

Visual Collaboration

**A Powerful Toolkit for
Improving Meetings,
Projects, and Processes**

Ole Qvist-Sørensen and Loa Baastrup
Illustrated by Sofie Lind Mesterton



6 tools | 8 skills | 75 customizable templates | 500 icons to boost teamwork

WILEY

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**A Powerful Toolkit for
Improving Meetings,
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**Ole Qvist-Sørensen and Loa Baastrup
Illustrated by Sofie Lind Mesterton**

“Visual Collaboration is one of the best examples I’ve seen of visual facilitation—balancing structure and process, skills and questions, and knowing how to get started and how to scale. All of these examples are illustrated in a captivating style that is in itself a teaching.”

David Sibbet, Founder and CEO, The Grove Consultants International, Author of *Visual Teams*, *Visual Meetings*, *Visual Leaders* and *Visual Consulting*

“This is an extraordinary book. It is accessible, but at the same time offers nuance and depth—good for both the novice and the experienced practitioner. It is well-suited for anyone interested in organizational change, facilitation, communication and group work. Visual collaboration has for years been an integral part of the way we teach at Kaospilot, but also one of the core skills our students learn. This is the book we have been waiting for.”

Christer Windeløv-Lidzélius, Principal, Kaospilot

“In my work as a leader of strategic corporate governance, I am often in situations where I need to explain complex challenges. In these situations visualizing and drawing is a great tool. It invites and engages others and increases the chances of reaching a shared understanding. This book helps me develop and improve my skills at working with complex organizational challenges.”

Lene Einang Flach, Project Director, Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation

“Visual tools work well for managing meetings, programs, and processes in a way that promotes engagement, ownership, and dialogue. What an excellent resource for complex organizations and anyone who cares about activating the imagination and doing social change work well!”

Bliss Browne, President and Founder, Imagine Chicago

“I am quite impressed by how elegantly the authors present their theoretical framework and the ease with which theory is translated into practice. It is fascinating and brave to turn the hopelessly difficult word ‘autopoiesis’ into an obvious core concept for understanding social processes.”

Jens Rasmussen, Professor, Danish School of Education

“Collaboration is challenging and critical for virtually all companies. The authors have made it accessible and enjoyable with this marvelous book.”

Sunni Brown, Best-Selling Author and Chief Human Potentialist

“In a world of creative destruction and emergent creation, all organizations face the challenge of orienting and imagining the shared future we all want and need. Visualizing and sharing perspectives are critical to achieving this goal. The authors have defined and practiced ‘state of the art’ visual collaboration for decades, and in this book, they generously share the ingredients necessary for all strategy development, process planning and implementation steps for the years to come. This work will be a classic ‘go to’ source for anyone aspiring to develop shared engagement, visual insight, competence, and tools.”

Tom Cummings, Executive Board and Senior Management Adviser, Author of *Leadership Landscapes*

“I really enjoyed this book. The visual language is sound, it is conceptually clean, and the tools you get are solid and easy to use. This should be mandatory reading for anyone designing and facilitating meetings, workshops, and strategic processes in their organization.”

Holger Nils Pohl, Founder, WorkVisual Institute, Author of *Creating Clarity* and Co-Creator of Biz4Kids

“In a world overwhelming us with complexity, confusion, and speed, Visual Collaboration reminds us that the most powerful technology we have is our innate visual processing power. It is an invaluable resource for teams.”

Lisa Kay Solomon, Co-Author of *Moments of Impact* and *Design A Better Business*

“This book helps you embrace complexity and translate ideas and thoughts into a visual language that works across teams, processes, and cultures. It gives you a framework for making the right decisions. Faster. It’s not a read-once book, but a go-to book when you need to handle change and—literally—draw your team together and create alignment or when you just want to make work more clear and fun.”

Brian Kyed, CEO, Airtame

“As a facilitator, what I most appreciate about this book is how the practice of visual language can start with me learning how to express both simple and complex thoughts visually—and then I can immediately bring the skill into any meeting or workshop. As others engage and see the difference a visual approach makes, they joyfully join in.”

Tatiana Glad, Co-founder and Director, Impact Hub Amsterdam

“This book is structured in a very pedagogical and logical way. It is clear and easy to understand and richly illustrated. You quickly experience success with drawing. It is a unique handbook that provides many years of experience from practice in process design and visual facilitation. I highly recommend Visual Collaboration to meeting leaders, process designers, teachers and anyone interested in learning.”

Lotte Darso, Associate Professor, University of Aarhus, Author of *Artful Creation*

“Visual collaboration enables amazing new forms of collaboration and innovation in organizations. I’ve had the privilege of working with the authors many times, and this book gives anyone the ability to bring their unique skills and capabilities into their own work.”

Ron Volpe, Global Vice President Apps Business Development, Tradeshift

“This book shows how drawings and visualization increase the bandwidth of collaboration. Something we desperately need, when we work in complex situations. The book is a must-read and has become an essential part of our company toolbox.”

Henrik Challis, Senior Consultant in Organization Transformation, Co-Founder, Emerging

“When I first came across visual facilitation, it was a bonus if a consultant were able to draw and visualize for clients. Today it is a must. This is a very impressive book; it shows how much is possible and should be on every consultant’s bookshelf!”

Jacob Storch, PhD, Entrepreneur, Founder, Joint Action and Attractor

“Visual Collaboration is a book I will not only read; I will use it. I want to become better at sketching, and I want to learn how to use visualizations more. A picture is worth a thousand words.”

