

The Global Leadership Academy

Methodological approach



Implemented by:

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



we

WHO WE ARE

The Global Leadership Academy

There is a need for spaces that allow for a collective search for new approaches and initiatives.

The Global Leadership Academy creates spaces in which decision-makers from the fields of policy-making, business, research and civil society come together to look at global challenges from a completely different angle. Spaces for personal and collective development, for listening and strengthening mutual understanding, building new trustful cooperation to go beyond institutional silos and let new ideas emerge on how to address the global challenges of our times.

www.we-do-change.org/who-we-are



we do

WHAT WE DO

The Global Leadership Academy

Based on its years of experience, the Global Leadership Academy has developed an effective approach to enable change on a personal, organisational and systemic level – Leadership and Innovation Labs.

A Leadership and Innovation Lab is a space of dialogical knowledge sharing, connection and innovation dedicated to a particular societal challenge.

In a unique way, this approach addresses the intertwined relationship between leadership development of key change agents and the initiation of systemic change in organizations, networks and our societies.

www.we-do-change.org/what-we-do



we do change

OUR IMPACT

The Global Leadership Academy

The Global Leadership Academy's objective is to enable change on a personal, organisational, and systemic level. Our programmes take an emergent approach to change – we don't formulate the objectives for change initiatives, instead, we provide an enabling space where new ideas can be sparked, networks created and paths to change tried and tested.

Our members transfer insights and innovations into their home contexts in manifold ways: Through change projects, new cooperations, innovative leadership and much more.

www.we-do-change.org/our-impact



Dialogue

Leadership

Innovation

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH of the Global Leadership Academy

Theory of change

Dialogue

Leadership

Innovation



Theory of Change

The Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) started operating in 2012, to test an innovative approach in International Cooperation by designing and conducting international dialogue processes among leaders and change agents from around the world on issues of global relevance in an open, diverse, highly flexible, and experimental, yet enabling setting¹.

This document aims to summarize the approach developed by the GLAC and the methodological learnings extracted from the past years of work in this field².

Against the background of the challenges of our time (first section) and our mandate and objectives as Global Leadership Academy (second section), the paper introduces the thinking and assumptions that guide our general approach (third section). Subsequently, we explain our practice of growing a global network of highly motivated change-makers, starting with the Leadership and Innovation Labs along three phases: the initiations of Labs, the Lab process itself, and the transfer of insights into changes and ongoing peer-support for impact beyond the individual level, joining energies to reach the global Sustainable Development Goals. Our practice is continuously evolving, based on our experiences and exchange with other practitioners. Therefore, we are openly inviting feedback and conversations on this document.

The challenges of our time demand rethinking our responses

Humanity is facing major challenges. Economic disruption, climate change, conflicts and large-scale migration are only some of the global issues that loom large. Across the globe, people meet the future facing prevailing uncertainty. Signs of isolation, withdrawal, and confrontation dominate and even increase – many actors place hope in seemingly simple solutions that might have short-term, localised effects, but often create more drastic problems in the long run. Some place their faith purely in technology. Yet the complex interdependency of the challenges, their dynamic and global nature, and the acceleration of social effects through the digital transformation and artificial intelligence, all render it extremely difficult to find effective and jointly committable ways forward.

The Sustainable Development Goals re-emphasise how

interrelated and inseparable social, environmental, and economic issues are. Yet, most of the world's current problem-solving approaches still focus on individual sectors or organisations ("silo-thinking"), and on the same patterns of thought and implicit assumptions as the problems we are dealing with. In the face of fake news, short term national interests and the vagueness of international commitments many people grow disillusioned and doubtful that real change is possible. Why do so many seemingly great ideas never get implemented?

There is a need for new spaces for motivated change makers that allow for collaboration across regional, institutional, and sectoral borders to develop new approaches and initiatives – spaces for personal and collective development, for listening and strengthening mutual understanding, building trust to break institutional silos and to trigger new forms of collaborative action to address the global challenges of our times.

The change we desire – our objectives and mandate

The aspiration behind the work of the Global Leadership Academy is to contribute to more sustainable, inclusive, and just societies. This is done by designing, convening, and hosting dialogue processes that encourage the breaking of conventional patterns and that open new perspectives on innovating and leading.

Leadership manifests in the interplay of individuals with a social system, and systems can change intentionally and sustainably if those in positions of responsibility change. But leadership is closely intertwined with organisational processes, structures, and culture, and often key to initiating systemic change³. Acknowledging this reciprocity GLAC considers leadership and organisations situated in a respective broader system simultaneously. System thinking defines the GLAC approach.

As a start of the network of change makers, we work with individuals, brought together in a “temporary system” – a Leadership and Innovation Lab – to explore a complex issue of global importance that matters deeply to each person. We aim at growing participants’ awareness of other perspectives, enabling them to take those perspectives into account when designing and implementing change, and facilitating a holistic view on systems. In the true sense of a laboratory, our Labs become spaces of experimenting with approaches to systemic change.

In that way, the Global Leadership Academy’s interventions aim at adding values on three levels:

- They **contribute to the personal transformation of key change agents**, by opening new perspectives and perceptions, and improving individual innovation capacities and leadership skills.
- They **inspire key change agents to initiate change in their organisations and networks**, providing them with a platform for developing new approaches to address current challenges.
- They focus on one issue of wide societal and global importance and **enable key change agents to pioneer collaborative approaches in this field**, by creating new forms of cooperation across sectors, countries, and cultures.

Since starting to gather global leaders and change makers in these multi-stakeholder-dialogues in 2012, thematic “lab communities” evolved. Anecdotal evidence showed that these communities were interested to form a global network

as a strong resource for change in global development. The facilitated thematic dialogue processes proved to be stimuli for developing a joint understanding and systemic and open mindset that could function as a basis for a wider network of highly motivated change makers for sustainable development, spanning over 120 countries by 2022.

The approach

The Global Leadership Academy enables change through dialogue, individual and collective leadership development, and by promoting social innovation.

In the purest sense GLAC does this in the format of Leadership and Innovation Labs that are explained here in more detail. Throughout the past years we have learnt though, that circumstances might not allow for implementing a dialogue process following this outline, as budget, time frame, international travel or other factors might be restricted. Nevertheless, the following chapters explain the background and cornerstones of the approach followed in the Leadership and Innovation Labs as well as in other GLAC formats, may they be in presence or virtual.

The dialogue processes convened by the Global Leadership Academy constitute unique environments where key change agents are strengthened in their capacity to bring about desired changes in their respective sphere of influence. These spaces enable dialogue between a range of actors with different perspectives and roles, and thereby function as accelerators of innovative, strategic change. Such spaces are also referred to as a social, change, or learning laboratories (in short often ‘labs’). Building on his work on learning organisations, Peter Senge⁴ introduced learning laboratories as spaces to strengthen individual and collective (interpersonal, group) capabilities to reflect while acting. He describes a learning laboratory as an effective learning process that simulates real-life settings in which decision makers map mental models – make explicit and share their assumptions; reflect their mental models by acknowledging inconsistencies in their assumptions; and take action to improve their models through continuous, iterative testing cycles. Further explaining, Zaid Hassan has emphasized that: “just as we have technical and scientific labs to tackle our biggest technical and scientific challenges, we need social labs to tackle our biggest social challenges.”⁵ Three key characteristics underpin the **social lab approach**⁶, prominently developed by the leading organisations Generon, Presencing

1 The Global Leadership Academy is an international development programme carried out by the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

2 It is a revised version of the first edition published in 2018 by the authors Claudia Apel, Wiebke Koenig, Katharina Lobeck, Martina Maurer, Jan Wesseler, David Winter and Mareike Zenker.

3 See: Wimmer, Rudolf 2009: Führung und Organisation – zwei Seiten ein und derselben Medaille (‘Leadership and organisation – two sides of the same coin’). In: Revue für postheroisches Management, issue 4/2009, p. 20-33.

