

# Pro Action Café

## Purpose and History

The Pro Action Café is a methodology for creative and inspirational conversation where participants are invited to share their questions (around projects – seed ideas etc.) and get input (deeper questions - knowledge – experience) from others.



The original concept of Pro Action Café is a blend from World Café and Open Space Technology.

It was invented by Ria Baeck and Rainer von Leoprechting to find a synergy between a peer-to-peer approach and action orientation, which could scale up to many participants if needed. It was and is successfully used in Brussels, more or less on a monthly basis. It is designed on a set of principles that reveal a deeper living network pattern through which we can co-evolve our collective future.

## What is Pro Action Café Good For?

As a conversational process, Pro Action Café is an innovative yet simple methodology for hosting conversations about questions and projects that matter to the people that attend. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work or community.

As a process, like in a World Café, it can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims. This means that during this event we participate in different topics of conversation.

As in Open Space Technology, topics are brought forward by participants themselves. There is no set agenda, only overall guiding questions, with the intention of deepening the learning process of all participants.

Pro Action Café can be used with an open invitation to a broad number of people and/or as a methodology for a specific group / organization / community to engage in creative and inspirational conversation. In this way it is a good tool for convergence and getting into actions.

## General Flow of a Pro Action Café

### Getting to know each other; break the ice

With an open invitation you get a lot of participants that don't know each other. In its original form we provided simple food for people coming straight from work. In this way conversations already started while eating. If used in a longer process with the same group this is of course not needed.



### Connecting with lingering questions – becoming present

Initially we provided some guided silence/relaxing time. At the end we asked participants if a question, project, issue, dream would come up that would benefit from input from others, here and now.

### Announcing the topics

People with a topic speak it (and write it on the agenda) and choose their table. We do that until tables are full (1 host per table + 3)

### Explaining the process

Although each table deals with a different issue, there are overall questions that guide the conversations of each table. Before announcing the first one, explain very well the Café Etiquette (cfr. World Café):

- . Invite participants to share from own experience,
- . using a talking piece for deep listening and intentional speaking
- . look for deeper patterns and common themes
- . invite to write and doodle on the tablecloths.

**3 Rounds of conversation:** 20 to 30 minutes each:

**Round 1:** *What is the quest behind the question?* Try to go deeper than the story provided by the table host.

**Round 2:** *What is missing?* Once the quest has been redefined, what makes the picture more complete? Broaden the picture. What areas haven't been covered?

**Round 3:** *What next steps will I take? What help do I need? What did I learn?*

Depending on time available, this 3rd round can be divided into 2 steps:

1. Some minutes for the topic owner to reflect on these 3 questions and harvest key insights with the help of others
2. Rest of the time is reflection time for all participants on what they learned during this process. This is intended to be more a process harvest than a content harvest, but also to become conscious that you learn in conversations, even if you didn't hold an announced topic.

Between each or some rounds create a 5 to 10 minutes break for people to have a drink and weave their conversations further.

### **Final feedback in circle**

At least the issue holders share what happened. Anyone can share any additional insights.

### **Materials and set-up:**

Like all good hosting, make a hospitable space. (see also World Café)

Ideally create a large circle in one part of the room and tables with 4 chairs in another part (if the size of the room does not allow this, then participants will move tables and chairs themselves as soon as the agenda is created).



Provide nametags if needed.

Dress the tables with flipchart paper, colour pens and markers, a talking/listening piece if appropriate.

Prepare the matrix for the agenda of the session if needed (not when you have less than 20 participants, so less than 5 topics)

*Adapted from the original description of the process, by Ria Baeck, edited by Andries De Vos and again by Ria Baeck. (June 2010)*