Lars Kolind, former CEO, Oticon, Board Member, Entrepreneur and Author of *Unboss*

“As a process consultant on participatory processes and strategic conversations, I have learned that visualization promotes collective understanding and memory. Visual Collaboration gives an overview and an introduction to the use of visual tools and techniques in an educational and simple way. It speaks to different levels of experience and practice, whether you are a beginner or a more experienced user.”

Monica Nissen, Process Consultant, Co-Founder, InterChange

“I have followed the evolution of the methods described in Visual Collaboration since its earliest days. I am delighted to see its’ core message regarding the power of ‘making conversations visible’ to support collaborative innovation and constructive change in organizations and communities being communicated in engaging and creative ways that can support both the novice and experienced practitioner. The global spread of the World Cafe approach to strategic dialogue and collective intelligence has benefited enormously from the approaches described in this important contribution to the field.”

Juanita Brown PhD, Co-Founder, The World Cafe

“Visual Collaboration is an inspiring guide for anyone who is interested in a more visual approach to organizing and hosting meetings and workshops. The book walks the reader step-by-step from discovering a new visual language to enabling others to work more visually. As a reader one doesn’t only find helpful hands-on tips but also inspirational templates which can be easily customized for any kind of meeting and workshop.”

Donato Carparelli, Head Global Product Innovation, Schindler Elevator Ltd

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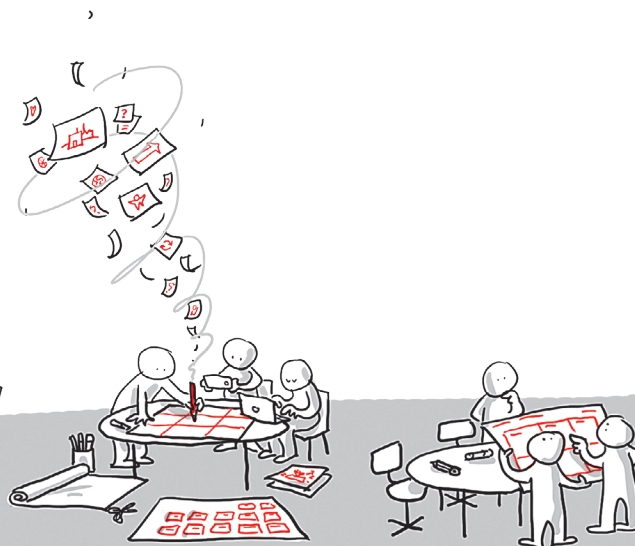
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Welcome to Visual Collaboration

Many organizations struggle to find engaging and effective communication processes to manage increasing complexity. Some attempt digital solutions and new organizational structures. Others are still searching for tools to foster the ongoing collaboration complex organizations require.

If you want to run meetings, projects, and processes that are more engaging, efficient, and impactful, this book is for you. The tools you will find here will strengthen thinking, communication, and collaboration anywhere. By using visual tools and techniques, including simple drawings that anyone can learn, Visual Collaboration can support any type of organization in managing complex projects and encouraging innovation. It will help you develop solid visual literacy skills that become foundational in your work.

If this is your first encounter with the strategic use of visuals, you are at the edge of an exciting mind-set change in how you work. If you are an experienced user of visuals, we believe the Five Building Blocks of Visual Collaboration presented in this book will give you a new and systematic approach to further develop your own visual literacy and strengthen the visual skills in the teams with whom you work.

In this book you will learn how to draw objects, people, places, processes, and more complex concepts like user experiences, business plans, and strategies. You will also learn how to design any meeting, project, or process, how to define powerful questions to engage your peers, and how to create visual templates that can focus any conversation. Finally you will learn how to scale your design so it creates a wide impact across your organization.

When people draw together, they learn together. The big picture comes into view and everyone can see themselves in it. Frontrunners such as LEGO, the UN, Maersk, IKEA, and the Red Cross have already successfully incorporated this way of working. How might you?



Contents

The five colored chapters present the **Five Building Blocks of Visual Collaboration™**—a practical method for working visually. The remaining chapters offer different perspectives on visual collaboration.

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Visual Collaboration

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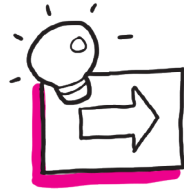


