

## TECH1502-18 Social Media & Technology

### Workshop Eleven: Conversation Skills

#### 1 Activity - The Art of Hosting a Conversation

- Working in pairs, read through the sections here on hosting group conversations.
- Make a note of any relevant issues that you think are interesting.
- Can you identify an example of a situation in which your conversation skills have been tested?
- Can you identify a situation in which your conversation hosting skills have been tested?
- Use the whiteboard to develop a mind map of the key attributes of a good conversation, and what speaking and listening skills are necessary?

#### 1.1 The Art of Hosting Good Conversations - By Howard Rheingold

##### 1.2 What an online/offline host wants to achieve

- The goal is civil discourse: all kinds of people having conversations and arguments about a variety of subjects and treating each other decently.
- Authentic conversations -- from the head, the heart, and the gut.
- A feeling of ownership. Participants become evangelists.
- A spirit of group creativity, experimentation, exploration, good will.
- A shared commitment to work together toward better communication, better conversations. If this is achieved, nothing else is needed.
- A system where people figure out where the conversation is going, by themselves, and settle conflicts among themselves.
- A place where everybody builds social capital individually by improving each other's knowledge capital collaboratively.

##### 1.3 Good online/offline discussions:

- Enable people to make contact with other people.
- Enable people to entertain themselves rather than being just the passive consumers of canned entertainment.
- Enable people to create a gift economy for knowledge-sharing.
- Create conditions for ongoing collaboration that return individual effort with a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Provide a way for people to get to know each other beyond their usual masks.
- Make newcomers feel welcomed, contributors valued, recreational hasslers ignored.

##### 1.4 A Host is...

- A host is like a host at a party. You don't automatically throw a great party by hiring a room and buying some beer.
- Someone needs to invite an interesting mix of people, greet people at the door, make introductions, start conversations, avert fisticuffs, encourage people to let their hair down and entertain each other.
- A host is also an authority. The host is the person who enforces whatever rules there may be, and will therefore be seen by many as a species of law enforcement officer.
- A host is also an exemplar. Good hosts model the behaviour they want others to emulate: read carefully and post entertainingly, informatively, and economically, acknowledge other people by name, assume good will, assert trust until convinced otherwise, add knowledge, offer help, be slow to anger, apologize when wrong, politely ask for clarification, exercise patience when your temper flares.
- A host is also a cybrarian. Good hosts nurture the community memory, pointing newcomers to archives, providing links to related conversations, past and present, hunting down resources to add to the collective pool of knowledge -- and teaching others to do it. Well performed voluntary cybrarianism is contagious.
- A host can be a character in the show, but the show is collaborative improvisation, with the audience onstage.
- All hosts are members of a community of hosts. You can't host communities without communities of hosts.
- <http://www.rheingold.com/texts/artonlinehost.html>

## **2 Activity - The Art of Good Questions**

- Working in a small group with no more than four people, use an audio capture device, such as your phone or a Zoom recorder, to record a short conversation lasting no more than four minutes about your planned topic being developed for coursework B and C.
- Plan to record the piece in one take, with no edits.
- Write out a couple of questions?
- Once you have recorded the conversation, listen back to it and note any issues or concerns that you have about how the conversation flowed, and how people related to one another?
- Is the conversation dominated by one person, or is it equally shared?
- Which form of conversation approach is more effective?
- What was the form of the discussion that you had, and how did they influence the topics that you covered?
- Did you find it hard to stop the conversation, or did it naturally end?

### **2.1 Conversation Flow**

Remember, our goal is conversation flow. Conversations flow when they move from topic to topic and speaker to speaker in a way that feels smooth and natural. One of your primary tools for helping conversations flow is the idea of invitation. An invitation is something you say that:

- Communicates very clearly that it is now your partner's turn to talk, and
- Gives a strong suggestion for what your partner should talk about.

<http://www.improveyoursocialskills.com/conversation/invitation>

### **2.2 The Complete Hosting Manual - A good conversation is more like a game of hacky-sack**

What, generally, makes a good conversation? Many things: an alive topic of interest to all, an open and receptive mood, people willing to listen as much as speak, a willingness to drop preconceptions and explore many different ideas, a comfortable setting in which people can easily hear each other, a group small enough for everyone to speak. A good conversation is more like a game of hacky-sack than a game of tennis—the objective is to keep the ball in the air, not to defeat your “opponent.” At its best, such conversation gets deeper and richer the longer it can be sustained.