4 See: Senge, Peter 1996: Die fünfte Disziplin. Kunst und Praxis der lernenden Organisation. Klett-Cotta, and Senge, Peter 1990: Systems thinking and Organizational Learning. Retrieved: <http://www.systemdynamics.org/conferences/1990/proceed/pdfs/senge1007.pdf>

5 See: Hassan, Zaid 2014: The Social Labs Revolution. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

6 Compare: Hassan 2014: The Social Lab Revolution

cooperation – GLAC refrains from prescribing what ‘good’ leadership should look like. Instead, focusing on offering a space for participants

- to strengthen a reflective and dialogical mindset,
- to understand and navigate systemic dynamics and one’s own role,
- to reconnect with their values and inner drive for change,
- to foster readiness for action and self-responsibility,
- to encourage relationship-building, trust, and cross sectoral cooperation.

Innovation

Generally, the GLAC approach understands innovation as the change of a routine – be it a structure, process, regulation, culture, service, or product. And changing routines occur all the time in organisations and systems. The key question for leaders and change agents is: How can they influence organisations and systems to support and amplify those innovations that make them fit for the future?

The GLAC approach builds on three dimensions central for sustainable and lasting innovation:

- the personal dimension to lead innovation that includes an open learning mindset as well as the ability to deal with frustrations and setbacks
- the organisational dimension to create the right framework conditions for heterogeneous teams with time and co-creative spaces to develop new ideas
- the process dimension to design iterative, user-centred innovation processes with dedicated feedback loops – following a basic principle of innovation design: ‘Fail fast to succeed sooner’¹³.

Leadership and Innovation Labs and other GLAC formats use experience-based methods that attach importance to enable peers to inspire each other by sharing experiences and knowledge in a heterogeneous group. These are not trainings to go through the three dimensions with a set of tools. By attributing high value to learning from living examples through learning journeys and immersions, by practising and applying dynamic, iterative innovation models, participants are encouraged to use the collective intelligence of the multi-stakeholder, multi-country, and

multi-cultural group to co-create innovative solutions for the challenges that they share with direct relation to their home contexts. In this way, participants directly apply different innovation methodologies to produce tangible prototypes as an output of the Lab. At the same time, their innovation capacities and knowledge of innovation processes will create impact that goes far beyond this prototype.

Leadership and Innovation Labs

A Lab is a space of knowledge sharing, personal development, collective enquiry, and innovation dedicated to a particular societal challenge or topic. As such, Lab processes are usually convened for a predetermined period of time (typically for GLAC between 6 and 18 months).

The long-term sustainable change that the GLAC approach seeks to inspire, especially on the organisational and systemic level, lies beyond the scope of the convened Lab cycle. The facilitated Lab therefore only provides the initial impetus to enable long-term change, and starts a community¹⁴ of peers that can support those changes beyond the Lab. The following elements, in particular their combination, are at the heart of GLAC’s Leadership and Innovation Labs.

Initiating a Leadership and Innovation Lab

Great importance must be given to a careful initiation of a Lab. Defining the global issue in an open but provoking new way, carefully building the hosting team for the process, identifying participants with high ambitions to contribute to change (and managing their expectations of what to expect from the Lab) and designing a suitable methodological approach are crucial prerequisites for an impactful process.

Defining a global issue for a Lab

A global issue relevant to human coexistence around the world is the focus of each Lab and pools the passion and sense of ownership of participants. The GLAC approach works for global challenges, where an urgent need for new thinking and cooperation has been identified; challenges that can only be tackled by involving a range of disciplines, sectors, and societal stakeholders, and where the experimental laboratory approach appears to be beneficial for developing innovative approaches. The global issue is at the heart

7 <http://www.generationinternational.com/> , <https://www.presencing.com/> , <http://reospartners.com/>

8 Bohm, D. (2006): On Dialogue.

9 Senge, P. (2006): The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.

10 Isaacs, W. (2008): Dialogue. The Art of Thinking Together.

11 However, Bohm’s approach envisaged no facilitation, or only to get things started at the beginning of a dialogue process. As it comes to our Leadership and Innovation Labs, we understand them as a start of longterm engagement in communities of practice or even a global network of change makers. Facilitating them serves well to establish trust and a collaboration culture that then continues beyond the facilitated phase.

12 See also: Bolden (2005): What is Leadership Development? Purpose and Practice. University of Exeter Centre for Leadership Studies.

13 Quote widely attributed to David Kelley, see Manzo, Peter 2008: Fail Faster, Succeed Sooner. Stanford Social Innovation Review: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/fail_faster_succeed_sooner

14 In that sense we again follow Bohm’s approach, who envisaged no facilitation, or only to get things started at the beginning of dialogues. Lab spaces function as catalysts to create collaborative communities that again fill into a global network.

of all subsequent steps – from building a strong hosting team, to selecting participants that share a passion for finding solutions to this challenge, to developing a tailored intervention design with the appropriate methodologies. Importantly, it serves as a prerequisite for lasting Lab communities among participants that in most of GLAC's Labs last well beyond the facilitated process.

Collaborative hosting of the Labs

The Global Leadership Academy always partners with other organisations in convening and hosting Leadership and Innovation Labs or other formats. GLAC and partners jointly define objectives for the Lab that guide the composition of the Lab group, the intervention design, and the choice of methodology. All important decisions during the implementation of the Lab are taken together in this partnership. Cooperation partners complement the Global Leadership Academy in a variety of ways. They may bring in specific technical experience, knowledge of a sector, geographical, or cultural insights, methodological know-how, funding – or a variety of these aspects.

By choosing this cooperative approach to convening and facilitating, the hosting team (Global Leadership Academy, convening partners, facilitators) shows the same diversity of perspectives, skills, experiences, and views that the Lab group itself needs to generate new insights and innovative ideas for change. The Labs benefit from the many advantages this approach brings – a widened skill set, greater reach, strengthened networks, greater convening power, or deeper knowledge. At the same time, co-hosting comes with many challenges that shared ownership over a process brings. It means navigating diverging institutional interests, managing different roles during the Lab process, facing conflicts, and letting go of control over the process while allowing for the emergence of new ideas. In that sense, the hosting team is a "microcosm" of the entire Lab group. The premise that sustainable change is achieved through dialogue and cooperation needs to be lived by the conveners who themselves experience the advantages, opportunities, difficulties, and conflicts of working collaboratively in shaping change.

Composing the Lab group

A diversity of perspectives is a prerequisite for the dialogue and innovation processes that define GLAC Labs. Each member of the Lab brings her or his particular view on the issue to the group conversations – perspectives that might complement one another or that can be conflicting.

When identifying participants for a Lab, attention has to be placed to the diversity of the group in terms of experience, age, gender, cultural and professional backgrounds. A Lab typically brings together people from all sectors of society (government, civil society, business, and academia), from different disciplines and a wide range of countries or regions. The success of a Lab largely hinges on the identification of

participants that are experienced with and passionate about the issue at stake, open to new ideas and impulses, able to engage in dialogue, and willing to re-consider personal attitudes and deeply held assumptions.

As the Lab not only seeks to facilitate conversation but also to enable change, participants need to be passionate about making change happen in their particular field of work or institution. They must be keen to overcome the 'aspiration gap' between the status quo and the desired situation. While acknowledging that official rank is no sufficient predetermination for the implementation of change initiatives, the capacity to exert influence matters – be it through institutional standing, networks, or opinion leadership. Lab participants need to have the possibility to make things happen.

Over the last years GLAC has learnt many insights regarding the composition of Lab groups. Labs attempt a delicate balancing act, they strive for great diversity of opinions and experiences, while at the same time forging a network built on a shared desire to advance sustainable change in a particular field of interest. While we originally thought it should be the objective to represent the entire system in the Lab group – with all its polarized voices, we today believe that a reasonably shared strive for a more sustainable and just future among the participants as a prerequisite for a impactful Lab. Additionally, GLAC increasingly builds on regional or national clusters of participants (e.g. at least 3 participants per country) to ensure that participants have overlapping spheres of influence in which they can take joint action.

Institutional linkages of the Lab

As outlined above, the GLAC approach is built on the understanding that personal development of decision makers is a key element in initiating systemic change. To increase the likelihood that a committed change agent will achieve sustainable organisational and systemic impact, the Lab and its outcomes need to be relevant to the institutional and organisational context of the participants.

Institutional links can help to increase the probability of sustainable impact of Labs. They raise ownership and openness of participants' organisations for new impulses that arise in the Lab. They create broad awareness of the issues the Lab explores and expose them to a wider public, amplifying the discourses explored in the Lab. They can support the initiation and implementation of change projects and may be central in strengthening emerging change projects beyond the convened Lab cycle.

