



CONVENE & CONNECT

Convening is the art of bringing the community (of practice) and relevant stakeholders together to connect members and engage them in meaningful conversations. The diversity of a community and a risk-free and inclusive environment help develop conversations and engage members.

Start small, create the conducive environment to convene and network people.

Proper community management to ensure diversity of views, prioritize equity for access to opportunities and resource and where everyone feels they belong and can actively participate.

Diversified, equity and inclusiveness environment where there is diverse representation, fairness and everyone feel valued and heard.

Activities oriented to developing the practice – Debate

WHAT

Debate

Most people are familiar with high school debates, in which participants have to defend a position independently of what they believe personally. This forms the basis of this activity.

WHY

Debates are good to explore the thinking of a whole community when there is a choice between two options regarding a contentious issue. The debate format turns the discussion into a game, which allows people to explore various opinions, arguments, and doubts without getting too personal. One danger of a tight community is groupthink: people may find it hard to disagree when the majority seems to believe one thing. They don't want to rock the boat or appear negative. Making disagreeing the point of a game allows doubts and scepticism to be expressed.

HOW

After presenting the two sides of the question, we split the community into two groups. We usually do it at random, for instance by getting people to count 1-2-1-2-1. Making the side assignment random makes it clear that people are not there to defend their own opinion. Then we assign each group to one side of the issue, usually the pros and the cons. We ask the con group to try to not only be against the proposition, but also to argue for better alternatives.

Each group goes to opposite sides of the room or to a separate breakout room if online. Each side develops its argument and selects three people to join the debate table.

In a physical room, we have a debate table in the middle of the room, with three chairs on each side. Online we ask everyone but the debating teams to turn off their video.

Keeping things playful, we make the debate itself very formal: one minute for each person. We start with the first pro person, then a con person, switching side each time.

After the first round, we usually have a second round. The sides go back to their group or breakout room and prepare a final counterargument, having heard the arguments of the other side. They choose one person to join the round two of the debate. Again, one minute per person, but this time we start with the cons representative and let the pros person have the last word.

There are often lots of laughs and clapping (and boos) as the sides spar at the debate table. But we do not declare a winner because we do not use the debate to make decisions. This would infuse the process with a weight that would work against its value as a game. Instead, once it is over, we invite the community to reflect on the debate out of role, expressing their own opinions after having heard both sides of the argument.