

# A Developmental Systems-Constellation Workshop for Advancing Shared Leadership in Holacratic Environments

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Shared or distributed leadership in holacratic environments is often more of a dream or advertisement than a reality. This is so because *leadership* is an adult-developmental issue which requires making the lifetime journey toward maturity. It is thus especially hard to achieve when members of a team are only in their early adulthood. Such a journey cannot be shortened by “skill training” or other behavioral methods but only through personal transformation for which effective tools are still hard to come by since most companies have simply bypassed adult-developmental research and continue to do so.

This 2-day workshop for 15 (maximally 18) participants has a two-fold purpose:

1. Engaging in guided *self-exploration* within a participant-selected work context and/or team situation.
2. Acquiring new *listening, thinking, and dialogue tools* for helping oneself and others explore shared-leadership issues with a view to taking the “next developmental step”.

The workshop is geared to getting to know oneself as a part of a holacratic culture “from the inside” in order to consciously shape work “in the outside”, the real world. The central goal is to motivate oneself and others to be creative in everybody’s very personal way of doing professional work and develop one’s talents.

Participation has no pre-conditions. Selection of participants depends on what a start-up aims to achieve. I suggest selecting participants according to the value streams they work in, or some other connecting dimension in which the quality of collaboration and dialog is essential to achieving their goals.

## Framework

The workshop strives to bring what is hidden into the open (which is what research in adult development is all about). It is structured in the sense of *systemic constellations*, that is, of staging participants’ internal sense-making system in physical space (details below). Using Laske’s *Constructive Developmental Framework* (CDF), we adopt the following *three main perspectives*, applying them to all topics explored in constellations:

1. One’s unconscious internal positioning toward others (“social-emotional” constellation)
2. One’s inner ego needs, and the self-imposed or environmental pressures put upon them (“behavioral” constellation)
3. The relationship of one’s thinking in real time to the real world (“cognitive” constellation).

This systemic approach is inspired by E. Schein’s notion of four *dimensions* of professional self:

1. Open	2. Concealed
3. Unknown/under development	4. Blind

*Dimensions of the Professional Self*

In order to broaden the first dimension (open self) and understand its relationship to the other three, the workshop pivots around the three (CDF) perspectives named above. Each of them, once adopted, separates one type of systemic constellation from another. Every constellation thus focuses on a different central issue:

1. What can I take responsibility for (in a pod or circle), and what is presently beyond me? (social-emotional constellation)
2. How might I do better in terms of my interpersonal perspective, my approach to tasks and self conduct? (behavioral constellation)
3. How aware am I of my *movements in thought*, and how could I enhance that awareness? (cognitive constellation)

The effect of separating these types of constellation manifests as a structural deepening of a group’s work. Importantly, a topic selected for exploration by participants gains clarity from all three perspectives and their interrelationship.

#### Real-Time Procedure

I, the facilitator, understand myself foremost as a helper, and as a teacher only secondarily. However, I will teach all three systemic perspectives mentioned above so that participants feel comfortable enough to adopt them. **All of our work will be done under the star of helpfulness:** how to help ourselves and each other, making sure that all of us feel we are together in a safe space.

After an introduction to the goal and procedure by the workshop facilitator, participants select a particular issue or problem area central to work at VSE, such as “shared leadership”, “innovation”, “thought leadership”, “jobs to be done”, *or other*. They frame it within a concrete situation of concern or interest, following one of the three perspectives opened up by the facilitator.

In physical terms, we form a half-circle around a circular physical space that we can use as a staging ground for issues and movements in our own mental space. Participants agree on a topic to explore. The facilitator clarifies the specific perspective to take. He then invites a protagonist to become the *topic owner* with the privilege of having aspects of his/her understanding of the topic staged in the physical space. To help making different aspects of the chosen topic visible, the latter appoints 3-5 participants whose task it is to represent these aspects in the circular physical space set aside. (The meaning of location and distance in the space can be defined by the protagonist, or else it emerges during the constellation process.)

In this way, the exploration of a topic chosen by participants, and taken ownership of by the protagonist, “plays out” in a double way:

- a. as a mental and physical movement on stage (by topic representatives)
- b. as a multi-perspectival dialogue between (1) the topic [aspect] place holders chosen by the protagonist, (2) the protagonist and his/her representatives, (3) the facilitator and the representatives and (4) the facilitator and the protagonist.

A constellation ends when the majority senses that the problem owner’s job has been completed and the latter agrees or names remaining issues.

No constellation should exceed 2 hours. At the end of a constellation we regroup in order to review the experiences that have played out and, after a break, move on to different constellation. This can be a constellation of the same type, e.g., social-emotional, for learning purposes; or else a constellation tackling one of the two unused perspectives.

### Outcomes

The workshop is designed to support and invigorate the following professional capabilities:

1. An understanding of what is concealed, unknown, or blind in everybody’s present approach to shared work
2. A grasp of possible ways of positioning oneself toward others (social-emotional)
3. A grasp of levels of responsibility one can take in one’s work
4. A higher motivation to develop toward self-authoring
5. A keener sense of one’s own personal needs and the pressures brought to bear upon them by oneself and the environment (behavioral)
6. A higher awareness of one’s own and others’ *movements-in-thought* in real-time dialogue (cognitive)
7. A higher fluidity of holistic conceptual thinking.

### Time line

Day 1: developmentally and behaviorally centered constellations

Day 2: cognitively centered constellations, with wrap up for bringing together experiences from all constellations put in place over 2 days, by topic.

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Interested parties are invited to write to Otto Laske at [otto@interdevelopmentals.org](mailto:otto@interdevelopmentals.org), Director of IDM, for more information on workshop timing and cost.