### **2.3 Setting the Stage: Opening the Conversation Café**

So—imagine you have convened your group and they have arrived and you have welcomed them warmly. Then state the theme or topic for the Café and let them know the ending time (90 minutes is best, 60 minutes minimal, and less would be a Café Light)

### **2.4 The Agreements**

Next, read the Agreements out loud. The introduction of these Agreements begins to mark the shift from daily busyness and ordinary chit-chat to the wiser, generative depths at a slower pace of ‘being-in-time.’ You could have each person read one of them. This begins the sense of ownership of the process and gives a few people their first opportunity to speak. You may want to elaborate on each one, along the lines of the italicized words:

### **2.5 Open-mindedness**

Listen to and respect all points of view. Conversation isn’t just talking. It’s talking and listening. In fact, in a group of 4-8, you’ll be listening more than you are talking! By focusing on listening, you may also benefit from the variety of ideas around the table.

### **2.6 Acceptance**

Suspend judgment as best you can. We all judge one another, but do your best not to. Doing so will enable you to hear new things from others. It also helps everyone feel safer if they think others are trying to not judge them!

### **2.7 Curiosity**

Seek to understand rather than persuade. We’re not here to convince others that we are right and they are wrong. If someone expresses a point of view that seems different from yours, see if you can ask some questions to gain clarity or understanding.

## 2.8 Discovery

Question assumptions, look for new insights. Conversation Café dialogues aren't polite conversation—they are designed to expose us to new ideas or possibly even see old ideas in a new way. Insight—seeing more deeply into a topic—can come if we watch for it.

## 2.9 Sincerity

Speak from your heart and personal experience. We want to hear what's important to you, not just your opinions or data you've collected. Relate your ideas or reports to your personal experience.

## 2.10 Brevity

Go for honesty and depth but don't go on and on. Honesty and depth are important to a good conversation, but so is giving everyone a chance to speak. People are polite. They may not stop you if you go on and on. But you can stop yourself. Try to stay under a couple of minutes.

After reviewing each of these agreements, make sure you get everyone's buy-in—by nodding their heads or even raising their hands. It is essential that everyone makes the commitment to do their best to abide by these agreements for the next hour and a half.

## 2.11 The Process

After reading the agreements, explain how the process will involve two rounds with a Talking Object, followed by open conversation, and end lastly with a final round where each will reflect on their experience.

## 3 Discussion - Talking Object

- Read through the tips and ideas about hosting conversations in the next section.
- Open a thread on DMU Talk (<https://talk.our.dmu.ac.uk>).
- Can you come up with a topic idea and a format for a podcast that you might wish to produce that uses a conversational style?
- How would you go about organising and planning a podcast of this kind?
- What topics would you cover?
- Who would you invite to take part?
- What are the conventions of podcasting that you might want to use or break?

### 3.1 Being in the Circle

The talking object is a deceptively simple yet powerful tool for transformation. It creates the space for deep reflection as it creates the capacity to hold the floor in silence, without concern or possibility of interruption. It invites deep listening from the rest of the circle which in turn invites a higher quality and greater depth of expression, yielding new levels of thoughtfulness and wisdom. Further, it is a powerful tool for creating equality: Everyone in the circle (which in itself is a powerful tool/symbol of non-hierarchy) has an equal voice, an equal turn. This is the essential expression of democracy. It equalizes power differences that arise from rank, class, ethnicity, age, gender, as well as personality and communication styles. You can use whatever you want for a Talking Object. Pick anything that is easily held and handy—even a salt shaker. Some hosts like to choose something with symbolic meaning to them, or an object from nature.

<http://www.conversationcafe.org/the-complete-hosting-manual/>

### 3.2 Tips for Hosting a Conversation

Hosting a conversation is easy: gather for a potluck and have a discussion. We are asking folks to concentrate on the issues profiling, detention and/or deportation. The key is to engage the queer AAPI community in issues of social justice, while being comfortable with familiar people in an inclusive environment. To help introduce the topic, we have provided tools such as fact sheets, videos, and news articles illustrating the problems. After going over your chosen resources, everyone will share their reactions and thoughts. Hosting a conversation can be the perfect way to grow community support for important issues. Help create these interactive and welcoming educational opportunities.

