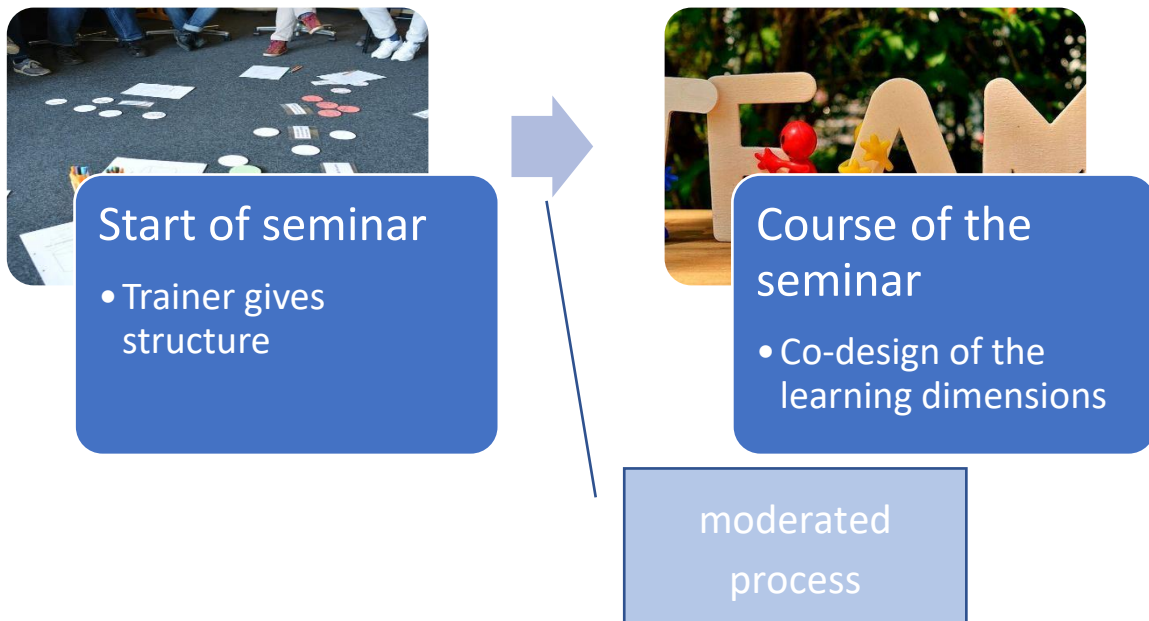


SELF-ORGANISED LEARNING AND COOPERATIVE GROUPS

In order to establish self-organised learning in a group, it is necessary to consciously introduce the group to this topic and the tasks associated with it. It has been our experience that it is highly recommended to start with classical methods that the participants are already familiar with from other seminars. It is advisable to gradually introduce elements of self-organised learning only after the participants have really arrived well at the seminar, by releasing the individual dimensions of self-organised learning for the group in consultation with the participants.



At the beginning of every seminar, it is important to give the group security by providing elementary structures. This is best done by filling the initial situation with familiar and clear elements:

- Round of introductions
- Getting to know goals and focal points
- Provide a clear time structure
- Recording the interests and expectations of the participants

If you want to work fully with the methods of self-organised learning in a group right at the beginning of a seminar, you run the risk of overtaxing the participants and in this way provoking resistance to this learning setting.

Start of seminars



A newly formed group is completely overwhelmed when it is confronted with little leadership and has to make decisions independently in a way that takes into account the needs and wishes of as many people as possible. From your experience as a trainer you know that in every new seminar group the individual participants first have to find their place in the group structure. In such a situation, self-organised learning would be completely overwhelming for many.

As a facilitator, you are familiar with the different phases that a group ideally goes through - unfortunately, many groups do not go through all the group phases and therefore never reach a proper working capacity - and you can also actively support your participants in becoming a cooperative group, which is essential for Self-Organised Learning.

Let's take a closer look at the ideal group phases as they are known from group dynamics and consider how you can actively support the group in these phases in order to quickly reach a good working capacity.

GROUP FORMATION PHASES

Each group goes through different phases in the course of its life cycle. Tuckmann differentiates between four phases:

Forming (orientation phase)

- In this phase, the participants get to know each other and determine the goals of the cooperation and the working methods. Group members orientate themselves on how they can behave in the group. The working energy is mainly put into feeling out and finding the group.

