalf of participants. (This has been compared to the game Whack-a-mole)



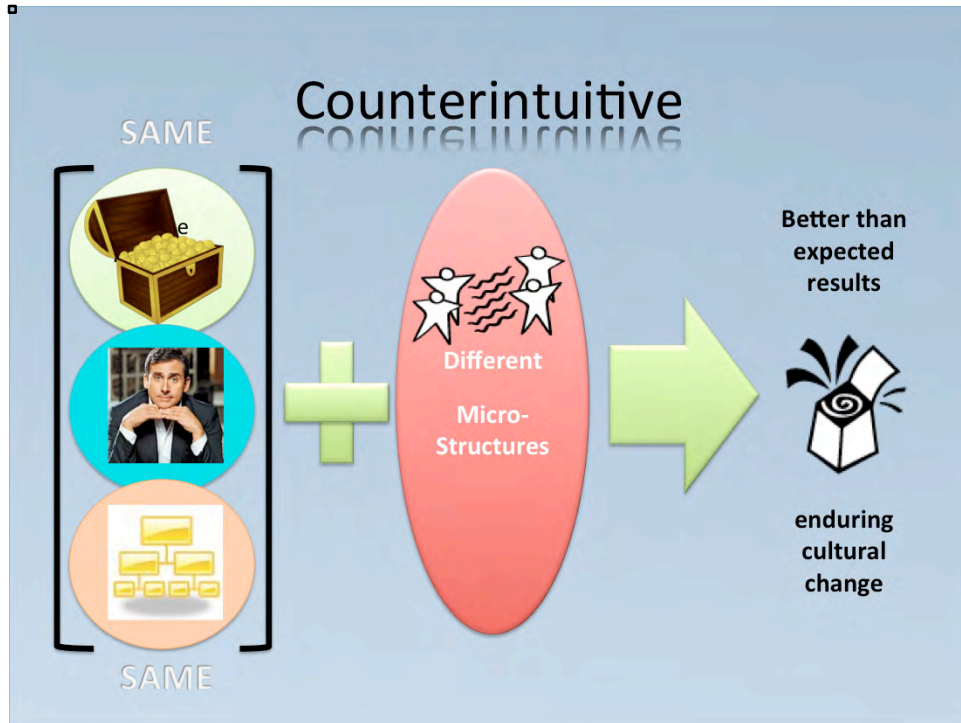
Liberating Structures are designed to **distribute** control, including and unleashing everyone in shaping direction.

Deciders and doers are united, everyone can make contributions immediately, and direction is shaped out of local interactions.