GLAC has explored different ways of strengthening institutional links of a Lab: inviting organisations/initiatives and/or international cooperation programmes to nominate candidates for a Lab; encouraging participants to involve their home organisation in activities between the Lab meetings; hosting public events with additional partner organisations; forging links with on-going high-level policy

dialogues.

Nevertheless, it is critical to maintain the open-ended, emerging character of the Lab process, and not attempt to align the creative energies of the Lab too closely with institutional expectations of participants' home organisations.

Tailored intervention design and methodology

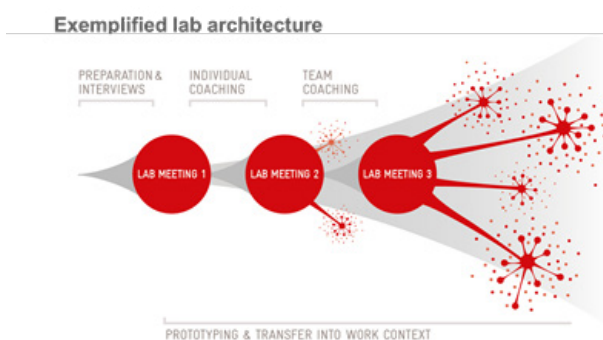
The hosting team creates a tailored intervention design for each Leadership and Innovation Lab to fit the issue of the Lab, its objectives, and the needs of participants. This entails that the hosting partners need to generate a shared understanding of how to reach the objectives – including the overall duration, number, and location of Lab meetings, coaching, working with individual or collective change projects and platforms for online sharing and exchange.

The Labs involve multiple meetings and coaching phases. This iterative process design increases the long-term absorption of new experiences and insights, as everyday routines are broken up at several points and the learning effects of the Lab meetings can resonate at different times during individual and institutional development.

In interplay with the intervention design, an overall methodology is employed to ensure that learning experiences are appropriate to the issue, and that the objectives of the Lab can be met. The respective dialogue, leadership, and change methodologies are implemented hand in hand with leading international practitioners. Examples of methodologies GLAC has employed include Theory U, Deep Democracy, Design Thinking, the Circle and Open Space.

The Lab process – working with structure and emergence

Ultimately, all pre-Lab design work needs to be adaptive to the dynamic social process of the Lab group – while staying firm to the objectives of the Lab. While providing a carefully designed structure to each Lab process, the thematic foci the participants choose and the nature of the innovation projects they work on only emerge through the facilitated meetings of the Lab. The Global Leadership Academy therefore does not prescribe specific outcomes or pre-defines possible interventions. It is up to the Lab participants to identify leverage points and potential for change in their home systems.



Hosts and conveners need to demonstrate humbleness to the inherent social group process, be open to what wants to emerge in the Lab and facilitate its flow, while at the same time ensuring a guiding process to structure this flow. This balance is a demanding dance for the hosting team and especially for an organisation as the Global Leadership Academy with its GIZ background, being used to far more planned, predictable processes. But this openness is fundamental to allow participants to take ownership and evolve from recipients to co-creators of the Lab process and hence the change they want to initiate.

The content and structure of individual Lab meetings depend very much on the overall intervention design and their place in the process. Initial meetings usually place a stronger emphasis on the exploration of the issue and the systems at stake, while later ones might focus more strongly on shaping visions for change and approaches to innovation. Concluding Lab meetings can include a public element, where the Lab prototypes and reflections are presented to a wider public. They close the convened Lab cycle and serve to take stock, while opening up to what lies beyond: the on-going implementation of prototypes, maintaining the Lab community and feeding into broader networks, sustaining the new. During the actual Lab process, GLAC attaches particular importance to the following elements.

Creating and holding an enabling space for dialogue

The first interactions during a lab are vital to set the tone of the engagement with and among the participants. For people to truly open up to other perspectives and new possibilities, they need to feel safe from threat, judgement, harm, and repercussions. To encourage participants to take ownership of the Lab process, it is important to listen closely to their needs in shaping the agenda, work with their real-life challenges, and invite the co-creation of the agenda. By consciously creating professional and personal interactions through which participants get to know each other and the members of the hosting team comprehensively. This proved to be a major prerequisite for the lasting communities of practise that emerge from our Labs and feed into a global action network of change agents.

Creating and holding such an enabling space are the key roles of the facilitators. They welcome and attend to the energies brought into the room, acting out of a dialogical mindset themselves. This also entails the facilitators' responsibility to carefully sense and work with the group dynamics and to reveal the system (= the group) to itself (e.g., by sharing observations) thereby enabling the group members to learn about themselves as a group, self-regulate and take responsibility for the course of the group's process.

Collective enquiry into the issue of the Lab

The participants of Labs are coming together to enquire afresh into a common global issue. During this dialogue,

participants reflect on the prevailing assumptions and systemic challenges in the respective context. Various dialogue sessions provide opportunities to share knowledge, practice, and experience from different geographies, sectors, and perspectives – enabling a collective search for something new to emerge.

Engaging in dialogue allows participants to let go of old ways of thinking and problem-solving with which they have become so familiar in their organisational and societal roles. By listening to voices they might not normally get to listen to and paying attention to positions outside their usual daily roles and interactions, participants are encouraged to see the whole issue rather than parts of it, to recognise connections and relationships, to explore assumptions, to learn through exploration and disclosure, and to let go of the fixation on a specific predefined outcome of a conversation.

Lab Meetings as enabling spaces for new forms of (collective) leadership to emerge¹⁵

The Lab meetings also provide an essential space to enable new forms of leadership to emerge. While enquiries of content are certainly one aspect of the dialogue process, it serves further to address the relationships between people. It provides an opportunity to sense the given challenge in a new way, consider systemic issues from different and potentially divergent perspectives, and identify new points of leverage or approaches to innovation. The consciously designed dialogue sessions strengthen relationships between participants and provide opportunities of considering individual and collective leadership roles and challenges. Consciously reflecting on one's own attitude is part and parcel of our approach. This enables them to overcome systemic obstacles and identify *dysfunctional patterns of action*¹⁶ and new leverage points for innovation. Having learned to understand one another, they can develop new solutions¹⁷. This open collective enquiry strengthens the bonds among participants and lays the foundation for self-sustaining connections to emerge.

Locations and Learning Journeys

The Global Leadership Academy always selects locations for its Lab meetings that are somehow connected to the issue the Lab addresses. This helps in deepening the engagement with the issue – key questions are not only explored in dialogue but are present in the surroundings. In cases where a Lab meeting takes place in the country or even city of a participant, it is important to recognise his/her additional co-hosting role, for example by including local participants in the preparation of such Lab meetings. That might help to access parts of reality that otherwise wouldn't be discovered, and often enables the local participants to use the Lab for strengthening their influence in their home context, thereby also supporting the impact of the Lab. Placing the Lab in a relevant context represents yet

another opportunity for shifting perspectives and for sensing a system through immersion. In Learning Journeys, participants can draw on living examples (e.g., projects, organisations, initiatives) to experience challenges, opportunities, innovations, and contradictions relevant for the issue. A Lab group dealing with sustainable oceans might for instance visit conservation or extraction projects – depending on the issue to be highlighted. A Lab dealing with urban development might choose to take the group to places where exciting new changes are happening, or where they are badly needed. Learning journeys are carefully prepared, debriefed, and connected to the overall Lab process. They represent opportunities to glean vital information from a system or context, not a mere visit to a site or a community.

Initiating change at the interplay of Lab meetings and reality

Depending on the overall objectives and methodology of a Lab, the Global Leadership Academy applies specific innovation methods that support the crystallisation of change ideas into concrete change projects or prototypes that participants are committed to take forward in their respective spheres of influence¹⁸. Nurturing the creative potential of everyone individually and the team as a collective, the Lab group develops ideas for approaching the identified problems participants have and want to deal with. In between Lab meetings, participants introduce prototype ideas into their home contexts, testing them in their respective spheres of influence. Experience has shown that success of change projects depends on a variety of factors, including their relevance for participants, their passion and commitment to make them work, the institutional embedding and their agility. The open-ended character of the GLAC approach allows for change projects to be tailored to those individual and institutional needs – rather than to the needs of a funder or external experts.

