METHOD	CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES
Area of CoP Activity:	Taking Action as a Community
CoP Lifecycle Phase:	Design Prototype Sustain
CoP Success Factor:	Leadership Strategy
EIGE Step:	Step 1: Getting Started Step 3: Setting up a GEP Step 4: Implementing a GEP Step 6: What Comes After the GEP
Group Size:	4 groups with 4-6 people each
Difficulty Level:	
Time Needed:	
Facilitator Preparation:	
Participant Preparation:	
Description:	Critical Uncertainties can help a group to see if they have critically considered their course of action. This will enable them to later develop a strategy. This activity is about being able to imagine the best and worst scenarios of an activity and to think about how to best respond to unforeseen events and changes.
More Information:	www.liberatingstructures.com/30-critical-uncertainties/

CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES (THEORY OF CHANGE)[1]

Short description

Critical Uncertainties is a method based on the theory of change that can help a diverse group of people to see if they have critically considered their course of action. It also helps to develop a better response to challenges that might wait in the future. This will enable your group of people to later develop a strategy. The aim of this activity is not to create an implementation plan. It is about being able to imagine the best and worst scenarios of your activity and help you to think how to best respond to unforeseen events and changes. This includes being able to see the different ways in which future can evolve, managing expectations and accepting that there might be different scenarios of your actions.

When to use

Critical Uncertainties helps to see if current thinking is viable, practical and above all critical. This is being facilitated when uncertainties are defined and recognised. The overall goal is to make sure that everyone is able to adapt in the case of a rising uncertainty, as well as being able to prioritise. Finally, this method should help to build up confidence in managing unanticipated future.

How to

A: Brief explanation

The participants of this activity think of the most fatal uncertainty they might face or are actually already facing in their organisation or project team, which might prevent them from working successfully and reaching their goals. In small groups, strategies are being developed to help to avoid those uncertainties or to prepare some coping strategies and mechanisms. If the issue is complex, distribute the central question to the participants before the event and let them prepare.

B: Detailed step-by-step guide

1. Divide all your participants into 4 groups. Each group receives a printed temple (ideally A3 format), or a blank flip-chart paper sheet, post-its, flipchart stands, etc. All the participants take responsibility for planning a strategy and everyone has the chance to contribute.
2. All the participants (all together not in groups) are asked to identify and describe the **two** most critical uncertainties in their organisation, project, or plan. The question asked in this context could be:

In your project, what two factors seem to be difficult to foresee or control?

Ensure that the selected factors are BOTH critical and uncertain. For example, early career researchers could suggest that one of the most critical uncertainty facing their career is the **quantity** of research projects and the resultant publications they will be able to take part in, given their busy schedule teaching and supervising their students:

[1] Adapted from Liberating Structures: http://www.liberatingstructures.com/30-critical-uncertainties/.

Critical Uncertainty 1: The quantity of research publications.
This uncertainly is critical because, scientific career relies on rich publishing.

However, the second critical uncertainty is the **quality** of the publications. It is crucial for their career that the outputs are published in well-regarded journals:

Critical Uncertainty 2: The quality of research publications.

3. Next, a grid with two axes, X and Y, with a "more of" and "less of" continuum for each of the factors on each axis is being established for **both the critical uncertainties**. In doing so, four quadrants will originate (see Example Template). For example:

Weak Publications (low quality) versus Strong Publications (high quality)

