



## 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 – Hot Topic Conversations

#### WHAT

##### **Hot Topic Conversations**

Well-functioning communities have lively discussions of all sorts of topics relevant to their domain, the definition of a key concept or term, the implications of a policy, the usefulness of a new tool, the significance of a new research finding. Domains are not static. Topics come and go (and come back), new issues emerge, new policies are created. When the community discusses such topics, members develop their understanding of their domain and the context in which their practice operates.

#### WHY

Hot topic conversations are a chance to hear a variety of opinions on a topic of shared interest. The point of collective sense-making efforts is not about achieving consensus. On the contrary, members of healthy communities have a diversity of opinions on various topics of importance to the domain. Exploring these opinions with or without resolution will raise the level of awareness of the domain for everyone.

#### HOW

Most of these conversations require minimum structure. The most important is to ensure that specific voices are not ignored or silenced, inadvertently or intentionally.

You also need to look out for soap boxes. Some communities become hostage to people with strong opinions or who tend to bring up the same gripes. These types of rants distract from a focus on practice and turn members off. Cutting the debate may be necessary. And focusing on issues of practice with concrete stories can give the conversation a more productive turn.

### Variations

**Rapid fire.** Some communities invite members to select a topic and they are given 5–10 minutes to introduce the topic and engage the group. This rhythm can be energizing and give everyone who cares to a chance to introduce a topic. This technique can also be a good way to promote a series of communities to potential new members, perhaps at an organization-wide event.

### Use Case:

#### Hot topics discussions in *Ignite*

We have adopted several techniques for hot topic discussions in *Ignite* communities of practice. Here are three that we have found particularly useful (with the reference for more detail):

**Lean Coffee** ([leancoffee.org](http://leancoffee.org)). To set the community's direction democratically and generate ideas to cover in future sessions, many *Ignite* communities regularly host "Lean Coffee" meetings. These are agenda-less meetings that invite the participants to rapidly build, vote on, and discuss a list of topics in a controlled, democratic, and time-boxed manner. For example, a community in Buenos Aires took the name literally and facilitated a lean coffee that included coffee and croissants. The goal was to come up with techniques on how to bring agile methodologies to life for community members. "If you want something good, bring food," they said!

**Guided Conversations** ([guidedconversations.org](http://guidedconversations.org)). The facilitator comes up with a starting set of questions around a single topic. Members then discuss these questions with a strict time limit of, say, 8 minutes. New questions that seem important can then be added to the list. The format is based primarily on informal conversation and requires little up-front preparation from the facilitators. It allows all participants to share their opinions and experiences. "The guided conversation enables a more collaborative environment where a message can be transmitted more effectively, because people engage with the session and improve it as they actively participate."—Mateo, Buenos Aires

**Lightning or *Ignite* Talks** ([ignitetalks.io](http://ignitetalks.io)—the name is a coincidence!). These are for rapid-fire sessions. A *Lightning talk* is a 3–5-minute presentation, where slides are *optional*. An *Ignite talk* is 5 minutes long and it must include 20 slides which advance automatically! These are fun because they move quickly and keep the audience's attention, with a lot of variety and engagement throughout. They can be daunting for presenters, but they're a great way to practice public speaking skills.