The impact of Labs ultimately unfolds in the interplay between Lab meetings and participants' return to their home context. The complementarity of Lab meetings and participants' work in home systems enables participants to engage in novel and daring thoughts in the enabling space of the Lab, while repeatedly returning to their home systems to rub their new ideas against the rough skin of reality. The biggest challenge lies in transferring ideas from the Lab meeting, with all the excitement generated there, to participants' home systems. It is probably the most sensitive, difficult, or even discouraging part of the Lab process. Participants are likely to face resistance, ignorance, and reluctance – the forces of a system that seeks stability and wishes to avoid change.

There are different ways to support participants in this process. During Lab meetings, participants can reflect the current framework conditions in their sphere of influence. Taking the perspective of those who oppose change helps to

identify and understand the leverage points change agents have at their disposal. In between Lab meetings, participants can be accompanied through coaching calls (individually or in small groups) and other forms of contact. Depending on the individual design of the Lab, this support can go much further and even entail facilitated sessions in participants' home countries. The iterative process with – in most cases – three Lab meetings also supports the sustainability of the intervention.

Often, the greatest encouragement in managing the obstacles and frustrations of initiating change is self-organised and provided by the Lab group itself, which we frequently see turning into an active community of peer support. Exchanges among Lab peers are frequently supported through social media and other online elements, such as platforms that provide a virtual space for co-creation, communication, and knowledge sharing.

Impact can take various forms, ranging from the individual level, to relationships, to impulses and change projects of the participating change agents on the levels of organisations, networks and potentially systems.

- **Participants employ acquired dialogue and leadership skills.** Having practiced generative dialogue in the Lab meetings, participants will take those dialogical skills with them, able to engage differently with stakeholders in their home context, listen differently and more openly. This empowers them to build, strengthen, or renew professional relationships and cooperation.
- **Mutual support in a peer community.** The intimacy of the enabling space of the Lab meetings strengthens relationships between participants and is a fertile ground for future cooperation and mutual support beyond the Lab. The exchange in these peer communities is often carried well beyond the designed Lab process and develops a life of its own. As convenor and hosts it can be important to let such communities thrive on their own, staying in the background, rather than dominating them.
- **Infusing new ideas in participants' home context.** During the intense knowledge sharing, participants have gathered new ideas, knowledge, or tools from their peers that they now introduce to their organisations and networks back home.
- **Facilitating reflective learning spaces in home organisations.** Through the experiential learning approach of our Labs, participants gain important facilitation skills that they can employ in their home context to develop a learning atmosphere and provide reflective spaces. The role of internal facilitation skills

becomes increasingly important for organisations and networks to nurture a continuous learning culture to come up with novel ideas.

- **Participants initiate change processes.** Often participants develop specific change projects or prototypes during Lab meetings. These initial ideas are further explored and tested in the home context – often with peers from the Lab team supporting each other. It is crucial to test for innovation at an early stage, to adapt or change ideas or to overthrow them and identify new ones. Initiating a change process needs passion, persistency, and openness at the same time. Participants are accompanied in this process through coaching.

The long-term impact Labs aim to achieve, lies beyond the cycle of the facilitated format. At GLAC we initiate change and accompany initial implementation, but the Lab ultimately serves only as an accelerator for change that goes well beyond the convened space. Depending on the specific context (issue, participants) and the available resources, the intervention can expand to support the mid-term efforts to effectively implement change initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluation for continuous learning

Participants themselves will define the measures and actions that are most appropriate to bring changes to their given contexts. The open-ended character of the GLAC approach, the acknowledgment of the non-linear nature of systemic change, and the fact that we don't intervene directly in systems but work with "multipliers" – change agents that will identify and implement ideas for change – all mean that the impact of GLAC formats is hard to trace, hard to attribute, and even harder to quantify.

The Global Leadership Academy is employing a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system, specifically developed to meet the requirements of a global and adaptive approach that identifies the sparking and sustaining of changes as outcomes, rather than prescribing the precise nature of desired changes. On the one hand GLAC measures Labs against their objectives at different points during the convened process and identifies any need for alternative interventions. On the other hand, concrete outcomes of the Labs are evaluated 6 and 18 months after the convened process. This leads to a continuous learning and adaption of our work.

15 We increasingly refrain from the term 'safe space', often used for a high quality dialogue space. People often connotate a safe space with feeling comfortably safe – while often we need to engage in dialogue that is not comfortable at all – but challenging for our perceptions and mind-sets – and thus enabling a change of perspectives.

16 See: Isaacs, William 1999: Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together, Doubleday, New York.

17 See: Kahane, Adam 2004: Solving tough problems, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.

18 Methods include among others Design Thinking, Prototyping, 3-D Modelling, and Agile Planning.

Beyond the facilitated Lab phase

With Leadership and Innovation Labs, the Global Leadership Academy has developed an approach for addressing the complex, dynamic, and interrelated challenges of our time. Our problems are systemic in nature – they won't be solved by fragmented thinking. Our approach to change therefore goes beyond current reductionist paradigms, taking a holistic perspective that considers systemic complexities and interdependencies. GLAC proposes spaces to practice systemic thought, to explore ideas derived from there, and to bring them into the world – to nurture more just, more inclusive, more liveable societies.

Considering the acceleration of change needed to reach the SDGs and – exhilarated by recent impacts of global warming or the COVID 19 pandemic – the urgency is growing to scale this approach, reach out beyond the still exclusive Leadership and Innovation Lab format and tap deeper into crowd intelligence. Therefore, a logic next step for the Global Leadership Academy is to become a network organization. Starting with the thematic Lab communities these are feeding into a global network: without hierarchical centre but with tightening connections and exchange across regions, sectoral and thematic silos. An action network for peer-support in making changes around the globe with a common understanding that it needs a crowd movement for reaching the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

“In order to recognise and release evolutionary potential in our increasingly complex, globalised world, a vertical transformation of our thinking and consciousness is needed. ‚Movint the furniture‘ on a horizontal level is no longer sufficient”¹⁹

Kambiz Poostchi







Impressions from our labs



Dialogue

“When scholars study a thing, they strive to kill it first, if it’s alive; then they have the parts and they’ve lost the whole, for the link that’s missing was the living soul.”

Goethe’s Faust

Why dialogue when working for systemic change?

Most of our current challenges – within organisations, as a society or globally – are complex. This means that cause and effect might lie far apart in time and space, changes might occur in dynamic and unpredictable ways, and many different stakeholders can be involved. While there’s a lot of commitment to solving these challenges, more often than not, solutions that look good at first sight prove to reproduce effects similar to those that they meant to counteract. Over time, this leaves many people disillusioned and doubtful that real change might be possible. Why do so many seemingly great ideas never alter what really matters to us?

One answer lies in the way in which we approach the search for solutions. In most cases, solutions are developed and implemented on the basis of the same patterns of thinking and implicit assumptions as the problems we are dealing with. These are assumptions about how humans are, how societies work, and many more. Rooted in the fundamental values and beliefs of the systems we live and work in, they are so natural to people that it becomes almost impossible to realize that they are indeed assumptions, and not “the” reality.

The fact that we hold such culturally shaped assumptions and beliefs about the world is not inherently bad – they grant us orientation, guidance and the capacity to act within organisations and systems. Yet since they lend stability to a system, they can become hindrances when we are trying to achieve change. In the search for new solutions to complex challenges, our unquestioned assumptions about the world

narrow down our possibilities and blind us to untried, different ways of approaching change. Viewed from a positive angle, this means that once we learn how to identify and question our own main assumptions, we will be able to develop new ideas for dealing with complex challenges. One way of getting there is through dialogue.

What do we mean by ‘dialogue’?

Dialogical philosophies and practices have been at the heart of many indigenous cultures for thousands of years¹. In the middle of the 20th century, physicist David Bohm and later organisational change specialists such as Peter Senge and William Isaacs have recognised, described and scientifically underpinned the benefit of dialogue for modern societies and organisations. According to Bohm² and later organisational change specialists such as Peter Senge³ and William Isaacs⁴ have recognised, described and scientifically underpinned the benefit of dialogue for modern societies and organisations. According to Bohm, dialogue is a freely flowing group conversation in which participants attempt to experience everyone’s point of view fully, equally and non-judgmentally. Dialogue combines conversation with the concurrent observation of the accompanying thinking process, thus slowing down communication and inviting us to recognise the borders of our comfort zone and their limiting effects on learning and understanding. The approach is ideally suited to enable individual and collective learning about deeply-held assumptions and patterns of thinking of those participating in the dialogue.