and

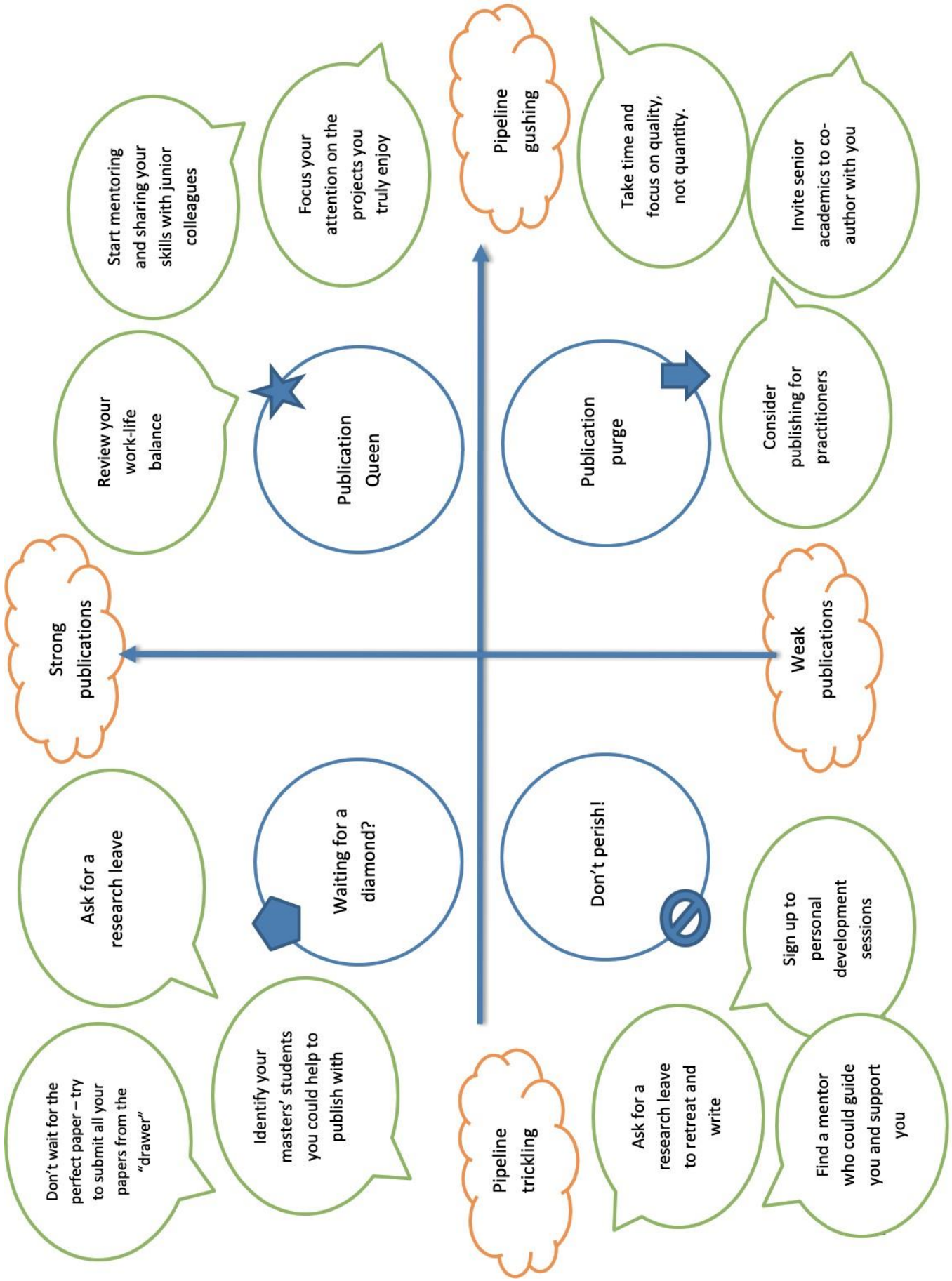
Pipeline Trickling (low quantity) versus Pipeline Gushing (high quantity)

4. Each group names one of the four quadrants and writes a short sketch/story/scenario about it and comes up with a catchy name (see the blue circles in the example template). After that, the four groups present their scenarios to the rest of the participants.
5. Each of the groups then thinks of three strategies that could be used in the one scenario they have been working on (see green speech bubbles in the example template). Those strategies are then shared with everyone on a flipchart or sheets fixed to the wall with blue tack.
6. At the end, the whole group discusses and identifies which strategies are the most practical and effective ones and which probably will not lead to success. Pooling all the different scenarios in the end enables everyone to learn about possible strategies in different situations.