Storming (conflict phase)

- This is the phase in which conflicts arise between the members and opinions polarise. The team members try out different roles and put their energy into finding their own position.

Norming (phase of regulation)

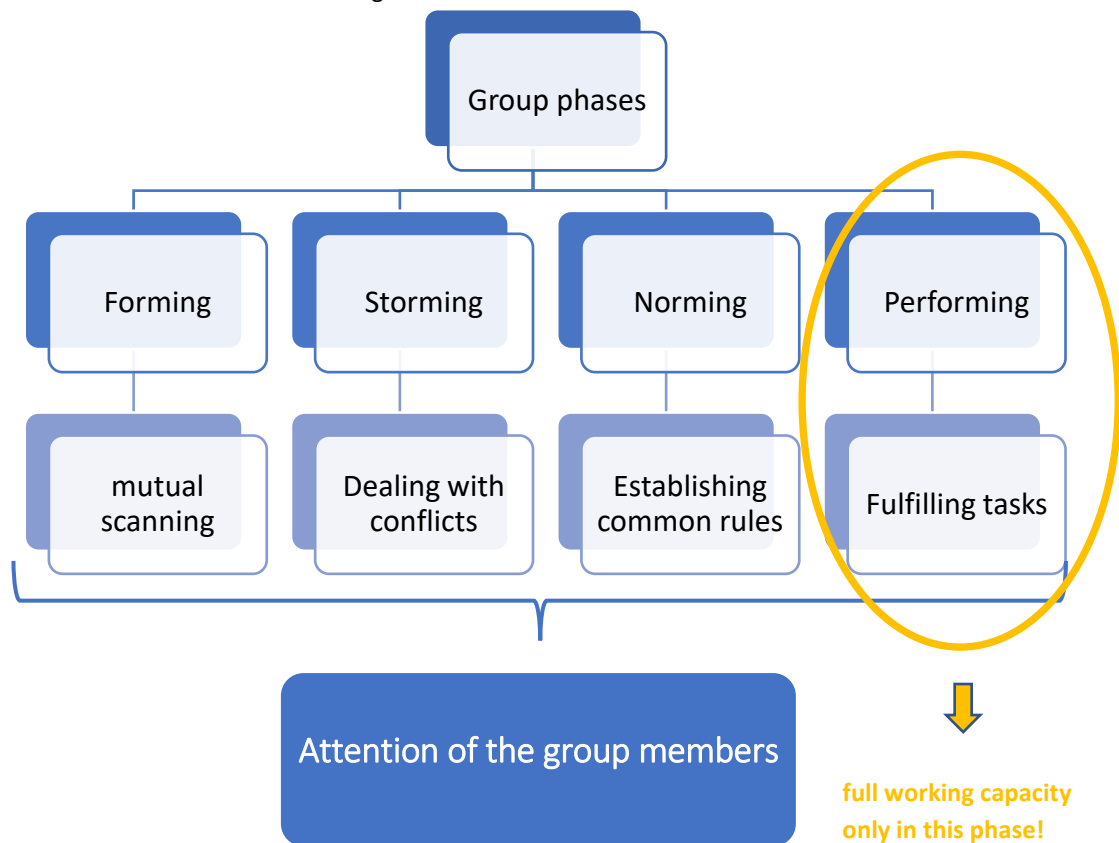
- It is only in this phase that the actual group is formed. Strengths and weaknesses of the individual group members are clarified and implicit and explicit rules of cooperation are developed. Trust develops between the participants.

Performing (work and implementation phase)

- The members of the group have found their role and are fulfilling it. A group feeling has been established and the energy of the group members can flow into the development of the actual tasks.

None of these individual phases can be skipped without a massive drop in performance within the group. Many groups get stuck in phase one or two and never reach their full capacity. The process of group formation can be significantly influenced by Moderation (the task of the trainer).

