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WORLD CAFÉ

PUTTING CONVERSATIONS TO WORK

Leaders in this era will need to see their organizations as dynamic webs of conversation and consider conversation as a core process for effecting positive systemic change. Taking a strategic approach to this core process can not only grow intellectual and social capital, but also provide a collaborative advantage in our increasingly networked world.



World Café for more and better process operators in Limburg, the Netherlands

WHO APPLIED IT

Perspectivity has facilitated numerous World Café's in a variety of settings. Here are some examples:

- Academic sector development (Ireland)
- City of Arnhem (Netherlands)
- Community of Co Down (Northern Ireland)
- Heritage plan for Dublin City Council (Ireland)
- Global Fund Replenishment (Netherlands)
- National Animal Protection Agency (Netherlands)
- National Housing Corporation (Netherlands)
- License to Operate - Process Industry (Netherlands)
- MDF Training and Consultancy (Netherlands)
- Patient and Client Council (Northern Ireland)
- Research & Valorisation Center Groningen (Netherlands)

'Unique about this setting was that all hierarchy and level differences disappeared...'

World Café Participant

HOW IT WORKS?

The following five components comprise the basic model:

- 1) Setting - Create a "special" environment, most often modelled after a café, i.e. small round tables covered with a checkered tablecloth, butcher block paper, colored pens, a vase of flowers, and optional "talking stick" item. There should be four to eight chairs at each table.
- 2) Welcome and Introduction - The host begins with a warm welcome and an introduction to the World Café process, setting the context, sharing the Café Etiquette, and putting participants at ease.
- 3) Small Group Rounds - The process begins with the first of three or more twenty minute rounds of conversation for the small group seated around a table. At the end of the twenty minutes, each member of the group moves to a different new table. They may or may not choose to leave one person as the "table host" for the next round, who welcomes the next group and briefly fills them in on what happened in the previous round.
- 4) Questions - Each round is prefaced with a question designed for the specific context and desired purpose of the session. The same questions can be used for more than one round, or they can be built upon each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction.
- 5) Harvest - After the small groups (and/or in between rounds, as desired) individuals are invited to share insights or other results from their conversations with the rest of the large group. These results may be reflected visually in a variety of ways.

WORLD CAFÉ

PUTTING CONVERSATIONS TO WORK

GETTING STARTED

The following seven World Café design principles are an integrated set of ideas and practices that form the basis of the pattern embodied in the World Café process.

1) Set the Context

Pay attention to the reason you are bringing people together, and what you want to achieve. Knowing the purpose and parameters of your meeting enables you to consider and choose the most important elements to realize your goals: e.g. who should be part of the conversation, what themes or questions will be most pertinent, what sorts of harvest will be more useful, etc..

2) Create Hospitable Space

Café hosts around the world emphasize the power and importance of creating a hospitable space — one that feels safe and inviting. When people feel comfortable to be themselves, they do their most creative thinking, speaking, and listening. In particular, consider how your invitation and your physical set-up contribute to creating a welcoming atmosphere.

3) Explore Questions that Matter

Knowledge emerges in response to compelling questions. Find questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the group. Powerful questions that "travel well" help attract collective energy, insight, and action as they move throughout a system. Depending on the timeframe available and your objectives, your Café may explore a single question or use a progressively deeper line of inquiry through several conversational rounds.

4) Encourage Everyone's Contribution

As leaders we are increasingly aware of the importance of participation, but most people don't only want to participate, they want to actively contribute to making a difference. It is important to encourage everyone in your meeting to contribute their ideas and perspectives, while also allowing anyone who wants to participate by simply listening to do so.

5) Connect Diverse Perspectives

The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link the essence of your discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Café. As participants carry key ideas or themes to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.

6) Listen together for Patterns and Insights

Listening is a gift we give to one another. The quality of our listening is perhaps the most important factor determining the success of a Café. Through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights, we begin to sense a connection to the larger whole. Encourage people to listen for what is not being spoken along with what is being shared.

7) Share Collective Discoveries

Conversations held at one table reflect a pattern of wholeness that connects with the conversations at the other tables. The last phase of the Café, often called the "harvest", involves making this pattern of wholeness visible to everyone in a large group conversation. Invite a few minutes of silent reflection on the patterns, themes and deeper questions experienced in the small group conversations and call them out to share with the larger group. Make sure you have a way to capture the harvest - working with a graphic recorder is recommended.



Care for a Common Cause - Young Leadership in Uganda



WORLD CAFE

PUTTING CONVERSATIONS TO WORK



Explore diverse perspectives



World Café academic sector Northern Ireland

More information

The basic process is simple and simple to learn, but complexities and nuances of context, numbers, question crafting and purpose can make it optimal to bring in an experienced facilitator. We would be happy to talk with you about your needs.

REFERENCES

The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter, Juanita Brown, David Isaacs (Berrett-Koehler, 2005)

The World Café Community: theworldcafe.com

ABOUT PERSPECTIVITY

Perspectivity builds inspiring collaborations for sustainable growth. We work with groups and individuals to address complex realities in organisations and communities. In current times of increasing complexity, blue prints have become obsolete. As Perspectivity, we dare to look at the world upside down. We bring a fresh perspective!

We engage people from all walks of life, people with differing interests and perceptions. We help them to find common ground to work productively together towards shared goals, even when differences seem impossible to bridge. We help people and organisations to match values to purpose.

Perspectivity
For the love of complexity

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