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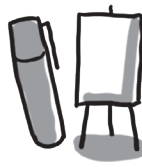
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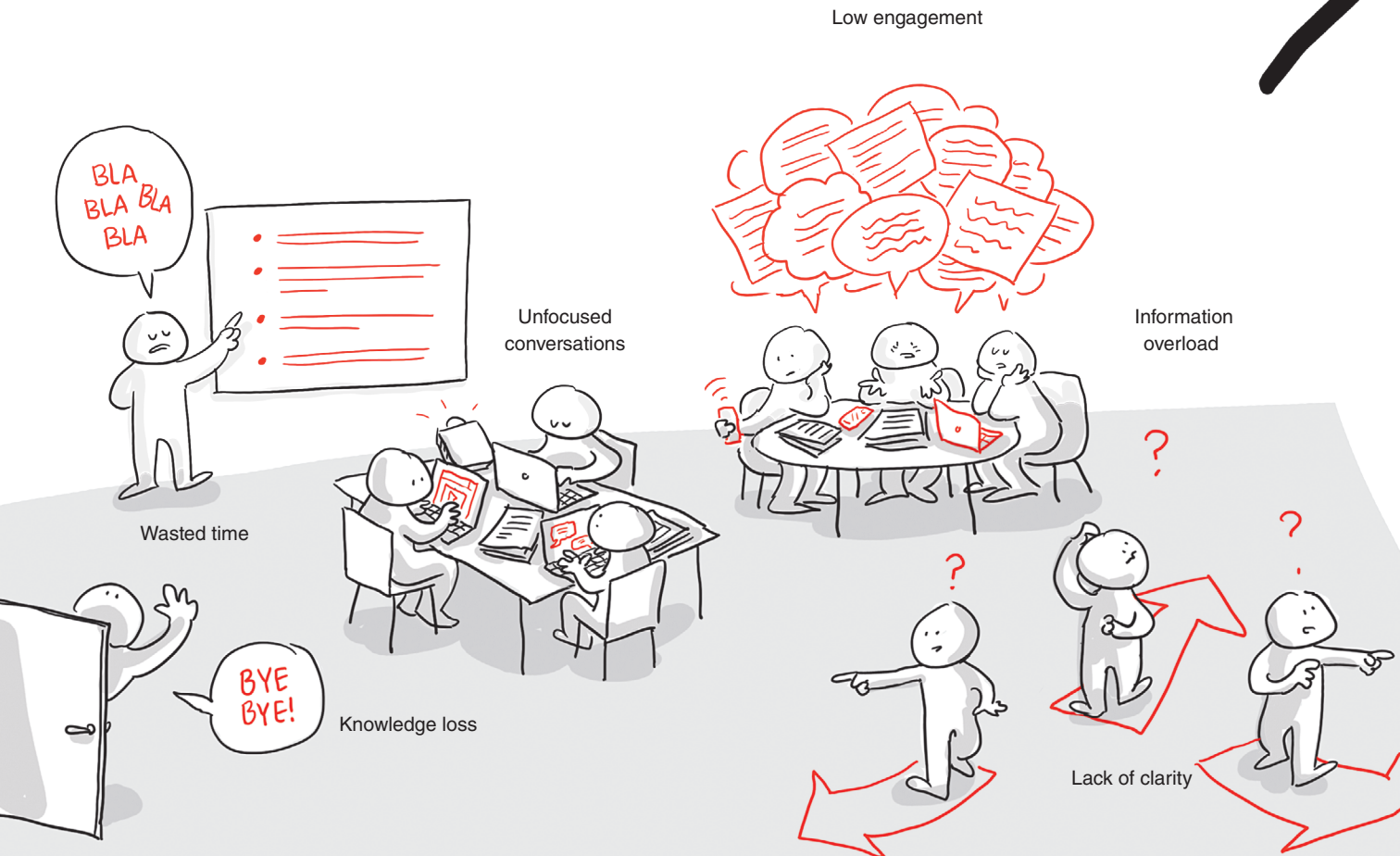
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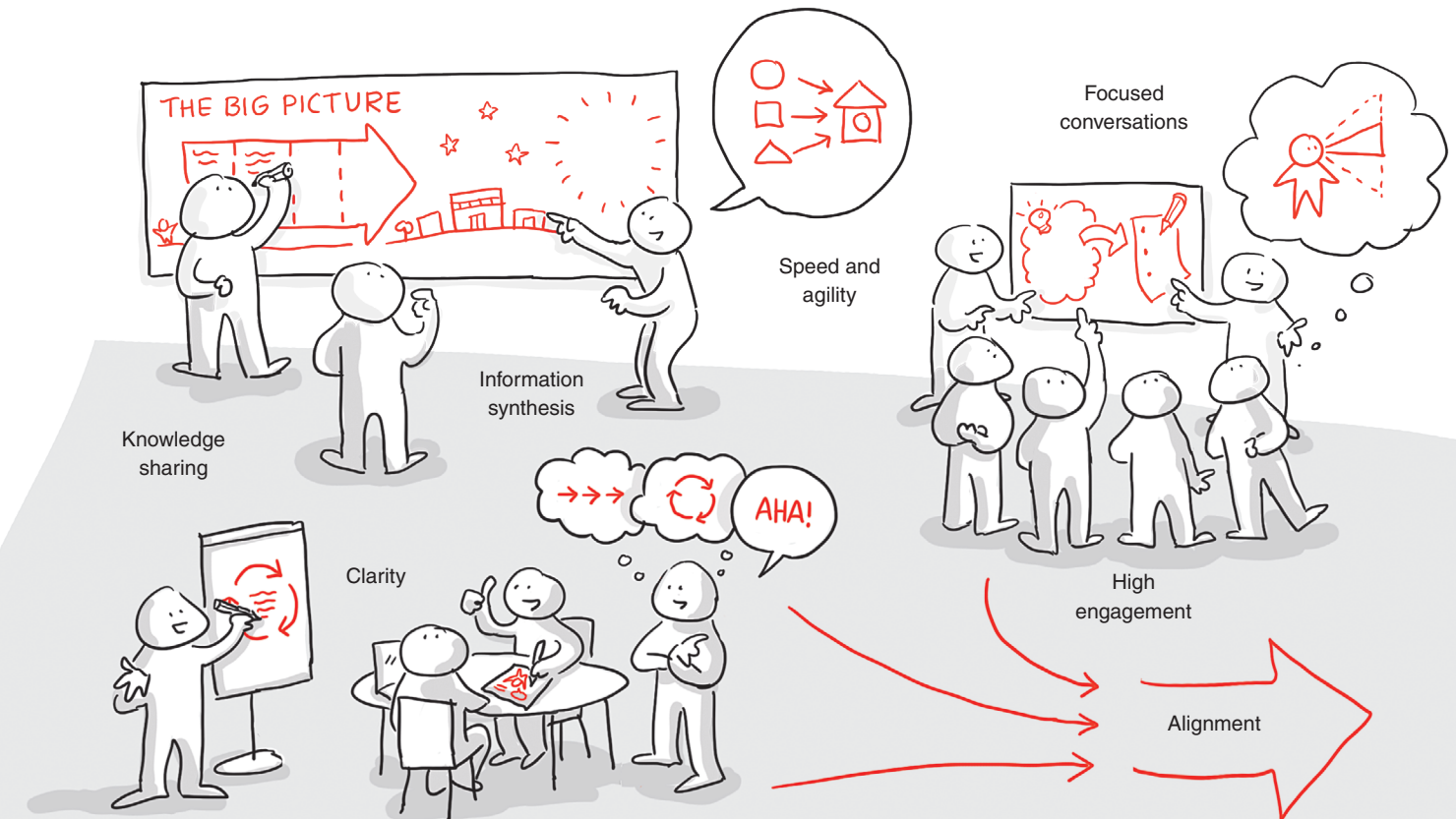
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Have you ever felt stuck with methods, tools, and skills that do not match the increasing complexity you are part of?

