

## DESIGN OF A CONVERSATION

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### INTRODUCTION

Arne Collen

This paper is a group report, which represents the summary of our conversation. It consists of six sections.

After general discussion about the topic of designing Fuschl type conversations, we hit upon the metaphor of Lighting the Fire. It became the central metaphor for our group process. The first section represents our exploration of the metaphor in regard to starting up a genuine conversation.

This exploration led us to consider enthalpy. The second section represents an extended examination of the metaphor concerning energy combustion.

The third section epitomizes our conversation to extend the metaphor further to include an initiation ritual to the group, we called Talking Sticks.

We subsequently discussed the concepts comprising Banathy's map of 'Design and Conversation' and recast in part the relations among the concepts, in light of our conversation. The fourth section presents the results, the Conversation Map ideally connected to a design and conversation journey.

The last portion our conversation to be reported involves our interest in sustaining the conversation. Once the fire is lit, if the fire is not to go out, it must be passed. Passing the Fire describes the continuation of the conversation.

### LIGHTING THE FIRE

Gordon Rowland

Getting a conversation group was taken as analogous to light up a fire. The metaphor proved to be rich and triggered many ideas and relationships. Below are a set of steps for lighting a fire related to steps that might be taken in getting a conversation started. Following that we possible meaning of some elements of the metaphor ad some possible guidelines for the metaphor's use.

#### Begin the Conversation - Lighting the Fire

##### A. Prepare

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Share input papers; bring experiences, ideas.           | 1. Gather seasoned wood.                        |
| 2. Celebrate ideas & accomplishments                       | 2. Thank the tree                               |
| 3. Release, open up to change; acknowledge strength/power/ | 3. Acknowledge the tree's role in life (cycles) |

energy to be gained through  
change

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. Break apart formal constructions (e.g. from input papers); offer pieces of ideas for possible future constructions (things we really care about) (e.g. constructs linked to situations)</li><li>5. Offer shreds of ideas (things we care about much) (i.e. words)</li><li>6. Layer ideas, arrange them in a loose, tentative framework</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. Split wood; gather kindling</li><li>5. Crumble up newspaper</li></ol> <p>Stack kindling above newspaper, leaving space for newspaper to get in to burn</p> |
|---|---|

B. Ignite

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Find and ask a powerful trigger questions</li><li>2. Ask the question of the ideas</li><li>3. Take energy from the (physical) environment; accept necessity of ineffecting at the outset; leave open</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Light a match</li><li>2. Hold match near papers in several places</li><li>3. Let the air rush in to fan the flames</li></ol> |
|---|---|

C. FEED

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lay issues of substance at the table; offer them as sources of energy (not to bar progress)</li><li>2. Turn to one another; begin the conversation</li><li>3. Enter 'liminal state' in dynamic spacetime; seek elegant patterns</li><li>4. Monitor process but stay out of its way</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Add logs when the kindling is burning sufficiently</li><li>2. When logs are burning okay, shut the stove door (gain radiant heat rather than allowing to escape up chimney)<br/>When main chamber is hot enough, switch to double chamber (to burn more efficiently)</li><li>4. Let it burn; add wood periodically</li></ol> |
|---|---|

Concepts (w/a First go at meaning; could go deeper into types, characteristics, meanings in the future) - (positive & negative)

log - Knowledge we bring and offer; constructions  
of mind

stick/

- kindling - Parts of log (knowledge) separated from whole (of person's knowledge)
- paper - Expressions, representation of knowledge (in languages & in media); artificial
- match - Trigger, e.g. trigger question
- smoke - Waste given off from combustion; purifies (conceptual waste)
- oxygen - Resource available from environment & used in combustion
- persons - Those who construct, light, feed, benefit from fire; they know how to build fires and to use them; do so for purposes
- flame - Visible artifact of combustion
- heat - A form of energy necessary for survival
- environment - The larger system {source of inspiration}
- bark - Protects; needs to be removed in order to burn well
- fire chamber - The place where conversation takes place (conceptual space?)
- combustion - Combining resources and ideas; combining resources and ideas; communication/sharing of inter\*\* and negotiation of meaning)... necessary for learning of patterns)
- draw (of chimney) - The pull to create
- chimney - The channel for removal of waste
- stove - Room, Asilomar, Hotel Seewinkle (physical space)
- door - Constraints, limits, frames, combustion
- ash - Waste from combustion
- air flow about the room(s) - The expression of needs of \*\* by the environment
- radiator - Transmission of energy to the environment
- damper - Regulates combustion by controlling introduction of new resources
- sparks - Ideas that escape (expelled burnup particles)
- battered flies - Virtual intelligent sparks, toasted or schtics(?); catalyze, facilitate combustion by sipping in and out, around, underneath, above fire.

