



## TOOLS & METHODS

# STRATEGIC VISUAL COMMUNICATION

*"USE A PICTURE; IT'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS." Tess Flanders*

## DESCRIPTION AND CORE PRINCIPLES:

Strategic Visual Communication (or Graphic Facilitation) is an approach for making information, knowledge and learning visible. It uses a combination of powerful questions to invite dialogue and exploration, structured listening to distill information, simple drawing techniques to make it visible. Facilitation methodologies support communication, collaboration and documentation while providing overview, shared clarity and ownership of the process.

Our brains are wired to perceive the world around us in images. When we work with pictures and images we activate both the left and right sides of the brain, meaning we can access both linear/logical thinking and holistic/creative thinking. Visual Communication is especially useful when you are working in a field that requires the ability to:

- Communicate effectively
- Collaborate purposefully
- Work with groups to reach shared clarity
- Navigate in complexity

## HOW DOES IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

The approach can be used in organisations in a number of ways: through visual templates, visual notes, and visual presentations.

**1. Visual Templates:** A visual template can be described as a visual questionnaire with empty fields for the group or individual to fill out with their responses, ideas and input. The template consists of headlines or questions guiding the participants and ensures a focused dialogue or reflection. It provides a clear structure that helps the participants feel safe and comfortable in contributing their thoughts

**2. Visual Notes:** Visual notes is a form of note taking where words or sentences are combined with simple icons to document, make sense of, and remember information. By taking visual notes you are distilling, sorting and grouping information, thereby making visible new connections and patterns. You can take visual notes for yourself or on behalf of a group.

**3. Visual Presentation:** A visual presentation is an illustrated overview of information that you wish to communicate to others. It makes visible both context and content and provides clarity for colleagues, clients and stakeholders around what needs to happen, why, when and how.



### Visuals and Meaningful Learning

'Tools for schools' has developed a model that describes how the 3 visual methods above support meaningful learning. The model identifies 3 pre-conditions for meaningful learning to take place in organisations, teams and groups. The 3 pre-conditions are:

- Visibility
- Clarity
- Participation

By making **visible** the structures of a project, meeting or process, we are creating a shared **clarity** that allows us to step in and **participate**, contribute and co-create new content. This new content then needs to be made **visible** to group to ensure shared **clarity** and understanding of the new knowledge. Only then is it possible to build on the new knowledge or to start integrating the new ideas in our organisational structures and practices.

The three visual methods can be seen as tools to support each of the pre-conditions. In the intersection between visibility and clarity, Visual Presentations can provide overview and shared understanding. Between clarity and participation, Visual Templates provides a clear structure to contribute your collective input whereby new learning is likely to emerge. Between participation and visibility, Visual Notes make visible the outcomes and emergent learning from a participatory exploration.

Source: 'Den visuelle Lærer', 2014, Nanna Frank og Anne Madsen,  
<http://www.toolsforschools.dk/>