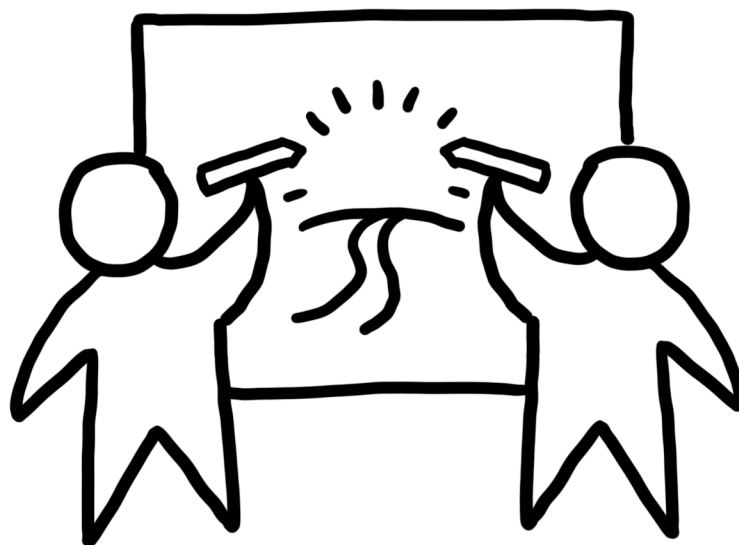
Apply the Five Building Blocks of Visual Collaboration