In each phase, the main attention of the group members is on a different topic. The following overview summarises this focus of attention once again:



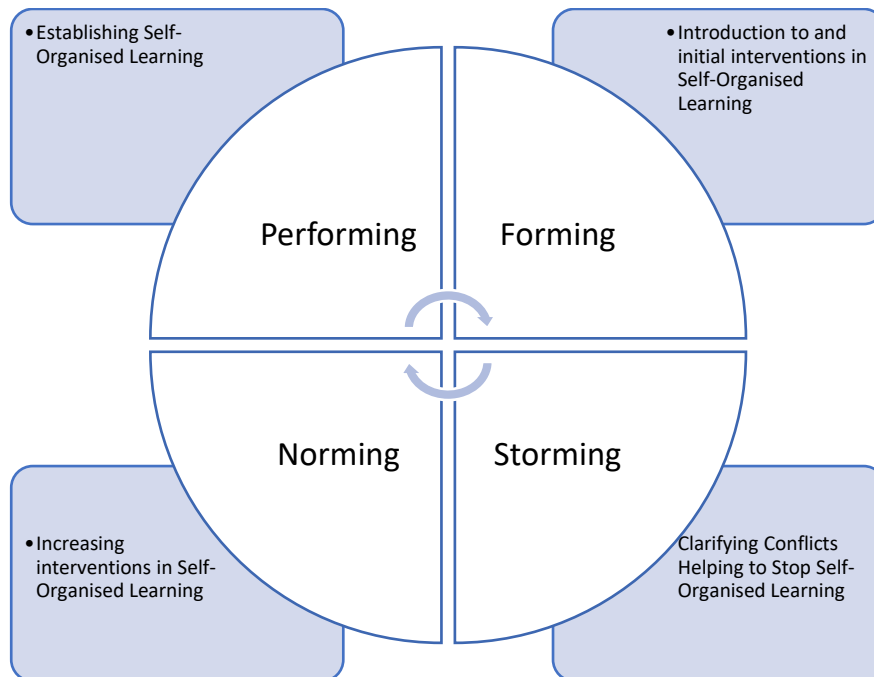
If we now look at these group phases with the respective main topic that a group deals with during its formation, it quickly becomes clear that Self-Organised Learning must be introduced carefully and trainers in adult education are well advised to support groups and not to overburden them too quickly with tasks that in the worst case are then misused to carry out subliminal conflicts and to secure their own position within the group.

So when should one start with self-organised learning?

The answer: from the beginning, but in portions and adapted to the group. You can only really get started with your participants when they have reached their full working capacity in the group and are willing to cooperate with each other.

There is no secret recipe that we can give you here, because every group is different and behaves differently, but the following overview chart can give you an indication of how you can create a situation in which your group participants can gradually become enthusiastic about self-organised learning:

INSTALLING SELF-ORGANISED LEARNING TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE GROUP FINDING PHASES



So, things really get going when the group is in the process of regulating itself, establishing norms that are binding on all group members and clarifying the status and sphere of influence of each individual member within the group.

With these exercises you can intervene within the group to help establish Self-Organised Learning:

Adding up the age and work experience of all participants

- This exercise usually triggers amazement at the existing group potential

Open learning workshop

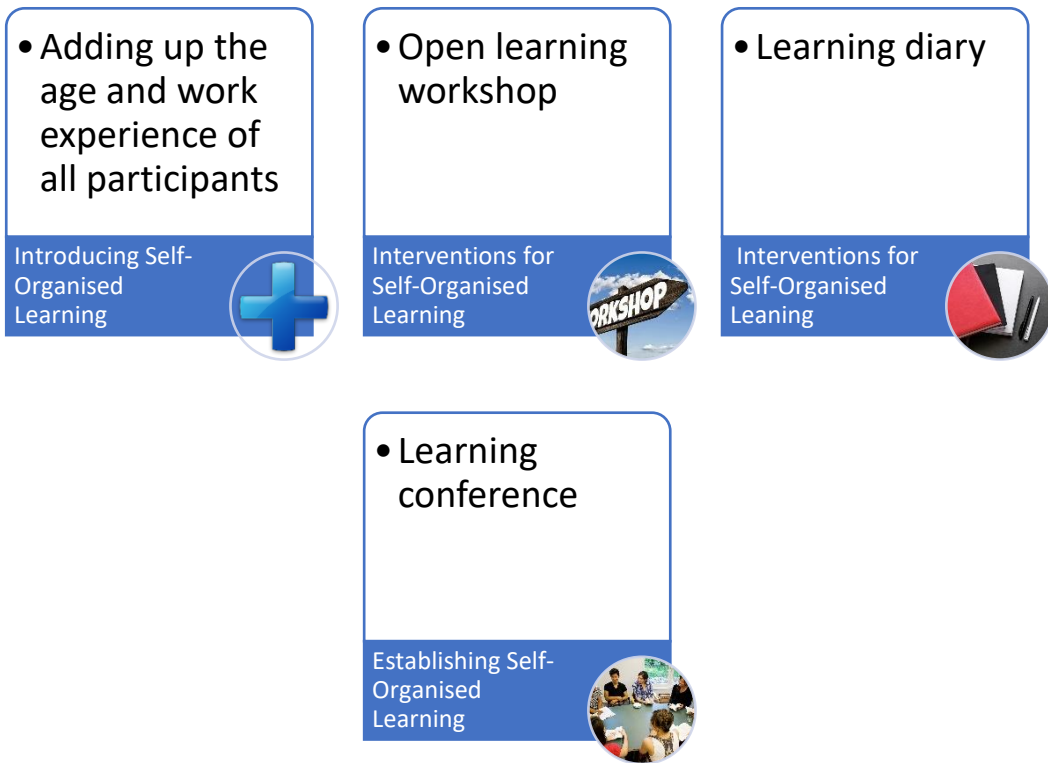
- The participants are given the opportunity to discover and explore the unknown in a curious and fun way. This is intended to promote educational motivation.