How do we employ dialogue in our programmes?

The Global Leadership Academy’s Leadership and Innovation Labs are spaces for international, interdisciplinary participant groups to develop novel ideas to address complex social challenges in their home systems.

1 Kovach, M. (2010): *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*.

2 Bohm, D. (2006): *On Dialogue*.

3 Senge, P. (2006): *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.

4 Isaacs, W. (2008): *Dialogue. The Art of Thinking Together*.

With the aim of advancing leadership and innovation capacities, our Labs are rooted in a dialogical understanding and employ dialogical methodologies and formats.

Our Labs build on many aspects of Bohmian dialogue: We work with what emerges in a group process and we use dialogue for deep reflection, deep listening and the collective emergence of new perspectives. In contrast to Bohm's work, we use dialogue as a way of addressing practical issues. Our Labs are designed around specific topics, with an explicit intention to lay the ground for enabling change and they are always guided by a facilitator, who accompanies the group and holds the space.

In the Global Leadership Academy's programmes, we employ dialogue to:

- enable personal transformation and foster leadership development
- use the diversity of perspectives for a deeper understanding of complex challenges
- strengthen networks and build cooperation across organisations and sectors

We believe that the experience of dialogue and the nurturing of the corresponding mindset enable leaders to go beyond solutions that recreate the status quo – enabling innovation and the initiation of sustainable and inclusive change.

Dialogue for personal transformation and leadership development

Dialogue enables us to see our world as shaped by personally and culturally defined 'mental models' and patterns of thought, rather than mistaking our personal viewpoint as "the objective reality". As we learn about our own blind spots and develop a deeper understanding of individual and collective assumptions, a new (and potentially shared) awareness of the functioning of a system and our own role in that system can emerge. This increased awareness is essential for leaders who seek to enable change in complex multi-stakeholder settings.

Furthermore, for those striving for societal change and being confronted with its difficulties, dialogue with others on the topics that they feel passionate about can help break out of feelings of isolation and stagnation, reconnect with their deeply felt purpose and bring back passion and energy to their change initiatives.

Dialogue for a deeper understanding of complex challenges

Classic problem-solving approaches tend to reduce complex challenges to ever smaller, manageable parts. By doing so, we miss out on understanding the relations between those aspects; that which makes a system greater than the sum of its parts.

The dialogue approach recognises the co-existence of a multitude of perspectives and doesn't aim at pitching one

argument against another. We learn to listen actively to each other and to recognise what patterns and insights emerge in each moment of the group conversation. Viewing a challenge from multiple, previously unknown perspectives opens up a more holistic view of a system. It helps us see the system as a whole, including individual elements, their relations and multi-layered connections. The points identified for intervening in a system may subsequently differ greatly from the ones that might otherwise have been chosen. Ultimately, a collective intelligence and new level of creativity may be tapped into; one that remains out of reach in usual conversations and that bears great potential for innovation and sustainable change.

Dialogue to strengthen networks and build cooperation across sectors

Engaging in dialogue builds trust among those engaging in it – through deep sharing, listening and questioning. Almost paradoxically, it is the exploration and co-existence of diverging points of view that nurtures a strong sense of trust and togetherness, as opposed to the discussion of pros and cons towards a single point of agreement. Dialogue can therefore become a powerful vehicle for cooperation and the strengthening of shared purposes. Our Lab groups are formed around issues of deep personal and professional relevance for each participant. Even if the perspectives are different, the passion is shared. The dialogue process enables the group to build strong connections, and diverse, boundary-crossing and non-hierarchical networks built on a collective purpose that may catalyze change and innovation.

Methods and instruments of dialogue

Moving from debate and discussion to dialogue is the transformation towards an inclusive learning culture in which all members are invited to free themselves from established perceptions and roles, to be able to see the whole issue rather than parts of it, to recognise connections and relationships, to explore assumptions, to learn through exploration and disclosure, and to let go of the fixation on a specific predefined outcome of a conversation⁵. This collective search for something new to emerge can initially be a highly unusual experience that requires letting go of learned habits of relating to others. As the dialogue process proceeds, initial caution often gives way to increased curiosity and creativity. New ideas and solutions can emerge, to be shaped and turned into approaches for action.

While some of the Global Leadership Academy's programmes have been designed around one particular method (e.g. the Global Wellbeing Lab, based on Theory U or the Power of Diversity Lab, based on Deep Democracy), others have drawn on a variety of different methods (e.g. Mandela Dialogues, Urban Innovation and Leadership Lab).

⁵ Gerard and Elinor 1999: Dialogue; in Holman, Devane 1999: The Change Handbook

These methods differ in many ways, yet they all serve the purpose of enabling deep listening, an open-minded, open-hearted exchange, the questioning of individual and collective assumptions and the generation of new perspectives.

Within the framework of a method or combination of methods, we apply a variety of formats that enable dialogue on personal and content issues, in group settings or one-on-one, that focus on verbal exchanges or bring in non-verbal aspects of communication (e.g. through analogue formats). Some of the formats we have used in the past include dialogue Walks, Case Clinics, Group check ins, story-telling circles, World Café, Silent World Café, role play, constellation work and social presencing theatre.

Dialogue in the Power of Diversity Lab

Dialogue in the Power of Diversity Lab, a collaboration between the Global Leadership Academy and the Deep Democracy Institute (USA), was enabled especially through the development of an awareness of what's emerging in the group and on considering all voices equally and nonjudgmentally.

To achieve this it made use of the concept of roles, which are inherently related to certain behavior tendencies, no matter which person fills a given role. The concept proved very valuable in quickly enabling participants of this highly diverse group of 25 leaders from around the world to refrain from 'categorizing' opinions and behaviors to regarding them nonjudgmentally. Participants in the Power of Diversity Lab also experienced the power of perspective-taking in intense role-plays, in which they were encouraged to fully take on the perspective of their counterpart, providing an experience of crossing one's own comfort-zone in a safe setting and enabling them to recognise and withstand the sensations that accompany such an experience.

In the best sense of a Dialogue approach, Deep Democracy suggests that the information carried within all opinions is needed to understand the complete situation and ongoing development of a system. The meaning of all information appears, when the various frameworks and voices are relating to each other. It uses a specific group facilitation approach to bring out even those voices and opinions that normally often remain silent, because they are being considered marginal, non-polite or politically incorrect. When groups move to this stadium, a highly enabling space for real dialogue is created – participants in the Power of Diversity Lab experienced that they can feel safe from judgment and repercussions when showing their personal truth, going through several moments of moving collective insights on topics as sensitive as migration and gender-equality.

After experiencing this kind of dialogue facilitation several times, participants were also encouraged to take on themselves the role of facilitator, and enable and hold that safe space for small groups of co-participants, laying the foundation for transfer of essential dialogue skills into their own organisations and teams.

Setting the context for dialogue

Dialogue doesn't just occur by chance or by introducing a few tools. Teasing us out of our habitual patterns of thought, conversations and action requires a different setting – one that allows us to step out of our typical roles, one that is conducive to dialogue. A setting does not just refer to a physical place, it includes a space or "container" where meaningful conversations thrive, that is facilitated and held in a particular way.

The intention to create dialogue

We initiate this kind of dialogical setting when we solicit participation in a Lab. In our first conversation with prospective participants, we do not only try to understand their passion and standing with regards to the set Lab topic, we also clarify the Lab process, generating an expectation for dialogue to take place in the Lab. By doing so, participants arrive at the first meeting with a clear intention to engage in dialogue, and are open to the idea of using dialogue to generate novel perspectives on a complex issue that holds meaning to them.