**...and start working in new ways that
strengthen thinking, communication
and, collaboration.**



Introduction



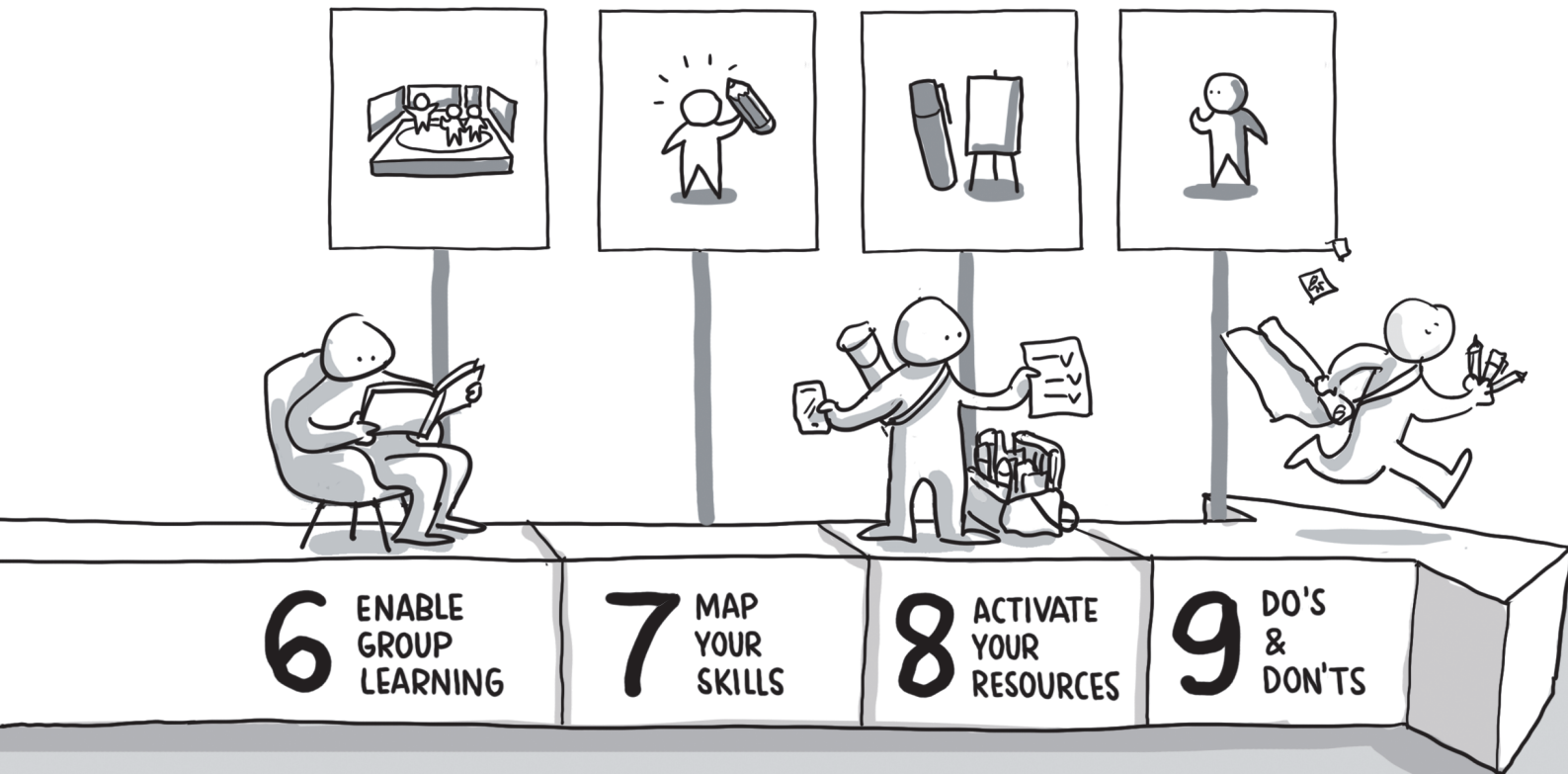
THE BOOK IN ONE PICTURE

PURPOSE: TO STRENGTHEN THE WAY YOU THINK,
COMMUNICATE, AND COLLABORATE



— THE FIVE BUILDING BLOCKS —

GOAL: YOU ARE READY FOR
VISUAL COLLABORATION



Why draw?

Drawing is an age-old discipline that we all can learn and which the brain grasps faster than it does speech or text. When we draw, we create clarity, and in a digital world, handmade drawings stand out.



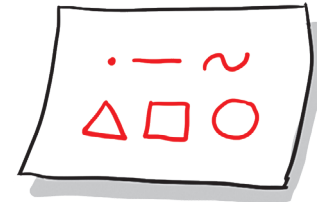
IT PROMOTES MEMORY

Drawings and images get engraved in our memory. When we only hear information, we are likely to remember 10% of it three days later. Add an image, we'll likely remember 65%. When we draw, we use that dominant power of vision to create material that our brains can better remember than speech or text.



IT HAS WORKED FOR 30,000 YEARS

As humans we were drawing long before we could write. Drawing is an age-old discipline that focuses attention and communicates volumes.



EVERYONE CAN LEARN TO DRAW

Most of us drew long before we learned to write. We can rediscover our innate potential for drawing as we create simple illustrations, and connect words with pictures. Everyone can do it.



IT CREATES CLARITY

The moment we start to draw an idea, a clarification process begins. The content of the idea is made concrete. The drawing process prompts new ideas that challenge, adjust, and refine the original understanding. The drawing product can serve as a tool to clarify understandings with others as you engage them in dialogue about the content of the drawing.



IT'S PERSONAL

Drawings are unique creations that stand out as personal and authentic, especially in a digital world.

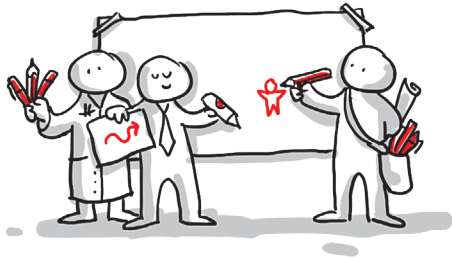


IT ACTIVATES IMAGINATION

Imagine that you've won a trip to your dream destination. Who is joining you? Where are you headed? And what will you do there? By drawing you can quickly show others how you envision the future, and together you can grasp, discuss, and shape it.

Who can draw and where?

Everyone can use drawing as an effective tool for communication. Technology has given us new means to draw, adjust, and share our drawings with one another.



ANYONE CAN USE IT

Regardless of role or function, we can all enjoy drawing and benefit from using it.



IN ANY SITUATION

Dare to draw in your next meeting, workshop, or conference. It will bring a fresh perspective.



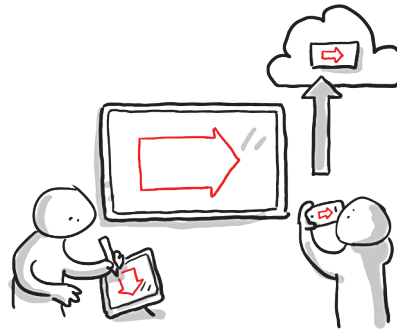
ON ANY SURFACE

Most meeting facilities have a whiteboard or a rolling flip chart. If you can draw on paper, you can also draw on a whiteboard with the right markers. Working with digital interfaces is slightly different. If you are a computer fan, find a good drawing program you like. Computer drawing makes it easy to adjust your drawings and share them with colleagues.



THE NEED IS GROWING

Our sharing of knowledge and information has exploded. Our social structures and patterns are often described as hypercomplex. The need for tools to navigate this complexity is growing. When we structure knowledge and information in visual phrases and build a visual language for a specific context, we create frameworks that advance our understanding of the complex systems in which we must act. It helps us see the bigger picture and make decisions accordingly.

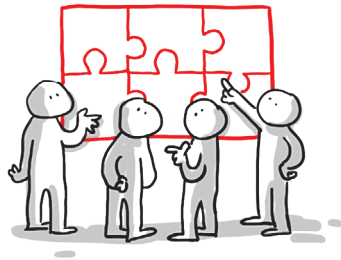


TECHNOLOGY MAKES IT EASILY SCALABLE

The last 30 years have seen astonishing technological developments with respect to using, sharing, and navigating visual materials. Opportunities for working visually are already in place in a wide range of readily available apps and programs. With a visually oriented younger generation, that range of visual platforms will continue to expand.

Why draw together?

To see the bigger picture, we need a greater knowledge base than we see on our own. Visual collaboration is when we draw together to learn from other perspectives and build shared responsibility and ownership. Drawing together can create a common language across cultures, positions, and national borders.