Some Associated Properties of the Metaphor (Guidelines/heuristics?)

- \*Lighting the fire: Intentional act of triggering destructions of matter (existing \*\*) to gain energy; in history transformation; need to make this clear/acknowledge.
- \*Paper->stick->log: Move from artificial to natural; reconnection; participants can make offerings only in stages; otherwise shut(?) out fire or excessive waste.
- \*Splitting the woods: Need to be willing to break relationships, to unlearn; requires trust in other people and in process (or at least willing(?) suspension of disbelief); openness to risk.
- \*Single stick/log difficult to light, offers little heat; need to climb

successive energy hills - no spontaneous(?) combustion.

\*The group is not ready for explosive force (match) at the beginning.

\*Carry 'Olympic flame' rather than coals.

\*Woods in its season will dry faster, be \*\*\*(?) to split, burn better.

\*Different types of wood, different pieces of wood will burn differently - do not expect are fire to behave(?) as mother(?)

\*A wet log will burn well, may be even better (i.e., with greater energy output) than dry, if enough heat has been developed in the chamber.

#### ENTHALPY MODEL

Gordon C. Dyer

To reinforce the metaphor of fire-lighting, Dyer then introduced the concept of ENTHALPY to relate to the stimulation, development and excitement (through synergy) of a successful conversation. Enthalpy is a concept of thermo-dynamics often used by chemical engineers. It refers to the energy content of the ingredients and products of a chemical reaction. The difference in enthalpy between ingredients and products is crucial. If the enthalpy change is negative then energy-heat or light- is released by the reaction (we say it is exothermic). Conversely, energy may be required to be added to the ingredients - eg by boiling them in a flask, in order to sustain the reaction (we say then that the reaction is endothermic).

Figure 1 shows the effect when two chemicals are brought together and react spontaneously. This is a special case of an explosive exothermic reaction. In this case the effect could be disastrous!

Life would be very difficult if materials around us spontaneously in this way eg if the wood of the chair we sit on suddenly caught fire by combustion with the oxygen in the air. Fortunately, Nature protects us from such possibilities. Figure 2 shows how.

Before a molecule of the wood of the chair (which contains carbon and hydrogen) can react with oxygen molecules in the air, sufficient energy must be added to overcome an 'energy hill' preventing the reaction. However, once the reaction is started, much more energy than that input is then released. This will then provide the 'energy hill' needs for other molecule to react. This effect then leads to a synergistic chain-reaction, provided the molecules can get in contact.

So, back to our fire-lighting. The match we offer up does not contain sufficient energy to overcome the energy hill levels of the sticks or logs but it will cause localized burning of paper. Because the paper is thin and has air holes the flame will influence many molecules, and thus energy release from the paper as it overts to carbon dioxide and water will be

rapid. When the energy release from the combustion of the paper reaches a particular level the energy hill of the molecules of the kindling sticks will be surpassed, giving further rapid release of energy. As this energy release builds we get to a point when through synergy or chain reaction the energy available becomes sufficient to overcome the larger energy hill of the log(s).

We have assumed dry wood in lighting our fire (ie seasoned and experienced conversationalists). Wet or green wood will burn in our fire but will take time to catch. The moisture prevents oxygen from entering the pores of the wood to facilitate the reaction. Green wood will burn will burn when the energy of the fire is sufficiently high. It will also crackle and sparkle representing the input of new people with new ideas into the conversation.

## TALKING STICKS

Uli Schwammler

### Conversation Practices

In native American culture talking sticks are used

1. to organize speaker and listener
2. to speak from the heart and expressing a deeper truth directed towards the center of the circle and above the Great Spirit.

Even used as a simple formal device it becomes a powerful tool for conversation. The talking sticks are placed in the middle of a group. A person who wants to speak takes the stick and use the space and time to talk or be silent at any length until he/she decides to place the stick back into the middle. If another person wants to speak it will be his/her turn to hold the stick and speak.

