How to Lead 1-on-1 Conversations with Your Community of Practice Members

Overview

Building community is all about building relationships and getting to know your members, their needs, desires and goals. Talking with current and/or prospective members should be something you do on a regular basis.

For this specific assignment, the main objective is to get to know the needs of your members.

Note: you might be thinking "why couldn't we just set up a meeting with 8-10 members for an hour, altogether, a focus group of sorts?" While there is certainly value in focus groups and such gatherings, 1-on-1 conversations provide extremely rich input and could go much deeper than you could ever go in a group setting. Furthermore, 1-on-1 conversations allow you to focus on the relationships as well.

How to Interview

Your time and your community members' time is precious. You want to make sure that you prepare well for your meeting to make the most of that time. Here's how.

1. **Schedule the 1-on-1:** schedule a 30-minute meeting and provide a brief background on why you want to meet. Then block 30 minutes after the interview to take process the notes and insights of what you learned.
2. **Identify 3-5 main questions:**
   a) You want to maintain a level of flexibility and ask deeper, follow-up questions, depending on how the conversation goes.
   b) Always ask open-ended, neutral questions.
3. **During the interview**
   a) Be empathetic, open-minded, curious and warm.
   b) Build a rapport with the community member.
   c) Follow up the plan, and yet remain flexible and ask probing follow-up questions as you deem fit.
4. **How to take notes:**
   a) Try not to take notes during the interview; you want to be present and mindful, listen actively and build a rapport with the community member.
   b) You may take very brief notes of key words / concepts.
   c) As soon as the conversation is over, and you've parted ways, take time to write down extensive notes and capture everything that you learned.
5. **After the interview**
   a) As mentioned above, take 20-30 minutes to write down notes. Ideally, store all notes in one single shared PPT, accessible to all members of the team and your coach.

b) Send a thank you note and/or follow up message (including any next steps and deadlines/timelines)

c) Synthesize key highlights and start preparing for the next conversation.

Interview Tips

1) Ask why!
2) Encourage stories
3) Look for inconsistencies…
4) Pay attention to non-verbal clues!
5) Don't be afraid of silence
6) Avoid leading questions and avoid suggesting answers to your questions

   Leading questions imply the answer you want: *"What features would you like to see in a phone app that helps you track your children?"*

7) Ask questions neutrally

   "Do you find it frustrating that a lot of people answer questions in our Yammer group that distract from the main focus?"… This is not a neutral question, what if the interviewee doesn't find it frustrating? Do they now feel like they answered the question incorrectly?

8) Don't ask binary questions: Binary questions can be answered in a word. Your goal is to create a conversation built upon stories. Too many binary questions can kill a good conversation.

   "How many people work with you?"

9) Don't ask non-questions

   "We've been told that …." "One of the things I'm trying to understand here is…"

   These are not questions; the interviewer is trying to tell the interviewee something. Decide in advance if there is something you must tell the community member.

10) Don't ask long, complicated questions (10 words max!)

Source

Developed by Dulce Govea Aguilar adapted from MIT Mastering Design Thinking training.

This document is part of the Communities4Dev CoP Toolkit featuring practical resources to help you develop impactful Communities of Practice in the development sector. Access the full CoP Toolkit.