COMPLEX CHALLENGES ARE NOT SOLVED IN ISOLATION

Drawing together is a systematic approach to complexity management. When we draw together, we work with a broader vision and base of knowledge. We can create more complete views of the whole and clarify connections and similarities and differences in understanding. Developing a shared drawing is an iterative process. We draw, stop, and jointly observe what we have created, and then draw more. This process trains our view of the whole, because we see one another's contributions in a shared context. This builds a common understanding of the bigger picture.



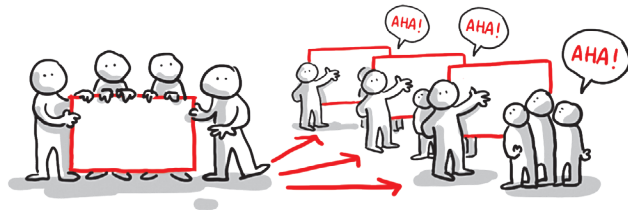
IT'S ENGAGING

Many meetings fail to engage more than a few participants. When we draw together, we relate to space differently. We move more. We reshuffle group dynamics and hierarchies as a new discipline is put into play. We practice constructive risk taking. We communicate more. Creative expression puts a smile on people's faces while energizing their participation.



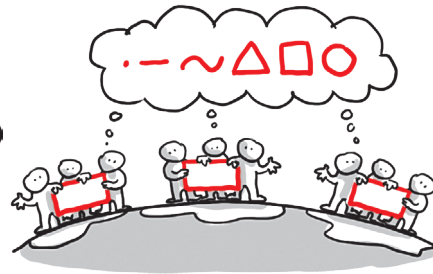
IT CREATES OWNERSHIP

People who contribute to something have a greater sense of ownership. Each individual contributor who helps create a shared drawing has tangible evidence of their contribution and can see their own contributions as part of a bigger whole. This enhances commitment.



IT'S EASY TO SHARE

When you have been involved in developing a visualization of a strategy or project, you know it inside and out. You can represent the drawing and its narrative to others who have not been involved. The drawing can serve as a collective learning tool that is easy to share with others.



IT CREATES A COMMON LANGUAGE

Having a common visual language strengthens communication around a given topic. We can share understandings and make sure that we are talking about the same thing. A commonly understood visual language can support a high level of complexity in our conversations.

Vocabulary for Visual Collaboration

Visual Collaboration is a guidebook for working more visually in meetings, projects, and processes. These three terms are good to know:

Facilitation enables a group to work together effectively and therefore make better decisions.

Good facilitators can:

- Put themselves in someone else's place.
- Create a shared sense of identity in a group.
- Energize a group and engage it in the service of a stated purpose.
- Find, formulate, and ask good questions.
- Listen actively and with focus.

Visual facilitation is facilitation with structured use of pen and paper.

The concept of visual facilitation stems from the concept of graphic facilitation, which was formulated in the 1970s by a group of organizational consultants in California who used visual techniques and tools to find solutions to complex issues.

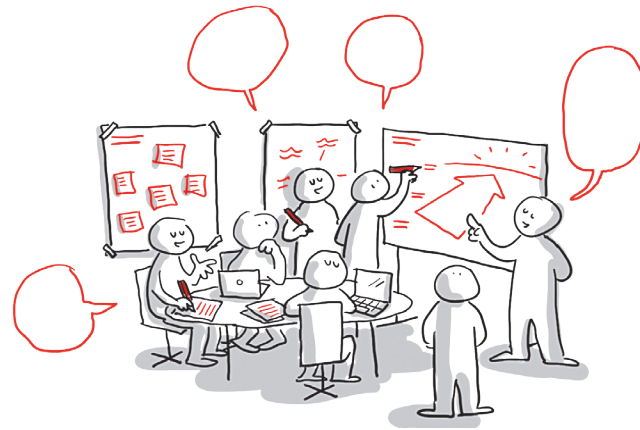
Visual facilitation uses visual representations to facilitate interaction in a group of people, using structured visual content. It is a systematic way of drawing together with others.

A good visual facilitator can capture communication in handwritten text so content is accessible to the group being facilitated. A good visual facilitator can translate the content of a process into drawings that are informative, straightforward, and comprehensive.

Visual facilitation can be as basic as facilitating a process by means of simple visual tools, like a few color-coded sticky notes, and a well-formulated question.

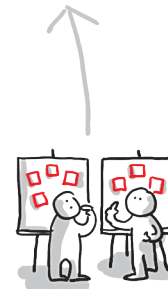
System visualization is a concept for visual collaboration. Through the lens of systems theory, we observe and structure knowledge visually.

Inspired by a wide range of front-runners in visualization, design thinking, change theory, facilitation, process management, and systems theory, as well as our own experience, we have developed the practical method of this book: the Five Building Blocks of Visual Collaboration. Each building block supports the overall purpose of system visualization: to facilitate communication and systems understanding in a group through targeted questions and visual representations to achieve valuable results.



Visual collaboration is also when...

...you and your colleagues stand in front of a flip chart and fill out sticky notes with ideas or tasks that you post and arrange in groups.

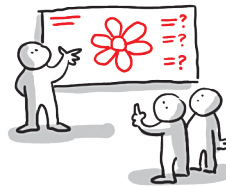
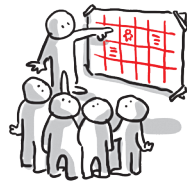


...you explain an idea or a concept by visualizing it.



...you work with others to create a mind map of an important topic or project.

... you and your project team chart a process by drawing it in broad strokes and then filling in each part of the process together.