<http://www.nqapia.org/wpp/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Tips-for-Hosting-a-Conversation.pdf>

### 3.3 What is the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter?

The Art of Hosting is a highly effective way of harnessing the collective wisdom and self-organizing capacity of groups of any size. Based on the assumption that people give their energy and lend their resources to what matters most to

them – in work as in life – the Art of Hosting blends a suite of powerful conversational processes to invite people to step in and take charge of the challenges facing them. <http://www.artofhosting.org/>

### **3.4 Hosting a Community Discussion**

Using fun and inspiring techniques such as art, music, storytelling, humour and hands-on practical activities, has proved a fantastic way to involve people in influencing the future of where they live. We've used them in neighbourhood planning events, whether it be helping people make the most of green spaces, kickstart community enterprises, understand climate change, or respond to large-scale planning developments affecting the area. <http://www.edenproject.com/eden-story/our-ethos/creative-community-engagement>

### **3.5 Organize a Community Forum**

**Getting Started:** What is a community forum? A community forum is an event that anyone can attend, where a panel of experts who have experience in a particular subject share their knowledge and perspectives and where members of the audience can ask questions during a pre-set time. It is a great resource for anyone who wants to learn more about an issue. It is also an excellent way to recruit activists.

### **3.6 Why hold a community forum?**

Community forums can be a very effective way to raise awareness in your community and to get people involved in an issue. It can provide an opportunity for activists to join forces to demand action on a set of issues, advocate for change and get local media attention. [http://www.action.org/documents/How\\_to\\_Organize\\_a\\_Community\\_Forum.pdf](http://www.action.org/documents/How_to_Organize_a_Community_Forum.pdf)

## **4 Discussion – Hosting a Community Café Discussion**

- Working in pairs, read through the sections here on hosting community café conversations.
- Make a note of any relevant issues that you think are interesting.
- Can you identify an example of a situation in which your conversation skills have been used?
- Can you identify a situation in which your conversation hosting skills have been used to gather information?
- Use the whiteboard to develop a mind map of the key attributes of a good conversation, and what speaking and listening skills are necessary?

### **4.1 A Quick Guide to Hosting a Community Café**

This Quick Guide is a shorter alternative to the full Orientation Guide, and focuses on the typical steps involved in hosting a Community Café. There are many variations to hosting a Community Café and this is only a guide to the practice of hosting meaningful conversations in a group setting. Hosting Community Cafés are part of an appreciative Inquiry process:

- Dream - What is your vision for strengthening families?
- Design - What change(s) would you like to see happen in your community?
- Discovery - What do you want to learn, need to know?
- Delivery – Host a café conversation and commit to action as a result of the conversation.

After your café, revisit this process again. Communities are encouraged to adopt cafés as a part of their community function. <http://thecommunitycafe.org/wp-content/uploads/QuickGuideEnglish.pdf>

### **4.2 Community Planning toolkit – Community Engagement**

This section of the toolkit provides guidance on the issues to consider when planning and designing community engagement. It focuses on quality and effectiveness, process planning and designing engagement tailored to the particular issue, level of participation to be achieved, timeframe and range of stakeholders affected.

### **4.3 Planning and Designing Community Engagement**

Community engagement works best where it is an ongoing cumulative process enabling relationships and trust to build and strengthen over time. Individual engagement events should be planned and designed with this in mind and aim to contribute to the overall aims of the engagement process. Community or voluntary groups may want to participate at a range of levels – from providing advice to co-designing the process and from undertaking some aspects of the engagement to delivering projects to meet some of the outcomes. <http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf>

#### **4.4 Ideas for Community Consultation**

Community consultation can 'work' for both the consulter and the consulted. It can bring new levels of expertise and information to the consulter, in a dynamic, cost-effective and integrated way. It can make the consulted feel that they are being listened to, that their opinions matter, and that they can be involved in decision-making that affects them. Importantly, over time it also educates the consulted in plan making processes which affect them. Consultation therefore has the ability to develop the 'deliberative capacity' of both the consulter and the consulted [http://activedemocracy.net/articles/principles\\_procedures\\_final.pdf](http://activedemocracy.net/articles/principles_procedures_final.pdf)

#### **5 Activity Blogging**

- Can you write any key points from this session into a blog?
- How will you use links and embedded media in your blog post to enhance the discussion and information that you present?
- Do you think you can write in a way that prompts other people to respond and engage with what you have written?

#### **6 References**