Additional ideas/ information

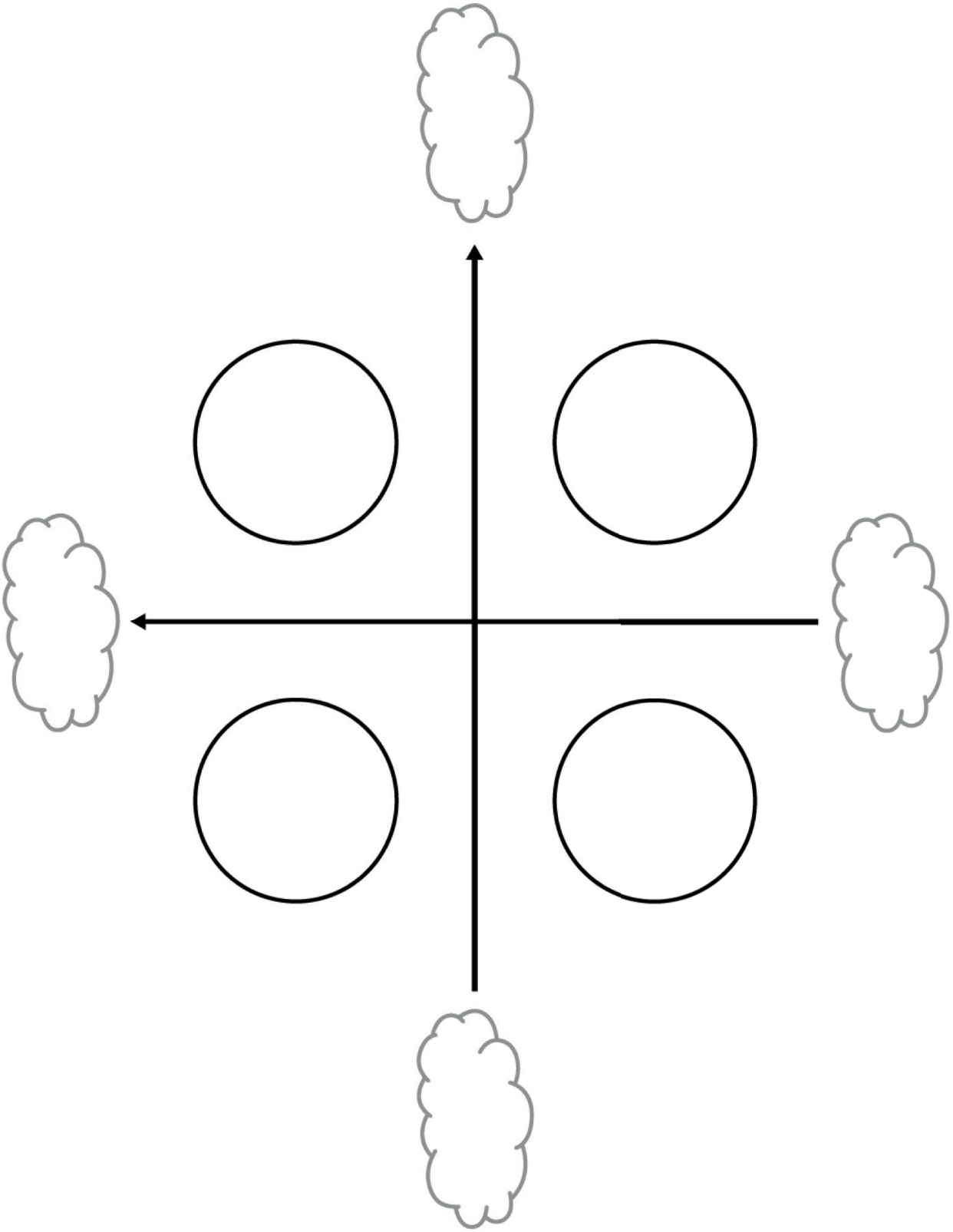
When thinking about the different uncertainties, it helps to remind the group of moments/events/scenarios that they did not expect and moments in which they were not prepared.

- Naming the quadrants can be a fun thing, e.g., using movie or book titles etc.


Strong publications
Weak publications
Pipeline gushing
Pipeline trickling
Publication Queen
Publication purge
Waiting for a diamond?
Don't perish!
Start mentoring and sharing your skills with junior colleagues
Focus your attention on the projects you truly enjoy
Take time and focus on quality, not quantity.
Invite senior academics to co-author with you
Review your work-life balance
Consider publishing for practitioners
Ask for a research leave
Identify your masters' students you could help to publish with
Sign up to personal development sessions
Find a mentor who could guide you and support you
Don't wait for the perfect paper – try to submit all your papers from the "drawer"
Ask for a research leave to retreat and write

Template

CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES



REFERENCES

Liberating Structures – Innovation durch echte Zusammenarbeit. 2019. Available from: https://www.liberatingstructures.de/.