

The University Project: Pro Action Cafe

Date: Saturday 15th October 2011

Time: 15:00 - 17:00

Location: Hub Westminster, London

Cost: Free event

Host: Liane Fredericks

Participants: 32 and lots of positive & grateful feedback

Blog: <http://univproject.posterous.com/encouraging-action-orientated-conversations-o>

Photos:

- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/andybroomfield/6247190826/in/set-72157627895791120/>
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/andybroomfield/6247192630/in/set-72157627895791120/>
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/andybroomfield/6247195854/in/set-72157627895791120/>

My Overall Debrief:

- *It was running alongside the rest of the unconference (participant generated 45 mins discussions) so participants had to choose to take the risk that they wouldn't get to host their project/idea as explicitly. This meant allowing them to write up their projects on a whiteboard prior to the circle. I still presented this as a 'first come first served' and acknowledged that there were keen hosts. So need to be clear about the constraints e.g. the call to host comes in the moment*
- *I was able to do a 2 hour one but most of the group had already spent half a day together, some could have talked for longer, I could have briefed the process & debriefed more clearly - maybe more visual reminders of how it works*
- *Before the opening I would have like to have started with an improv game that got them sharing/ aware of their listening.*
 - Open & share (15)*
 - Round 1 (20+10)*
 - Round 2 (20+10)*
 - Round 3 (15+15)*
 - Share & close (15)*
- *Be able to expand on the first two questions from memory or have it written up in large - to encourage those who are keen to race through to go deeper and get more out of each round*
- *"Feedback on the pro café event: it worked well – well done! - and most people I spoke to found it useful. It might have been an idea to emphasise a little more where it fitted into the overall structure of the weekend and how it related to the Univproj development. Newbies used to more boring/traditional ways of working (like me) might have welcomed a little more input on the café process itself. That said, the idea of the weekend seemed to be especially about giving everyone a voice around the theme of uniproj, rather than getting into any detailed specification or action planning."*

The Pro Action Café

...is a space for creative and action oriented conversation where participants are invited to bring their call - project - ideas - questions or whatever they feel called by and need help to manifest in the world.

The concept of Pro Action Café is a blend of 'World Café' and 'Open Space' technologies. It was first conceived by Rainer von Leoprechting and Ria Baeck in Brussels, Belgium.

The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in seeing with new eyes.

What is it Good For?

As a conversational process, it is a collective, innovative methodology for hosting conversations about calls, questions and projects that matter to the people that attend. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between café tables, cross-pollinate ideas, and offer each other new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, organisation or community.

As a process, it can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action in pursuit of good work. Pro Action Café can be used with a network of people and/or as a methodology for a specific group, organisation or community to engage in creative and inspirational conversation leading to wiser and more collectively informed actions.



The Invitation

Come with one's authentic questions, ideas, resources, project dreams and the best yet to be mentioned. Come as you are: a valued speaker, authentic listener, learner, eager student, teacher.

'We invite you:

- to **explore** your questions and find your quest underneath that guides your action.
- to **discover** the common patterns that sustain us and the value of our diversity.
- to **unlearn** what you thought to know and to understand what you do not know.
- to **engage** and relate with peers.
- to **develop** new meaning for your and our selves.
- to **co-create** your projects, actions, adventures, dreams, journeys.'

'It takes a whole village to raise a child'

General Flow

- You need 2 1/2 to 3 hours for a good Pro Action Café.
- Arriving time with open reception, warm-up, getting to know the others informally.
- Start with a check-in circle to connect to the purpose of the session and with each other. Take one minute's silence to ensure people 'land' - enjoy the quietness with each other and the space, and think about what your own question would be. The caller of the circle spends time articulating intention and invitation. If check-in has already taken place as part of a longer process, go straight to building the agenda.

- Invite participants step forward with their call and in that way ask the community for the help you need to move your project into action. Freely ask questions burning inside you and seek thoughts, ideas, resources from the people present. People with a call stand up, speak it and write it on the agenda that corresponds to a numbered café table.
- Count the amount of participants divide by 4 that gives the amount of callers with projects that can be worked. For example, 40 people you can have maximum 10 callers with each their project.
- **The principle is first come first serve.** If you have less callers add chairs to café tables but no more than 5 at each table. During this process each contributing participant (those who do not step forward) get to support 3 of the different projects.

Close your eyes for 2 min & consider your burning question/ call/ project/ problem

1. What's the question/call behind the problem or project?
2. What's missing?
3. What am I learning about me & my project?

When the agenda has been created invite the callers to go to their numbered café tables. Invite all other participants to think about which table they want to go to first.

