

# The Knowledge Cafe

Learning through conversation



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**Gurteen Knowledge**

# Business is a Conversation



# Business is a conversation

Business is a conversation because the defining work of business is conversation - literally.

And 'knowledge workers' are simply those people whose job consists of having interesting conversations.

David Weinberger  
The Cluetrain Manifesto



- Conversation is central to all that we do
- Its our job!

# Conversation is a meeting of minds

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits.

When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought.

Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.

Theodore Zeldin  
Conversation



- Theodore in an Oxford Historian
- Conversation is creative

# KM is about understanding



- Its about understanding & sense making
- Through conversation & storytelling

For all our knowledge, we have no idea what we're talking about.

We don't understand what's going on in our business, our market, and our world.

KM shouldn't be about helping us to know more. It should be about helping us to understand.

So, how do we understand things? It's through stories that we understand how the world works.

David Weinberger, The Cluetrain Manifesto

# Two forms of Conversation

“A mechanistic and unproductive exchange between people seeking to defend their own views against one another”

Debate  
or  
dialogue?

“A frank exchange of ideas or views on a specific issue in an effort to attain mutual understanding”



# Dialogue

- When we engage each other in **dialogue**
  - we enter into a conversation to **learn** from each other
  - rather than impose our views on the other.

The kind of conversation I'm interested in is one in which you start with a willingness to emerge a slightly different person.

Theodore Zeldin, Historian



# Principles of Dialogue

- Suspend assumptions, do not judge
- Observe & listen to one another – look for the meaning
- Welcome differences & explore them
- Allow taboo subjects to be raised safely

Dialogue is based on  
the work of the physicist  
David Bohm



# Summary

- Business is a conversation
- Conversation is creative
- Understanding is more important than knowing more
- Dialogue is the key to quality conversations

# The Gurteen Knowledge Café



# What is a Knowledge Café?

- A knowledge café is a means of bringing a group of people together to have an open, creative conversation on a topic of mutual interest to surface their collective knowledge, to share ideas and to gain a deeper understanding of the issues involved.



# What are the objectives of a Knowledge Café?

- To gain mutual understanding of a complex issue
- To gain a deeper understanding of other people's perspectives
- To gain a deeper understanding of one's own views
- To discover issues which need exploring

# What resources are needed?

- A group of people 20-30 people (or more!)
- A facilitator/speaker
- A room with tables & chairs - ideally round tables to seat about five people
- Time 60 – 90 minutes

# What's the process?

- Facilitator takes 10 minutes to introduce the Knowledge Café and the subject under discussion
- Purpose of the Knowledge Café is made clear
- Facilitator poses 1 or 2 key open ended questions
- Participants form into smaller groups of 5 or 6 to discuss the subject for say 30 minutes
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- The group re-assembles for an exchange of ideas as a whole for another 30 minutes

# What is the role of the facilitator?

- Facilitator need not be an expert
  - Nor disciplined in facilitation
  - A good listener and chairperson skills
- Facilitator should not take a lead in the discussions
- Should wander around and listen into the groups
- Should listen for problems and remind people gently of the rules of 'dialogue'

# What's the role of the individual?

- To see people with different views not as adversaries but as resources from which they can learn
- To enter into open conversation
- To listen more than speak
- To welcome differences
- To withhold judgment
- To avoid position taking
- To avoid being too politically correct



# How do the small groups work?

- Don't appoint a leader, chairperson or note taker
- Anyone can make their own notes if they wish
- Everyone is equal
- Engage as little or as much as you wish



# How does the whole group work?

- Objective is to hold a ‘group conversation’
  - Not reporting back to the facilitator!
- Facilitator plays a low key role
  - not the expert
  - helps facilitate the conversation



# What are the outcomes?

- Normally nothing is recorded
- Real outcomes are what you take away in your head
- A deeper understanding of the issue discussed
- A deeper insight into other people's perspectives
- A better appreciation of your own point of view
- Better position to make more informed decisions

# Where can I learn more?

- My website contains a lot of material
  - [www.gurteen.com](http://www.gurteen.com)
- The World Café
  - Book The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter
  - Website : [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

# Lets run a Knowledge Cafe



# The Challenge of Knowledge Sharing

What prevents us from sharing our knowledge more effectively?

How might we overcome these barriers?

# Questions & Discussion



[www.gurteen.com](http://www.gurteen.com)



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