... you use visual tools in your weekly meetings to update one another about various projects.



... you and your colleagues create a SWOT analysis with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.



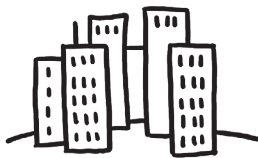
... you and your colleagues make frequent use of the whiteboard in the meeting room.

Boost your visual literacy

To gain the benefits of visual collaboration, here is a way to quickly get skilled at drawing.



HOUSE



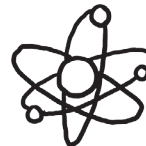
CITY



COUNTRY



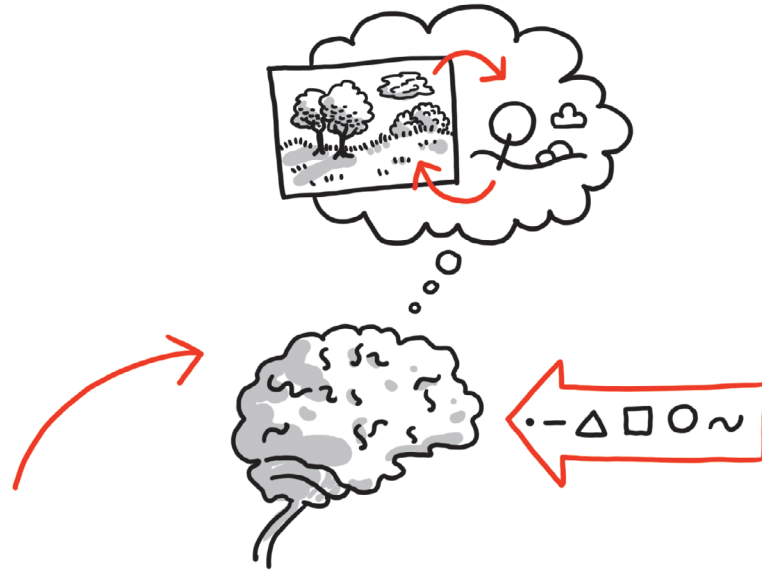
PLANET



SOLAR SYSTEM

You just need to practice combining basic shapes. With a dot, a line, a triangle, a square, a circle, and a wave you can draw a house, a town, a country, a planet, or an entire solar system.

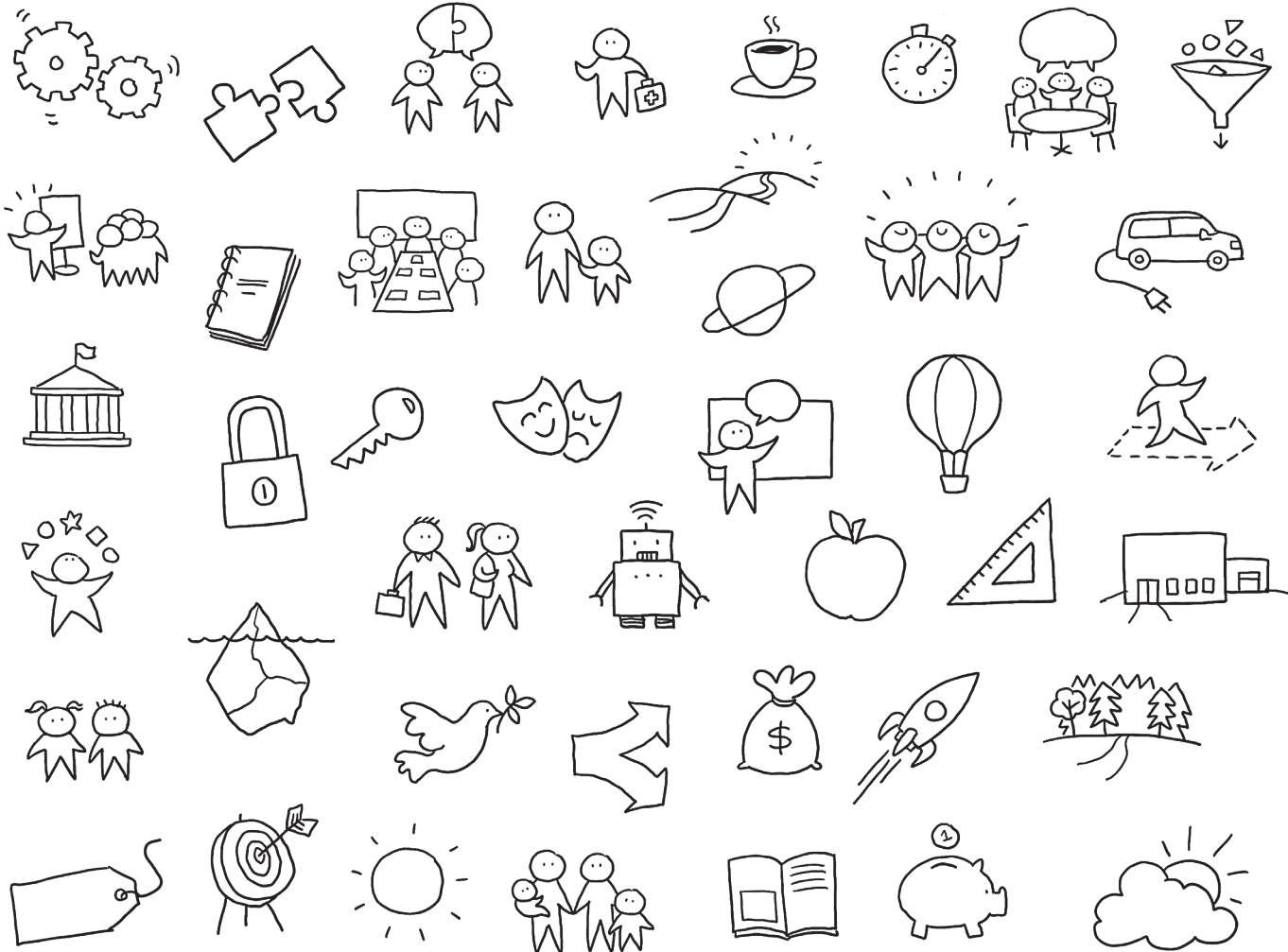
Drawing with basic shapes is an easy, rapid, and intuitive way of visualizing.

