

Dear friends and colleagues of the AMA network and beyond,

To the beginning of this new year, I would like to share an invitation with you that I have been carrying with me for several years – an invitation for a training about how to design and lead transformative spaces for diverse groups.

Many of you have experienced me as a facilitator, either at one of our AMA gatherings or in the context of our CCRDS at the UNFCCC COPs or because I have supported you as a facilitator of a gathering that you were organizing. Through the years I have received a lot of appreciative feedback and an increasing number of requests whether I would be willing to train others to do what I do, particularly to host groups in hard settings with people who are usually not prone to these kinds of interactive work.

So often I have heard feedback from participants such as *“I usually HATE these kinds of workshops. But this was simply great – simultaneously deep and light, and yet highly creative and productive”*. Or the organizers warned me about certain participants who would NEVER join such a workshop, and I should be cautious that they don't ruin everything. And afterwards they were amazed how smooth everything went and how particularly these participants played a crucial constructive role for the entire group.

My capacity to host processes myself is quite limited. Each process requires an enormous amount of presence and focus so that I usually do not host more than 5 or 6 events per year, and there are many requests than I cannot adequately respond to. So, I have increasingly felt the wish to pass my approach to process design and facilitation forward to a few people.

After training a few people individually over the last years I have finally found the space and particularly the support from Moana Pfleiderer to offer a training program for a cohort of 9-12 people scheduled to run through three weekends in the summer of 2025.

The training could have various titles. It is now called *“Transformative Leadership and Facilitation”*. An important essence, however, is captured in the subtitle *“Being the system that I lead”*. As many of you know I have taken another study program at IPU Berlin since 2019 (still have not finished my M.A. thesis, though) in which I have expanded my understanding of facilitation in the dimension of psycho-dynamic leadership. This program has helped me become conscious about a lot of deeper facets of facilitating. Routines, practices and approaches that had been intuitive and subconscious to me, have now become much more structured and clearer to me. I finally understand more clearly why I am doing what I am doing and how this shapes my general approach of group leadership.

The training will focus on the practice of group leadership, process design and facilitation. A key aspect will be about reflecting your own different personalities, emotional conditioning and sensitivities. The training will not teach *“the one”* approach but support you in exploring yourself and then draw on my experiences to adopt, adapt and integrate those aspects that match best to your own professional context and personality. The group leadership practice of an introverted director of an interdisciplinary scientific institute will differ from the style of an extroverted intrapreneur in a big company or the one of a freelance facilitator who never sticks with one context but enters and leaves. Still, I am convinced that my experience and knowledge can be a resource for all of them.

So, if you feel called to grow in a direction in which you are in charge of leading groups with diverse backgrounds (disciplines, cultures, political interests etc.) I invite you to join this program in 2025, June 7-9, July 24-27 and September 26-28.

Please feel free to reach out to me (thomas.bruhn@rifs-potsdam.de) if you have further questions. I am looking forward to (re-)connecting with those of you who feel resonance with this invitation.

All the best wishes

Thomas

Transformative Leadership & Facilitation

or

Being the system that I lead

A training on how to guide highly diverse groups towards greater cooperation and group creativity

For whom?

This training might be ideal for you if

- you are responsible for issues that require the interaction and/or cooperation of diverse perspectives and people
- you like to integrate others and "play fair" but often experience conflicts in hierarchical environments or with "α-leaders"
- you are frustrated about dysfunctional meetings of groups
- you are ready to engage in a process of self-exploration
- you consider yourself generally sensitive and caring

This training is probably not ideal for you if

- you are mainly looking for a more effective way to "make others do what you want them to do"
- you cannot meet different perspectives with genuine curiosity and appreciation
- you are not willing to explore your own personality and emotions as part of your leadership role and practice

Persona I "Scientist"

Ann is heading a large interdisciplinary research group. While she sees the potential of integrating different disciplines, many of her researchers remain disconnected among each other. How can Ann enable effective interdisciplinary collaboration?

Persona II "Policy Advisor"

Ben is working in the political field and responsible for a complex topic. He experiences how people rather talk than take action. Responsibility is passed around like a hot potato. He is worried about ineffective decision-making and increasing social polarization. How can Ben deal with the conflicts and work constructively with them?

Persona III "Facilitator"

Liz is a management consultant, executive trainer and facilitator. Her work is a lot about transcending silos and hierarchies while the people she works with are often managers or leaders who are very attached and conditioned to clear hierarchical boundaries. How can Liz deal with the potential conflicts and work constructively with them?

Persona IV "Corporate"

John is a manager in a hierarchically structured organization. He is passionate about sustainability and has the mandate for organisational change. His work transcends the old organisational silos and several other managers see him as threat to their territories. How can he lead towards a cooperative working culture?

Content & idea

Complex challenges often require the interaction of people with diverse expertise and perspectives. Thus, participatory methods for group leadership are gaining popularity. Based on the understanding of dynamics in complex systems you will explore the practice of facilitative leadership methods and how to design processes for specific groups and contexts.

Often, facilitation or participation is applied in flexible contexts or "in-between spaces". In hierarchical settings with power imbalances, they can be "alienating" and require a specific adaptation and contextualization. Interactive methods pretending that everyone could meet "on eye level" might be naive and counterproductive for the whole group. People with special capacities or roles need to be able to contribute without dominating or oppressing the people they work with.

You will discover how participatory work and facilitation can thrive and be transformative when dealing with in the presence of power structures and hierarchies consciously. You will explore the "middle path" of holding power and responsibility as a leader and leaving space for self-organization and co-creativity.

A special focus of the course lies on your role and mindset as leader or facilitator. Informed by insights from psycho-dynamics we will help you understand how your own state of being is connected to the group you are leading (in both directions!) and how this awareness can become the most powerful resource for your leadership.

You will learn...

- to guide people to discover trust and joy in cooperating even when they are skeptical about it or stuck in dysfunctional relationships or communication
- to identify leadership style(s) and practice(s) that match your own personality and natural strengths
- to understand and manage your own feelings while leading a group and use these feelings as a resource
- to adapt to challenging or unexpected group dynamics
- to guide spaces for self-organization without "losing control" or denying your responsibility
- to identify and hold healthy boundaries for yourself so that you can be effective and enjoy your leadership role
- to deepen your trust in the unknown
- anything else that I can offer and that might help you for your own role

Setup & schedule

The training is designed as a course for a cohort of 9-12 people and will include contributions from Prof. Thomas Kühn from IPU Berlin and Dr. Man Fang who both have deeper psychological expertise than myself. Some details for the location and participation fee are not fixed yet, but probably we will gather at the International Psychoanalytic University (IPU) Berlin on the following dates:

- Weekend 1: June 7-9; Weekend 2: July 24-27; Weekend 3: September 26.-28.

Next steps

While the dates are fixed, we are still figuring out several details of logistics and administration. If you are generally interested, please reach out (thomas.bruhn@rifs-potsdam.de) so we can keep you updated as the details become clearer.