



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 – Facilitation

WHAT

Facilitation in communities of practice is multifaceted and nuanced. It is often a role taken up by community leaders, and as a community matures, increasingly by other community members. Sometimes an outside facilitator or a member of the social learning team can be brought in.

WHY

Here we offers some brief guidelines for facilitation in communities of practice, whether provided by professionals or community members. All facilitators will have their own style, but it is useful to have some general guiding principles. We talk about the purpose of facilitation, the do's and don'ts of back-channel communication, and common facilitator challenges.

HOW

Here are some of the many tasks that a facilitator does in a community of practice:

- **Hold the space.** Your job is not to fill the space but to make sure it is there for the community to fill. If things wander off, lightly clarify and reinforce the purpose of the community. Help ensure all voices are heard, especially the voice of practice. Invite regular reflections and ensure that summaries are created.

- **Model a spirit of inquiry.** Try, as much as possible, to practice appreciative curiosity and positive leadership, focus on strengths more than weaknesses, optimism more than pessimism, support for thoughtfulness more than critique. Welcome questions as much as responses. But first of all, come in as a learner yourself. The best community leaders are the ones who feel an intense need for the community because they are “greedy” for the learning it can offer.
- **Value experience.** Honour people’s histories and contexts and give them credit for contributions that reflect their own experience. Crucially, this includes bringing questions and challenges from practice to the community. Look for opportunities to shine a light on member’s stories, whether they report successes, challenges, or outright failures.
- **Support people to make a difference.** Guide talk into action whenever the opportunity arises. When the possibility of action raises the energy level, build on it. Always look for opportunities to explore and articulate the potential value of participation for the prospect of making a difference.
- **Ensure follow-up.** In the earlier section, we suggested that a community of practice is a continuous learning loop. Members have busy lives and may not always remember all that needs follow-up. Keeping track and bringing things back helps complete the loops.
- **Invite a collective approach to facilitation.** Engage people, where possible, in sharing leadership of the community, particularly when dealing with contentious or difficult issues. Share responsibility for the quality of the space with participants. If someone complains, invite them to propose something. Be open to what could happen next, whether it follows your plan or not.

Back-Channel Facilitation

When people think about community leadership, they often have in mind the more public aspects of the community: the meetings, the website, the documents. While “front channel” is undoubtedly important, successful facilitators are generally very good at “back-channel” communication, connecting with people outside the “public arena,” for example, by handphone, over coffee, or via messaging tools. This back-channel leadership work helps them keep the pulse of the community. Knowing what members are struggling with and what they have accomplished helps them tune the learning agenda. Sometimes members need a little prodding to realize how useful it would be to bring their specific challenges and stories to the community. Starting with a private conversation can open the door. The table below provides some guidance for back-channel conversations in the form of do’s and don’ts.

Get to know your community by talking to members

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out the challenges that people are struggling with and probe what is bringing them value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about other people in a negative way or spread rumours • Get bogged down in complaints and negative thinking, listen to complaints and

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore where you can make more of their experience and energy and how they can help • Look for ways to weave an individual's story into group conversations while respecting confidentiality • Understand what keeps them engaged or keeps them from engaging in a non-judgmental way • Hear what out-of-the-box and realistic suggestions they have for the future | <p>recognize their legitimacy, but then channel them into action points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak or present yourself as doing things on behalf of members, rather, you are weaving, building on what they have to offer, and proposing ways they can engage with the community directly • Ask them for feedback on whether the community meets their needs as if it was a service, rather ask them how the community can create enough space for them to take initiative on things they would find useful • Make promises you can't keep |
|---|---|