Creating and holding an enabling space for dialogue

In order for people to truly open up to dialogue, they need to feel safe from threat, judgment, harm or repercussions. Dialogue shows its full potential in an atmosphere of trust, shared responsibility and mutual respect even in the face of opposing views and needs. The creation and co-holding of such an enabling space is a key role of the facilitators. They welcome and attend to the energies brought into the room, acting out of a dialogical mindset themselves. This entails the practice of actively listening to one another, inviting each individual perspective and point of view, valuing different and divergent points of view, respecting professional and personal facets of each person in the room, refraining from jumping to conclusions, and expressing one's own perspectives clearly. It also entails the facilitators' responsibility to carefully sense and work with the group dynamic and to reveal the system (the group) to itself (e.g. by sharing observations) in order to enable the group members to learn about themselves as a group, self-regulate and take responsibility for the course of the group's process.

Dialogue in the Mandela Dialogues on Memory Work 2

The Mandela Dialogues 2, a collaboration with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, provided an international forum to engage in dialogue on the practice and content of memory work along the guiding questions of how to create and sustain safe spaces and how to foster inter-generational memory work. The entire process was designed to create a dialogical atmosphere, in which participants could co-shape the process and in which an awareness for other perspectives in the group as well as in memory work generally is strengthened. In this sense, the group reflected that consensus is not always 'healthy' for learning processes. Through different layers and modes of engagement the process also aimed at stimulating personal and leadership development, enabling reflections on what memory work requires from those involved in it and strengthening each other in this work. Insights, inspiration and personal reflections from this international dialogue thought to enable change work in the home contexts of participants.

The dominant focus of the Mandela Dialogues 2 was on deep dialogue. This took place in facilitated plenary sessions and small group discussions. The Open Space methodology allowed the group to self-organise itself to effectively deal with the different issues in a very short time and to determine what aspects of a conversation it would like to deepen. It was used to deepen conversations around specific content aspects, debriefing immersions into local projects and develop ideas to go forward with peers within the group. Throughout the dialogue process, situations were created in which the group could practice deep and attentive listening, for example during dialogue walks. Dialogue walks allow two people to carefully listen to each's other thoughts for a defined time each in turn. This uninterrupted speaking time – and hence thinking time – enables new thoughts to arise for oneself and to better understand assumptions and line of thoughts of the dialogue partner.

A dialogical mindset is at the root of sustainable change

Dialogue carries a substantial promise – that of opening up to mindsets and opinions that differ from ours and considering them worthy parts in dealing with a complex challenge.

Today's unprecedented interactions among different cultures, systems, sectors, attitudes, ideas and approaches and the felt lack of control in shaping the functioning of society can provoke fear, rejection, and withdrawal. Yet when taking an approach of curiosity and inviting the answers others might hold into shared reflections, we jointly forge new forms of understanding.

This is a difficult step to take, as it requires us to let go of control and enter spaces of not-knowing. Dialogue demands genuine curiosity and interest in others and at the same time helps us to develop those skills. It thereby allows us to access common ground behind seemingly unbridgeable divides. Practiced over time, dialogue supports the development of a mindset that embraces differences and faces "the other" with openness and a continuous interest in learning and understanding. We believe that – since it is on the basis of their mental models that people take decisions, act and ultimately shape the world – a dialogical mindset is at the root of sustainable change towards more inclusive and just societies.

It aims at facilitating – rather than training – leadership development towards systemic change.

Some Labs are designed around a particular leadership development methodology (e.g. the Global Wellbeing Lab, based on Theory U, and the Power of Diversity Lab, based on Deep Democracy). Others draw on a variety of different approaches (e.g. Mandela Dialogues on Memory Work, Urban Innovation and Leadership Lab). Within the framework of a method or combination of methods, we apply a variety of formats that enable leadership development. The focus is on experiential and action learning techniques as well as reflective practices and personal transformation. Classroom teaching or competency training are rarely employed, if so it would be as a response to specific needs arising in the respective group. Formats we have used range from dialogical exchange of perspectives (e.g. pair exchange, group conversations, listening practices), individual introspection (e.g. journaling, solo walks, solo time in nature, mindfulness practices), role plays and peer consultation circles to approaches using body experience and movement (e.g. working with body symptoms, artistic approaches).

Just as much as we design every single Lab meeting to provide intentional spaces for leadership development, we aim at enabling and fostering leadership throughout the entire Lab process – including the periods before, between and after physical Lab meetings. The call for leadership – and the learning opportunities for leaders and change agents – do not end when we leave the Lab setting. That's exactly where they start!

Five elements of leadership development

To empower leaders and change agents to enable their own full potential and that of their system to emerge – be it a team, an organization, a network or a field of work – we design our leadership development interventions around five central elements:

Strengthening a reflective and dialogical mindset

Leadership grounds in one's personal mindset towards the world, towards the potential that lies in the existing diversity of opinions and needs, towards expectable tensions in the process of leading change, and towards our own roles as leaders and change agents. For a leader to enable leadership in a system, s/he needs to act out of a mindset that recognises the limits of expert knowledge and those of his/her own expertise and strengths, and that values and supports all voices and perspectives equally in their contribution to enabling a system to change.

Understanding and navigating systemic dynamics and one's own role

In order to identify ways of enabling systemic change, leadership requires an awareness of the assumptions and

mechanisms at work in the functioning of organisations and systems. On the basis of such awareness, one's own role in influencing change can be reflected, blind spots can be uncovered and innovative and efficient ways of taking action can be identified.

In our Labs, we attach great importance to providing space for the emergence of topics, needs, and conflicts that arise from the process. When highly diverse groups of people come together, leadership is challenged, and leadership behaviour can be observed at play in most of the group's interactions. We encourage developing a meta-awareness to observe such behaviour and social patterns, for example during tensions and negotiation processes in the diverse group, with special attention to one's own position and power to influence the dynamics of such a group.

Through these experiences in the Labs and through explicit reflection on one's role and impact in one's own system, participants develop an awareness of how – and with which consequences – they personally interact within their system and intervene in their sphere of activity. This new understanding is of specific importance when individuals go back to their organisations after Lab meetings: Carrying with them new ideas and impetus for change, they are likely to encounter resistance to change and to be confronted with stagnation and frustration. Being able to understand and navigate systemic dynamics opens up new opportunities for enabling change in one's organisation and environment.

One important opportunity to deepen the understanding of one's own role in change processes is the provision of personal coaching for each participant throughout the Lab process. Coaching offers a safe space to deal in depth with personal leadership challenges and points of stuckness, and it provides a rare space for sensitive and professional personal feedback.

Leadership development in the Power of Diversity Lab

In the Power of Diversity Lab, a collaboration between the Global Leadership Academy and the Deep Democracy Institute (USA), participants' skills to understand and navigate group dynamics were furthered through various modes of engagement.

Concepts of roles and their influence on interaction styles and group dynamics were introduced and discussed. For example, many role positions belong to the central belief system of a group, and are thereby generally accepted within the group. But there are also ghost roles: Behaviours that we cannot voice, because they are not acceptable within a given culture.

Participants practised to actively navigate group dynamics as a facilitator: Enabling the group to see the

role structures at play, recognize marginalised voices and bring their meaning into the conversations that were taking place. Through the emotional and physical experience of these dynamics while they were at play during the facilitated group processes, a sentient awareness was built up. It allowed participants to transfer their newly acquired analytical skills to interactions outside of facilitated sessions in the Lab.

The constellation of the participant group – many leaders in one group, a high diversity in terms of ethnicity, cultural background and sector of work – represented an ideal learning setting to realize and reflect upon one's own mental models and automatised behaviour in present group dynamics. For example, while in their home organisations, many participants act out of a role that is being assigned a lot of authority, they were now in a neutral space at eye-level with other leaders; having to look beyond their own automatised behaviours to shape their influence in the group's dynamic.

Connecting to one's values and inner drive for change

Through routine and frustration about stagnation and setbacks, it is easy to lose touch with one's drive for change and with what's really meaningful to a person – what one feels called to strive for.

We consider it important for leaders and change agents to reflect upon their own purpose and values and to be connected to those values in the practice of leadership, enabling them to face challenges with authenticity and respect for their own limits and the consequences of their actions.

By sharing visions and collectively developing them further, and through the growing solidarity among their international peers in the intense dialogue processes, Lab participants regain access to their passion and aspirations and are encouraged to follow their drive for change.

Leadership development in the Global Wellbeing Lab

The Global Wellbeing Lab is an action-learning platform, co-founded by the Global Leadership Academy, the Presencing Institute (USA), and the Gross National Happiness Centre (Bhutan) to advance new ways of generating and measuring wellbeing at multiple levels in society.