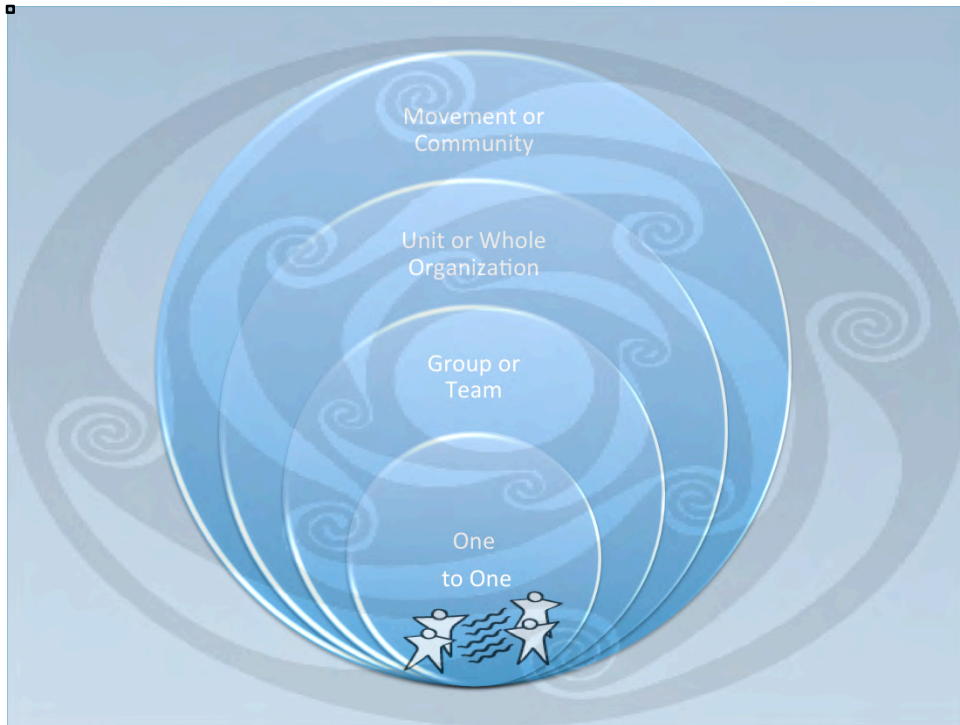


One Liberating Structure is called **1-2-4-All**. It transcends over- and under-controlling attributes.

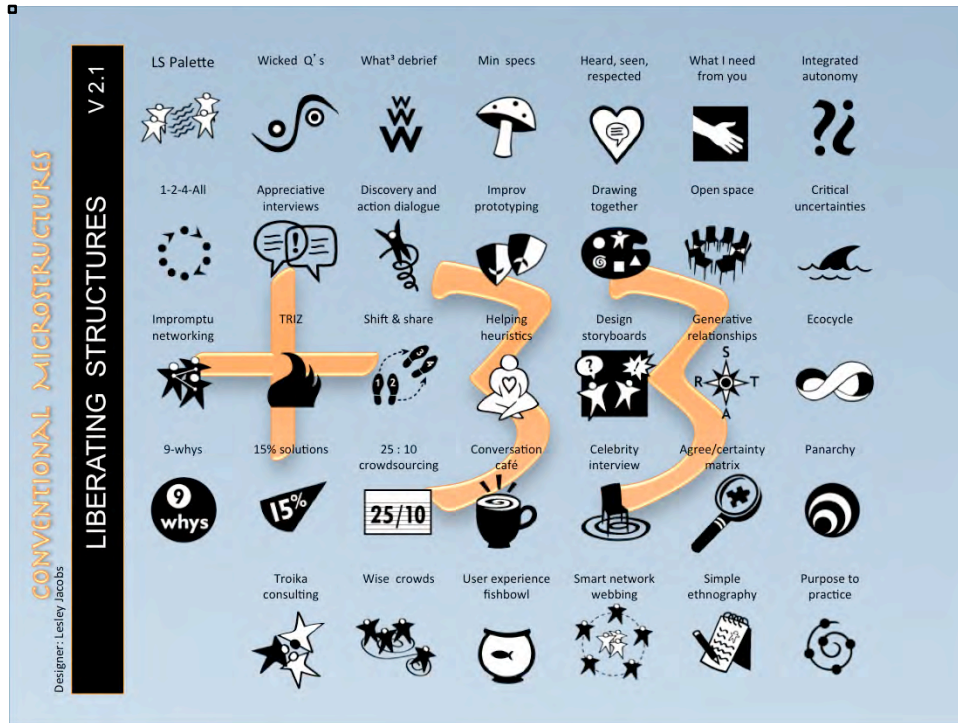
1-2-4-All is designed so that everyone can participate in generating and sifting many ideas in rapid cycles.



Counter-intuitively, macrostructures can stay the same while you try new liberating microstructures (at least as you start), the people you have are fully capable, and you won't need to invest much money ... on the way to getting better than expected results and enduring cultural change.



A path through the “engagement and cultural change” labyrinth is starting to take shape: the way through that is not spiritually mysterious or a complex engineering process but rather a relational design challenge across multiple levels... encompassing individuals all the way up to community movements.



To replace or complement the big five conventional microstructures, there are 33 Liberating Structures. Each has an icon and a unique combination of micro-organizing elements.

A working knowledge of each microstructure can be developed in less than 1 hour. Now, it is practical structure your work in a more inclusive way... generating better than expected results.

LS make it possible for you to work at the top of your intelligence while tapping the wisdom of the crowd. More freedom and more responsibility for everyone... as we shape the future together.