Learning diary

- The participants reflect on the respective course day with the help of a structured diary and subsequently plan the integration of the acquired knowledge and help decide the course of the further course.

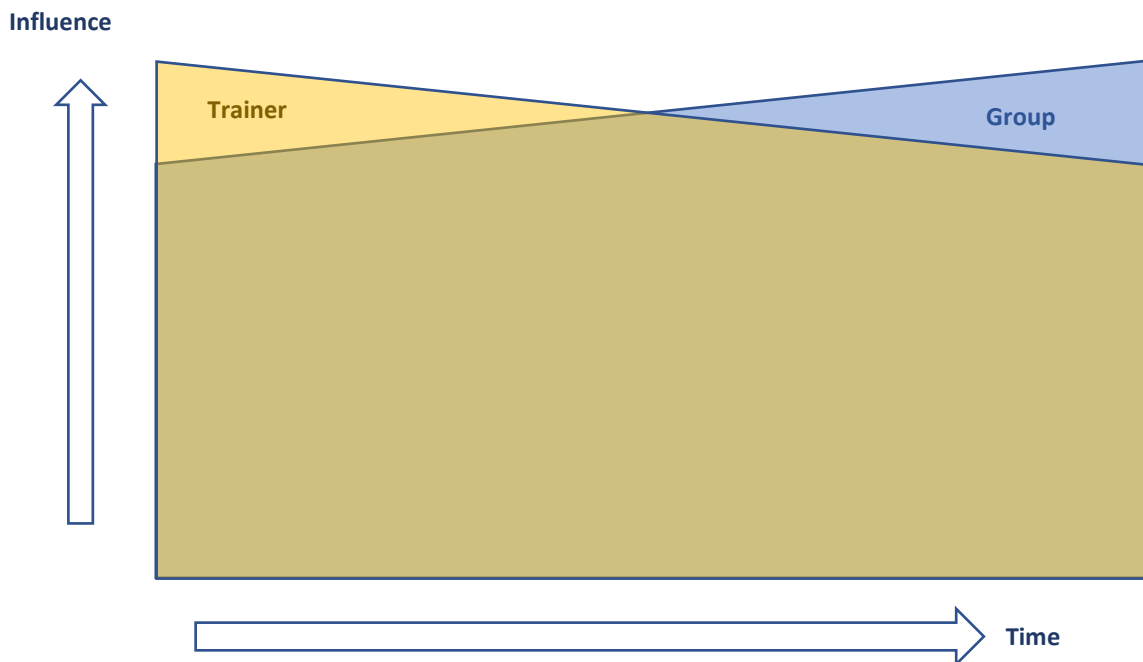
Learning conference

- Weekly fixed point for orientation and taking stock of the course progress, at which the coming week is planned and the learning objectives are defined.



POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERVENTION OVER TIME

Installing Self-Organised Learning can also be seen as a diametrically running process of influencing group events, from which the possibilities of intervention for the teacher can be derived on the basis of a temporal axis.



