

Designing Meetings that Facilitate Knowledge Sharing

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It is something of a paradox that most conferences put on to promote knowledge management in an organization provide little opportunity for participants to share or exchange their own knowledge. Too often they are a series of PowerPoint presentations by speakers with long breaks for "networking" among the participants. There is, however, a way to design conferences and workshops so that attendees have much greater opportunity to build their personal networks and where knowledge is actively and intentionally shared among peers.

The same principles that promote knowledge sharing in an organization can be used to design of the conference. Common Knowledge Associates works with the planning committee to design the events, space, and facilitation that cause the conference to live out the principles it is promoting. Those principles include:

- Experts are used to stimulate thinking, not to provide answers
- People learn when they talk; when they put new ideas into their own words
- The topics of conversation need to be real work issues - issues that participants are invested in.
- Conversation groups need to be small enough so that ideas can be challenged and reasoning explored.
- Multiple perspectives are critical; based on different experiences and different perspectives
- People ask questions and reveal problems when they establish trusting relationships
- Relationships are built eyeball to eyeball - how space is designed is critical

How Common Knowledge Associates work with conference planners

- Keynote speakers and presenters need the freedom to “do their thing” but there are small changes that can turn a didactic session into an interactive one. We work with the keynote speakers to help them weave those changes into their existing presentations.
- We help to identify critical issues from the field that need to be explored and shared in the meeting. It is not just talking - but talking about “what matters.”
- How the day begins is critical. Getting participants talking early on about issues of interest and concern sets the tone for active participation.
- We select from a store of processes such as Open Space Technology, Appreciative Inquiry, Knowledge Cafes, and Future Search, to involve the whole group.
- How the space is designed for each session is a critical element in whether people view themselves as passive listeners or active participants.

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- We think about how lighting influences the participants
- We design panel presentations to involve the audience in focusing the panel's interaction with each other on the most relevant issues, rather than the panel being a series of mini-speeches.
- We use Social Network Analysis to determine where there are existing communities that can be enhanced by the meeting.

Social Network Analysis



Who do you get important knowledge from?