One of the most direct ways to suspend habitual ways of paying attention is to explore conscious and careful listening. In the Lab, this was practiced through dialogue walks, mindfulness exercises, listening exercises and self-organized learning journeys. A learning journey

enables participants to observe, see and listen in a new way to voices from their own context – by suspending judgement and opening up to new perspectives.

The second movement of the Lab was presencing (a combination of the words presence and sensing) which is a deep and personal reflection about one's work and purpose in life. The Lab provided a space to the participants to connect to their inner drive for change – or their source of inspiration and will. This was facilitated in the Lab through an intensive solo nature time, in which participants spent half a day silently in the nature of Bhutan to connect with their deepest source of self, and the most present questions for their future. Coming out of the solo nature time, participants were accompanied through a guided journaling process, a self-reflective process that allowed participants to access deeper levels of self-knowledge, and to connect this knowledge to concrete actions. Based on the presencing experience in nature and the guided journaling, participants were able to crystallise the future they would like to create and concrete actions in forms of prototypes to get there.

Fostering readiness for action and self-responsibility

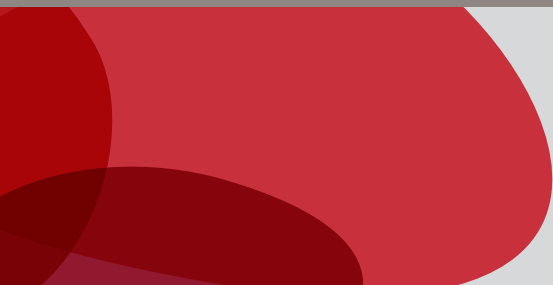
Good ideas in our drawers and good will in our hearts will only lead to tangible change if they are combined with the courage and pragmatism that are needed to actively pursue action; to overcome the fear of stepping into the unknown. Instead of getting stuck in demands made of others or complaints about the slowness of change, leaders and change agents need to be able to take responsibility for identifying and making use of opportunities for change.

Our Leadership and Innovation Labs consist of at least two and up to four physical Lab meetings. Throughout the Lab process, participants are encouraged to bring in their own topics and challenges to co-create the Lab in ways that are most useful for their own work back home. This ensures a sustainable transfer of participants' experiences and learnings into tangible change in their home contexts. To support this process, all participants are offered professional accompaniment in the form of coaching or reflection calls throughout the Lab process. A further means to overcome stagnation and resistance to change in one's own home context is the power of the network: In most Labs, inter-organisational and cross-sectoral learning groups or peer circles are formed. These groups continue their activities between physical Lab meetings and even after a Lab: fostering personal and professional bonds, advancing mutual support and exchange, and empowering personal responsibility for solving one's own and shared challenges.

Encouraging relationship-building, trust and cross-sectoral cooperation

In today's interrelated world, leaders and change agents are asked to coordinate diverse teams and multiple stakeholders with divergent interests. If systemic change means that processes, structures and relationships between the actors in our societies change, then it is crucial for leaders and change agents to develop solid interpersonal networks and to be able to cooperate within and across organisations, sectors, and cultures.

In our Labs, people come together from different sectors and world regions, but they are united by their passion for change in their field – be it the protection of the oceans, gender equality or urban development. The fact that a network of leaders and change agents from the same field meet at an eye-level promises intellectual stimulation, creative new ideas, and a better understanding of the perspectives of other stakeholders in the common field. It provides an opportunity for the direct enactment of one's learnings in a social group that, to some degree, mirrors the actual system out there. The interpersonal trust and connections that are fostered in this network – through shared experiences and collective learning – support innovation, cooperation and collaboration outside of the Lab context. That way, the Labs breed new opportunities for systemic change through their potential to create coalitions of interest and action among the participants and their organisations.



Innovation

In the international Leadership and Innovation Labs of the Global Leadership Academy, we bring leaders and change agents together around a complex global theme to strengthen their leadership & innovation skills and to enable them to develop innovative solutions to tackle challenges in their respective context. This paper summarizes how the Global Leadership Academy understands and supports innovation in this field.

Why do we need innovation?

Humanity is facing major challenges. Economic, social and ecological disruptions like climate change and large-scale migration, cause great uncertainty about the future. The increasingly complex, interrelated and dynamic nature of the challenges call for innovative solutions when responses of the past are no longer working.

The Sustainable Development Goals set a strong global political framework that may only be filled with life when governments, civil society organizations, private sector and academia find ways to collaborate on eye-level to overcome identified challenges. But how can leaders and change agents from such different institutions and perspectives work together to develop innovations towards the wellbeing of all?

What do we understand as innovation?

What is innovation? It seems there are various definitions of innovation: a new or significantly improved product, service or method; new application of an existing service, create a demand for an existing solution, integrating existing services (partially) into an overall approach or to find a solution by creative search methods.

Basically, innovation is the change of a routine – be it a structure, process, regulation, culture, service or product. And changing routines occur all the time in organisations and systems. The key question for leaders and change agents is: How can they influence organisations and systems

to support and amplify those innovations that make them fit for the future?

At the Global Leadership Academy, we convene Labs that are instruments of social innovation. Through intensive dialogue, advancing leadership and innovation capacities, we create spaces in which Lab participants develop novel ideas to address complex social challenges in their home systems. A key focus in this process is to target a broader societal wellbeing of all, rather than profit maximization for individuals or organizations only.

We believe there are three dimensions central for lasting innovation:

- the personal dimension to lead innovation that includes an open learning mindset as well as the ability to deal with frustrations and setbacks
- the organizational dimension to create the right framework conditions for heterogeneous teams with time and co-creative spaces to develop new ideas
- the process dimension to design iterative, user-centred innovation processes with dedicated feedback loops.

All three dimensions need to be addressed to produce tangible results that contribute to a transformation of our organizations and societies.

How do we support innovation?

Our Leadership and Innovation Labs are not trainings to go through these three dimensions with a set of tools.

Instead, they use experience-based approaches that allow each participating leader and change agent to work on a theme or challenge from his or her home context that is relevant and urgent. In this way, participants directly apply different innovation methodologies to produce tangible workpieces as an output of the Labs. At the same time, their innovation capacities and knowledge of innovation processes will impact far beyond this workpiece.

Leading innovation: the personal dimension

Today, an open, dialogical learning mindset and the ability to consciously shape one's own role and leadership are central elements of innovation competencies.

What does it take from oneself personally to open up for innovative ways of thinking?

Innovative thinking starts with an interior condition of open-mindedness. It is necessary to let go of traditional ways of thinking and problem-solving with which we have become so familiar in our organizational and societal roles. We need to nurture a curiosity about what others think – outside of the own organization and peer-group and considering wider networks – and what new facts and ideas we can uncover if we manage to observe and listen afresh without predefined judgements. We call this a dialogical learning mindset. This comes along with the openness to consciously get out of our comfort zones, challenge our own patterns of thinking and perception of our societal and organizational roles. In our Labs, we not only strengthen the awareness of the complexity and value of different perspectives by practicing deep listening and dialogue in heterogeneous multi-stakeholder Lab groups, but also by going on learning journeys to learn afresh from different voices in the system¹.

What does it take to lead innovation through?

Innovation and change seldom works smoothly. It requires endurance and persistence from leaders and change agents to work with frustration, resistance and setbacks along the way while dealing with own uncertainties of stepping into the unknown. In our Labs, we therefore explore the inner drive for change of the participants to sustain their sense of purpose in moments of despair. We continuously connect to the question of "WHY" do we need to innovate. At the same time, we encourage participants to explore strategies how to manage resistance within their organisations or networks, how they can communicate and engage people in a way that reduces fear of losses associated with change.

The organizational dimension: What does it take to create an innovation-enabling atmosphere in organizations and teams?

Finding new solutions to complex challenges requires a distinctively different atmosphere apart from the top-down implementation of decisions. Creativity needs an open, non-hierarchical environment with time to ideate, flip perspectives and ideas, in which people can engage without fear of failure, but rather recognize the productivity of failures in the process of developing adaptive flexible solutions to a challenge. This internal atmosphere of innovation spaces

needs to be actively nurtured. And often these spaces need specific advocacy and lobby within organizations that otherwise function on the basis of control and hierarchy.