At the beginning of a seminar, you as a trainer are strongly challenged to provide structure, especially in terms of content. The group members are in an orientation phase - the environment is new, they hardly know each other, if at all. Here it is advisable to use the team-building exercises familiar from conventional trainings and

thus support the group in its constitution. In the course of the seminar, your influence decreases steadily in favour of the group's room for manoeuvre.

INTERVENTION POSSIBILITIES OVER TIME DEPENDING ON THE GROUP FINDING PHASES

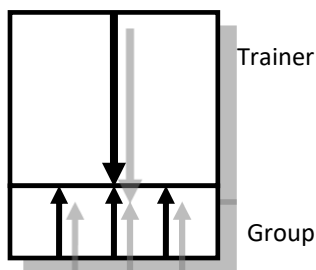
This model harbours some dangers. If one blindly follows this approach, the task of the seminar leader is to constantly withdraw his/her own influence on the group. This is supposed to expand the group's sphere of influence. However, a group only becomes fully functional in the last phase (performing). The facilitator is supposed to accompany this process through moderation and yet constantly hand over competences and areas of responsibility to the group. This can lead to great uncertainty among the participants. Of course, group development is not a linear process but is subject to fluctuations and dynamics that require a flexible response from the course leader. It is clear from this that this model represents an ideal course that must be adapted in practice to the needs and framework conditions of the group.

The following considerations can be quite helpful here:

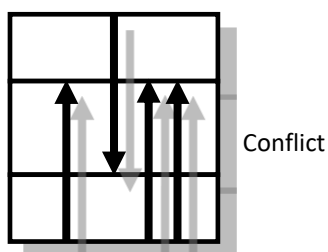
INFLUENCE OF THE GROUP LEADERSHIP ON GROUP ACTIVITIES

In general, several styles of group leadership can be distinguished from each other. In this script, the suggestion is made to understand these styles not as fixed variables, i.e. not as something that is primarily dependent on the personality structure of the presenters, but as didactic intervention possibilities that can be changed by the presenters and adapted to the group events. Basically, it is assumed that lecturers have enough self-reflection to use different styles appropriately. In general, the implementation of self-organised learning requires a high degree of professionalism and self-reflection from trainers.

Direct leadership style

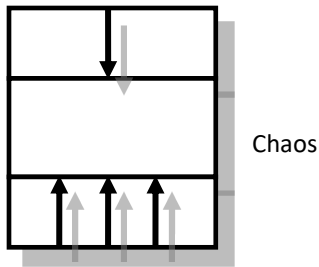


This way of leading groups may be quite helpful in the forming phase because it provides security and structure for the group, but it runs the risk of compromising the growth and development of the group in the further phases or provoking additional conflicts in the storming phase.



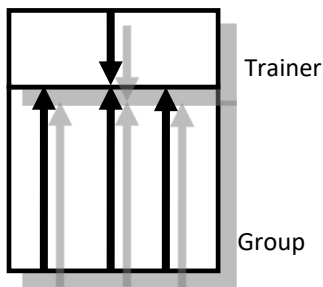
If a trainer announces in the forming phase to introduce Self-Organised Learning, but in the further course of the seminar holds on to a directive leadership style, this contradiction of announcing and holding out the prospect on the one hand and wanting to hold on to one's own position on the other hand can lead to conflicts and resistance against the trainer.

Giving up competences to the group too early



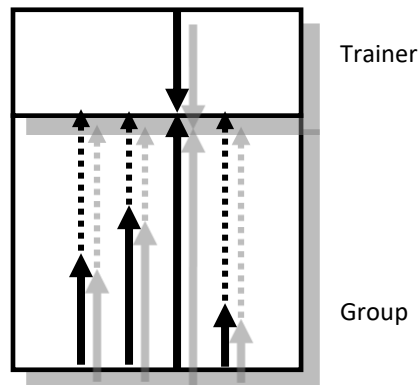
If one wants to start with Self-Organised Learning immediately, i.e. in the forming phase, this will lead to a strong overload for the participants, who are very busy at this time carefully feeling each other out and getting to know each other, and subsequently to chaos and resistance to this seminar.

