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
Conversation

Theodore is an Oxford Historian
The birth of the Gurteen Knowledge Cafe

London, September 2002
Global Knowledge Cafés

- I have run them all over the world
- Some interesting cultural experiences
- Format always works
- People love to talk
- Starting to discover their power
Have you ever thought that your job was to have interesting conversations?
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 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
KM is about understanding

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
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
Conversation
Principles of Dialogue

- Suspend assumptions, do not judge
- Observe & listen to one another
- **Welcome differences & explore them**
- Allow taboo subjects to be raised safely
- Listen to your inner voice
- Slow the discussion
- **Search for the underlying meaning**

Dialogue is based on the work of the physicist David Bohm
What makes a good learning conversation?
Café Applications
Stories

• Int’l Relations & Security Network (ISN), Zürich

• Statoil, Norway

• ING Bank Academy, Amsterdam
The knowledge café has led to a dramatic improvement in inter-team dialog, collaboration & knowledge sharing.

Many internal work processes are now being overhauled for the better as a result of these knowledge cafes.

And we have seen an explosion of new ideas & initiatives on the part of staff at all levels of the organization.

Simply put, the knowledge cafe has empowered all our staff to speak up and take the initiative.

Chris Pallaris, Chief Editor
ISN, Zurich
Statoil, Norway

• To surface issues as a result of a merger

• Series of Cafés to bring retiring experts together with younger members to transfer knowledge

• Geophysicists
  – Discussion of preferred technologies
  – Exchange views on experiences
ING Bank Academy Research Alerts

- Gather articles & reports about relevant trends in management, banking & finance
- Broadcast “Research Alerts”
- If Alert deserves attention host a Knowledge Café
- Discuss implications, impact, risks, opportunities ...
Challenging Minds

• Education programme for mid-level managers

• Abandoned lecture style training

• Small Knowledge Café style conversations around specific topics

• Short videos downloaded from YouTube

• Carefully crafted reading materials developed by CoachingOurselves (Henry Mintzberg)
Gurteen Knowledge Café Process
What’s the process?

• Speaker makes a short presentation 10 – 15 mins
• Poses a trigger question
• Small group conversations at tables
• Three rounds 10 – 15 mins
• Whole group conversation in a circle 20 -30 mins
• Share actionable insights 20-30 mins
• Two hours in total
People need to be close enough to touch each other
Café Circles
Café Principles

- Relaxed, non-threatening, open conversation
- Close to a pub or café conversation
- No manipulation; no hidden agendas
- Everyone equal; no table leaders; no reporting back
- No one forced to do anything – OK to just listen
- OK to go off-topic
- No summarization or attempt to reach consensus
- Don’t let the capture of outcomes get in the way of the conversation (no flip charts)
Café Principles

• Relaxed, non-threatening, open conversation
• Close to a pub or café conversation
• No manipulation; no hidden agendas
• Everyone equal; no table leaders; no reporting back
• No one forced to do anything – OK to just listen
• Trust people to talk about what is important to them
• OK to go off-topic
• No summarization or attempt to reach consensus
• Don’t let the capture of outcomes get in the way of the conversation (no flip charts)
• No note taker
• Encourage people not to take personal notes
Café Outcomes

• Outcomes are what you take away in your head
• Deeper understanding of the issues discussed
• Deeper insight into other people’s perspectives
• Better appreciation of your own point of view
• Improved relationships
• Position to make more informed decisions
Knowledge Café
Café Conversation

Do you think you could improve your Learning Cafes by adopting some of the Knowledge Café principles and if so, how?
www.gurteen.com

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Henry of Germany giving a lecture at the University of Bologna in the 14th century
Not just chit-chat

The most widespread and pervasive learning in your organization may not be happening in training rooms, conference rooms or board rooms but in the cafeteria, the hallways and the cafe across the street.

Junita Brown & David Isaacs
Conversation is a learning technology

Conversation is the most powerful learning technology ever invented

Conversations carry news, create meaning, foster cooperation, and spark innovation.

Encouraging open, honest conversation through work space design, setting ground rules for conversing productively,

and baking conversation into the corporate culture spread intellectual capital, improve cooperation, and strengthen personal relationships.

Jay Cross, Informal Learning
Conversation is our most effective KM tool

Our most effective KM tool is conversation

The words we choose, the questions we ask, and the metaphors we use to explain ourselves, are what determine our success in creating new knowledge

as well as sharing that knowledge with each other.

Nancy Dixon
Common Knowledge
Café Purposes

- learn from each other
- clarify issues
- gain insight
- break down organisational silos
- break down inter-personal barriers
- surface issues & problems
- surface potential risks
- surface opportunities
- get buy-in for a course of action
- stimulate innovation
- build better relationships
- engage with our work
- share good practice
- develop our unique voice
- move to action
Meetings

• Break meetings into two

• To better understand the issues
  – Knowledge Café style
  – Divergent

• To make decisions and plans
  – Debate and politics allowed!
  – Convergent
Conversation Dinner

Knowledge Menu
à la carte

Living Knowledge: making the most of Knowledge Management in International Organisations

Event Dinner: Turin, 24 November 2011

European Training Foundation, Turin, Nov 2011
The mind isn’t a vessel to be filled, it’s a fire to be kindled.

Plutarch 46-120 AD
Greek Historian
David Gurteen

- Physicist
- Software Development Manager
- Independent since 1993
- Lotus Notes Consultant
- Website, Knowledge Letter, Knowledge Community since 2000
- KM consultant, facilitator, speaker, blogger, curator
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