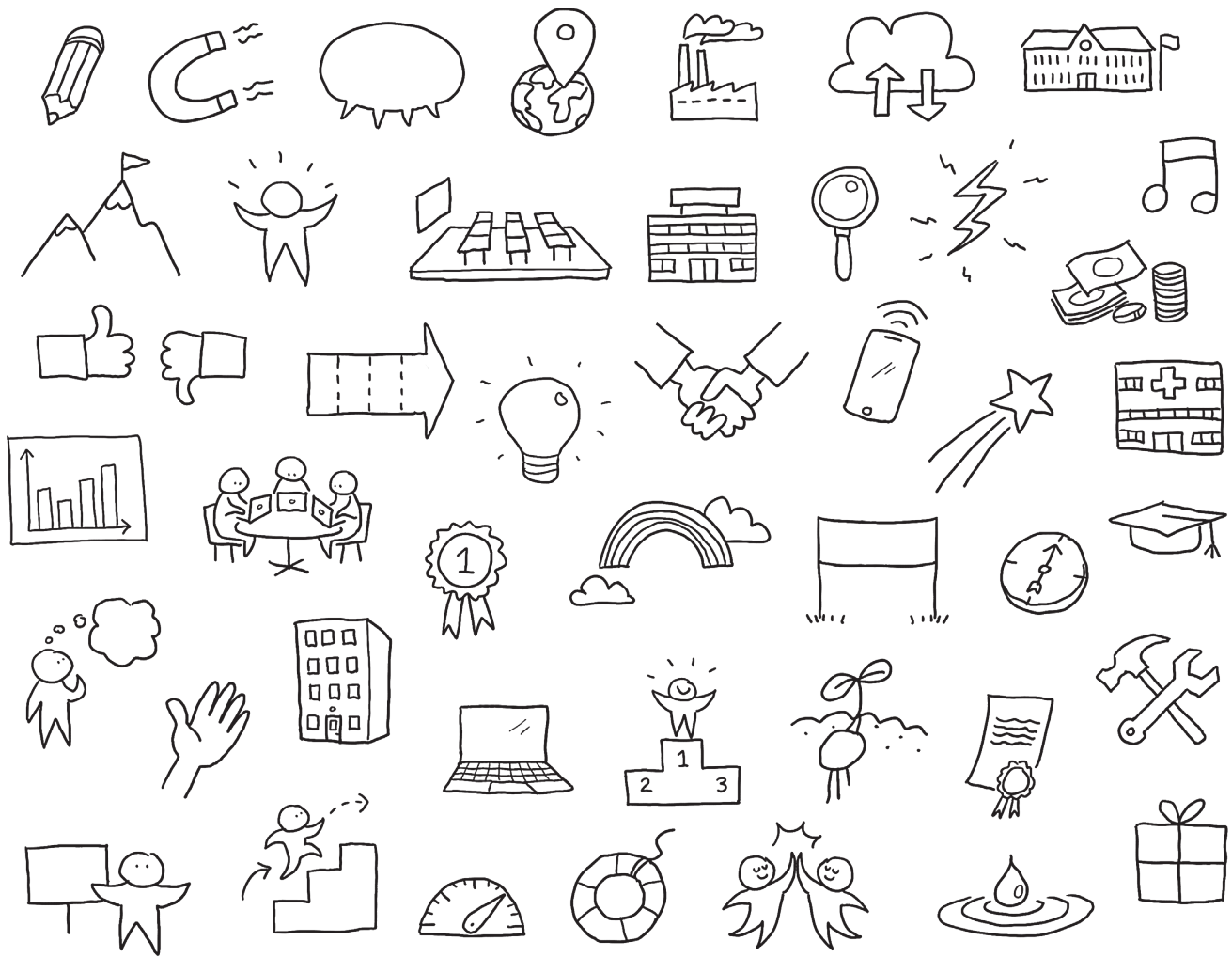


You only need to draw a fraction of what the eye sees to create recognition and understanding. Start seeing the world through a lense of basic shapes, practice drawing easy objects, and expand your visual vocabulary along the way.

From basic shapes to icons

Think of a word you want to represent visually and draw it as simply as you can.

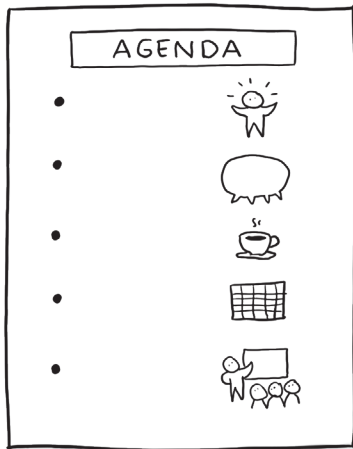




From icons to templates

Make simple visual templates with the icons you create.

SHOW THE AGENDA OF
YOUR MEETING



MAP THE COMPETENCIES
OF YOUR TEAM