There will be 3 rounds of conversation in café style of 20 to 30 minutes - each guided by a few generic questions to help deepen and focus the conversations. Participants are invited to join another table for the 2nd round, hosts remain at their table to host the 2nd and 3rd rounds. The host first briefs the new participants joining the table briefly (focus on essence not to take up too much time). Between each round create breaks for the contributors to have a drink, relax together and get ready to support another caller in their quest/ project.

No concrete timing given to participants for the individual rounds, but for the complete Pro Action Café (sense the noise level in the room to understand when one round is over - if the noise level goes up after a more quiet time a round might be over; rounds end naturally by people either speaking more noisily or getting off tables taking a break). The overall timing per round might be slightly different for all tables, the overall group timing (between rounds) is managed through breaks.

Round 1: What is the call behind the question, project or idea? – to deepen the need and purpose of the call, what does it mean to the host? What is the need for the host and for the world? Who are we serving?

- Short Break

Round 2: What is missing? – when the call has been deepened, explore what could make the project more complete and possible. What question has not been asked yet, what are perspectives or options not considered yet?

Allow for another break (maybe shorter depending on overall timing), hosts to remain at tables to think through what they've learned so far. When new travellers come back to the 3rd round after the break, the host can summarise what was learned in previous rounds and add in their own planned actions.

- Short Break

Round 3: What am I learning about i) myself ii) my project? What next steps will I take? - What help do I still need? – to help bring it all together and consolidate the learning into actions for all

participants.

This round is in 2 steps:

- First 20-25 minutes for the callers to reflect by themselves on the 4 questions above and harvest their key insights.
- Then a last round where 3 new contributors visit the tables to listen to the harvest of the caller, their learning, their steps, help needed – and then offer any insight and any further support.

Last step is to meet in the circle and invite the callers from each table to share answers to these 2 questions: **What am I grateful for? What are my next steps?** These can be written down as other participants gather chairs if time for reflection is needed.

If time allows, anyone can share their Café experience and the whole group reflects shortly on: **What applications do we see for practicing**

End the Pro Action Café with a collective gesture to appreciate the work done and the gifts offered and received.

Basic Checklist

- Create a web page for your café - directions, overview, attendance list / sign-up
- Design a poster (if the case) / principles of the cafe: listening, openness, harvesting
- Promote your café online & offline (Ning, LinkedIn, Meetup, Facebook, etc.)
- Set up a mailing list that you will grow with each cafe

- Ideally create a large circle in one part of the room and enough café tables with 4 chairs in another part (if the size of the room does not allow this, then participants will move the tables and chairs themselves as soon as the agenda is created).
- Decorate the space & tables (candles, etc. for cosy atmosphere – but make sure they do not interfere with the drawing, keep in mind the ergonomic of the space)
- Number tables
- Colour pens and markers & flipchart paper for each table
- The invitation and schedule written up in large
- Cafe etiquette written up in large
- Matrix with the right amount of sessions according to the number of tables you have
- A2 sheets for the callers stating the three questions
- The three questions expanded and written up in large/ for your reference - encouraging those who are keen to race through some guidance on how to get more out of each round
- Name tags
- Talking piece (to mark who's speaking)
- Snacks, tea & coffee

- What you bring to it besides these ingredients is your capacity as a host and to hold the space for the duration. Have fun and do good work together

Benjamin's Dagenhart's Reflections (in brief)

- **Vertical axis: What is the question or project behind the call?** - deepening into the quest and rising into the bigger story
- **Horizontal axis: What's missing?** - scoping the field, parallel emergence and knots in the net to weave around
- **Z-axis: What am I learning?** - evaluating the resources and investigating into the next steps from

there and making the whole thing a personal learning journey at the same time

Could also be described as: Deepening - Scoping - Consolidating

There is the notion of having a structure that allows for being fully in service of the purpose that the caller is carrying. Where you don't have to have a "balanced" conversation about everyone's projects so you are fully allowed to help AND learn so much about yourself in it...

It's also framed around 'stepping out'. It emphasises that we have an amazing pool of resources in our communities. We can support each other in reaching out strong and bright into the world. It broadens the scope from sharing inspiration, to community resources in general...whatever is needed to be in service of the highest potential. Together we have it.

References:

- <https://sites.google.com/a/pro-action.eu/pro-action-caf-/how-to-become-a-host/hosting-kit>
- <http://www.theworldcafecommunity.org/forum/topics/pro-action-cafe>
- <http://olifesparks.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/pro-action-cafe-singapore/>
- Art of Hosting Workbook: Leading Change with Authenticity and Courage through Conversations that Matter (Karlskrona, March 2011)

People	No. of callers = No. of tables
20	5.0
24	6.0
28	7.0
32	8.0
36	9.0
40	10.0
44	11.0