Cooperative group leadership



This form of group leadership gives the participants a lot of scope to develop, but requires a high degree of maturity and self-responsibility on the part of the group. Groups that are optimally supported in their work by this style of group leadership are called developed cooperative groups (see also Types of Groups)

Situational group leadership



This type of group leadership demands a high degree of professionalism from the course leaders and involves the trainer giving each participant the space they are comfortable with, with the aim of leading participants to even greater independence.

TYPES OF GROUPS

The teaching style of presenters is also closely related to the way a group is constituted. The nature of a group depends, on the one hand, on the phase the group is currently in and, on the other hand, on the attitudes of the members. Johnson & Johnson distinguish four types of groups

Pseudogroups

The members of a pseudo-group are supposed to work together but have no interest in doing so. The result is that there is little communication and coordination in the group, that the problem of free riders increases and that ultimately the group achieves less than the individual would have achieved.

Traditional groups

The members of this group work together but do not see any added value in this cooperation. Information is exchanged, but the work is done individually. Only individual group members benefit from this type of cooperation; others would be more productive on their own.

Cooperative groups

Members of a cooperative group want to maximise their group's success as well as their own. They see added value in the work of the group and believe that they can only achieve their goals in the group. To increase the work success of each member, they share resources, support each other and coordinate their work. Here the result of the whole group is greater than that of the individual members.

Developed cooperative groups

These are groups in which the members make the most of the opportunities the group offers them.

SELF-ORGANISED LEARNING DEPENDING ON THE TYPE OF GROUP

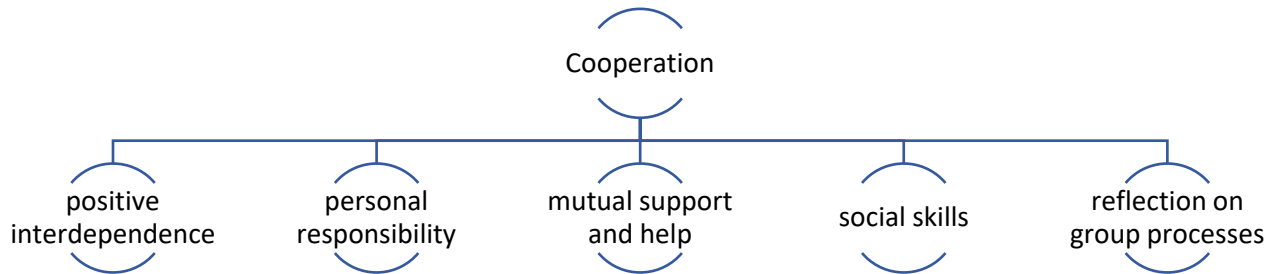
Self-organised learning in groups requires a high degree of cooperation between the group members. On the one hand, participants in this setting have to take on different roles, assume responsibility, expose themselves and actively contribute to the group's activities. On the other hand, they must also be prepared to step back and give other members space and time for their interventions.

Pseudogroup	Traditional group	Cooperative group	Developed cooperative group
Direct group leadership style	Situational group leadership style	Self-Organised Learning	

Self-organised learning therefore requires at least cooperative groups. Therefore, one of the main tasks of you as the course leader is to support a group in its development. You can do this by sensitively adapting your leadership style to the group's activities and by positively accompanying the constitution of the group with team-building exercises.

The following components promote cooperative work in a group and thus self-organised learning:

COMPONENTS OF COOPERATIVE ACTION



Match the definitions to the appropriate headings:

headings	definitions
positive interdependence	Participants should realise that they can only achieve their goal together. If a group member knows that his/her own efforts have a positive influence on the progress of the other group members, he/she will increase his/her efforts.
personal responsibility	If the individual work cannot be clearly assigned, the member's sense of responsibility for his or her part of the work decreases. Especially in larger groups, this quickly leads to the phenomenon of free-riding, as the individual can hide in the overall group.
mutual support and help	This includes sharing important resources and information, giving each other feedback, actively seeking judgement on one's own actions and helping each other to achieve the common goal.
social skills	Group members must learn to trust and respect each other. The greater the mutual trust, the more effectively a group can work. This point also includes being able to communicate appropriately with each other and to resolve conflicts.
reflection on group processes	Regular reflection on group processes benefits the group feeling and resolves underlying conflicts.