Through the experiential learning experience of our Labs, participants gain important facilitation skills that they can employ in their home context to developing a learning atmosphere and provide reflective spaces. The role of internal facilitation skills becomes increasingly important for organisations and networks to nurture a continuous learning culture to come up with novel ideas.

Furthermore, it serves the process to create a setting that is supportive to changing perspectives and to being creative: getting out of the traditional office-like environments, create meeting places that support getting together and that are designed with open and flexible interior, light and colours. Therefore, we organize our Lab meetings in selected places, where the Lab group can also learn about the theme of the Lab. During these Lab meetings, participants can reflect the current framework conditions in their organisations and how they might open up cracks for new ideas. After returning from a Lab meeting into the normal working environment, the risk of frustrations and a relapse into business-as-usual is high. We offer to accompany participants through coaching, small group or individual calls to continuously reflect how they can shape their organizational role to enable innovation. The iterative process with mostly three Lab meetings also supports the sustainability of our interventions.

The process dimension: How to design an innovation process?

There are multiple innovation process models existing today. In most of our Leadership and Innovation Labs, we introduce dedicated innovation processes that have certain elements in common: they are iterative rather than proposing a linear problem-solution connection; they encourage to include diverse perspectives (potentially other stakeholders from the wider network) in the development to identify blind-spots early on; they are user-centred and include feedback loops to test new ideas early on in the process, based on the principle of 'fail fast to succeed sooner'². The question of "HOW" can we innovate and open up for creative thinking is furthermore closely linked to the facilitation style and the open mindset of the facilitators themselves to learn and reflect and to use methods rather as supporting structural elements serving the purpose. Depending on the topic and group, we select a suitable innovation methodology, such as Theory U or Design Thinking. Within these frames, creativity tools are used flexibly in accordance with needs of the group, like prototyping, rapid brainstorming, 3D-modelling, open space, mind mapping amongst others. While the immediate objective of applying these tools is to produce concrete

¹ For an explanation of learning journeys, see for example <https://www.presencing.com/tools/sensing-journey>

² Quote widely attributed to David Kelley, see Manzo, Peter 2008: Fail Faster, Succeed Sooner. Stanford Social Innovation Review: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/fail_faster_succeed_sooner

results (see below), on a meta-level, participants learn a lot about innovation processes that can be applied in other situations in their respective organizations and networks.

The **Global Wellbeing Lab** is an action-learning platform, co-founded by the Global Leadership Academy, the Presencing Institute (Cambridge, MA), and the Gross National Happiness Centre (Bhutan) to advance new ways of generating and measuring wellbeing at multiple levels in society.

The Lab was designed on the principles of Theory U – an innovation process developed by the Presencing Institute that can be used by individuals and groups to suspend habitual ways of paying attention, connecting to the personal inner drive for change and explore the future they want to create through rapid-cycle prototyping. One way the U-process differs from other innovation processes is in its emphasis on co-sensing. Suspending quick fixes based on routines and knowledge of the past, Theory U emphasizes the need to engage in an intense process of listening, observing and learning to see and sense the world and a system through a multitude of perspectives – and gain a more complete understanding of it.

One of the key U-based methods applied in the Lab is learning journeys. A learning journey is a deep-dive immersion into places that have the potential to teach us about the emerging future. In preparation for the learning journeys, participants are coached to not only look for innovative solutions, but also pay particular attention to the way they are paying attention: to look for information that disconfirms their own expectations and to interact with the key innovators and stakeholders in that community with an open mind and open heart.

Based on this conscious observing and sensing, participants spent half a day in silence to reflect on the new insights and to connect with their inner drive for change: What is it really, that drives them to create the future they want?

Rapid-cycle prototyping, a creative process with peers, now enabled participants to transfer this inspiration and motivation into tangible prototypes that have the potential to trigger (social) innovation within organizations and systems. A prototype is a first iteration of a novel idea that can be tested early in real live to receive feedback and advance the prototype. Prototypes were developed by participants in the second Lab meeting of the Global Wellbeing Lab. Subsequently, participants tested, advanced their ideas and continued to

implement the prototypes in-between the meetings. In the third and last Lab meeting, cross-prototype learnings were exchanged, while iteration and implementation of the prototypes continues beyond the Lab cycle. For a summary of the Lab, please see: <https://globalwellbeinglab.com/2016/10/14/global-wellbeing-lab-2-0-2016-summary-report>

What are results and outcomes?

Tangible immediate results: Innovative solutions, products or ideas

As pointed out above, beyond strengthening individual competencies and learning generally through innovative and creative processes, our objective is to support leaders and change agents to produce immediate tangible results through their participation in our Labs. The Global Leadership Academy applies specific methods that support the crystallization of change ideas and solutions to concrete challenges. Therefore, the question “WHAT” is the novel idea is crystallizing in an open and iterative process – that explores why an innovation is needed or wanted and how we support new ways of thinking – rather than being planned ahead.

Nurturing the creative potential of everyone individually and the team as a collective, our Lab group develops ideas for approaching the identified problems participants have and want to deal with. These ideas may develop into concrete change projects or prototypes that participants are committed to take forward in their respective spheres of influence in their home contexts. Examples include a new style of leadership supporting collaboration and motivation of different stakeholders, new ways to engage beneficiaries in the development of their situation (process oriented, for instance in cases dealing with resistances for change), changes in an organizational setting and corporate culture supportive to the wellbeing of all involved (structure changes), new technical solutions or adapted applications (a new product, e.g. using modern technologies). Herein, innovations can be an existing good or service that has a novel use and therefore is more than a blueprint.

In between Lab meetings, participants take the new ideas out of the Lab and introduce and test them in their home contexts. Depending on the needs of the group, participants are supported by professional coaching as well as the exchange with their peers to deal with implementation challenges and setbacks.

In the process of the **Urban Innovation and Leadership Lab** Design Thinking was used as methodology to develop user-centered new ideas for the vision of a city we all want to live in. A group of urban experts from South Africa, India, Ethiopia, Egypt and Mexico, participants from companies, civil society and public service, jointly worked on a solution to solve the problem of physical exclusion:

The Gap App

Because of growing cities, a lot of people are pushed out of the city center into suburban areas. These people often have low income and are not only left out of the city but also out of suitable access to services. Examples are restaurant workers or domestic cleaners, which travel out of peak time. The limited options and high costs of accessing different services through rare or indirect public transport affect negatively to the quality of life.

The group developed an interface for costumers and service providers by using a smart or low-tech mobile as well as a physical kiosk. Fighting inequality, strengthen the social aspect and pay attention to environment and economy makes The Gap App more than just a new competitor to existing platforms:

The following goals demonstrate the bottom up approach:

- The reduction in spatially entrenched and persistent inequality in transport services for marginalized neighborhoods and groups.
- The increased safety through larger groups of commuters at off-peak times and commuter-led lobbying through the app/project.
- Increased use of public transport, more direct routes and reduction in low occupancy trips, reduces carbon emission and pollution.
- More reliable transport provides greater job security and access to opportunities.

The process of user testing with spatially excluded as well as service providers and local government that was followed by iteration was highly valuable to the development of the idea to:

- a) understand the needs and interests of the customers as well as the service providers as well as other stakeholders, such as public administration, and
- b) ensure the balance of envisioned services also to marginalized groups while also considering economic benefits to the providers, e.g. when tapping into the profitable option of freight carrier.

After the convened Lab space, a participant from Durban/South Africa formed a project team with local stakeholders including local government, entrepreneurs and academia and developed The Gap App further into a locally adapted version that is now called "Gibela" ("Jump on" in Zulu).

Lab spaces supporting dialogue, leadership and innovation for change

Overall, innovation competencies and tangible results are promoted throughout the Lab process and by the Lab experience itself. Engaging in dialogue allows participants to recognize connections and relationships, to explore assumptions, to learn through exploration and disclosure in turns, and to be able to identify blind spots and see the whole issue rather than parts of it. This enables them to overcome systemic obstacles and identify dysfunctional patterns of action³ and new leverage points for innovations that drive change. Embracing and understanding diverse perspectives, they can develop new solutions⁴ – and lead them through from an idea to implementation.

³ See: Isaacs, William 1999: *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, Doubleday, New York.

⁴ See: Kahane, Adam 2004: *Solving tough problems*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.





we do change

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