### Design of a Rituals Using Talking Sticks

Participants of a forming group are asked to go for a nature walk and let themselves found by a (talking) stick. The notion is that nature offers us a gift and a stick may call us as we wander around in an open, receptive and present mode.

People come back into the group and silently explore/mediate their own talking stick. They may discover meaningful features between the stick and themselves.

In the next phase people use their stick in telling their story how the stick came to them, and may disclose deeper meaning.

Finally people are asked to place their sticks in the middle and explore and use other people sticks using the original device (see above).

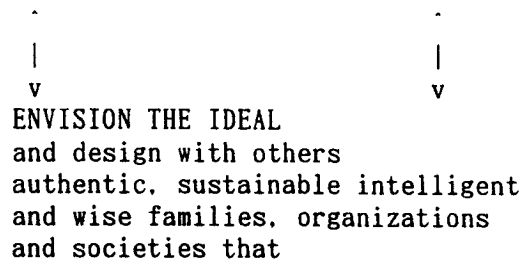
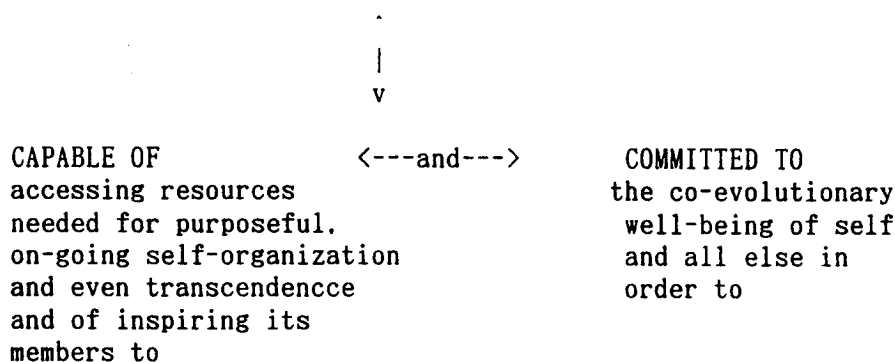
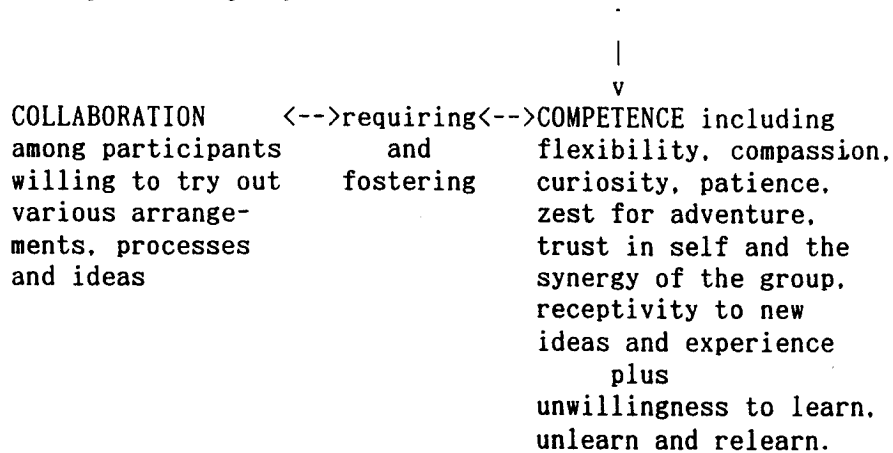
Rituals can be part of a self designing process of a group. They may represent option fields and a landing space in conversation groups. They can be designed in many creative forms using different modalities. A stick can be carved, decorated or painted. We may reserve the use of sticks for

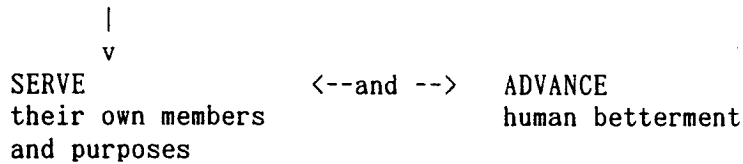
conversations to talk about oneself., etc. Instead of sticks, other objects are possible, such as feathers or stones. In order to align the group members of a self-seeking purpose system they blend in a safe way the individual and the group process.

CONVERSATION MAP  
 Tad Goguen Frantz

IDEALLY...

DESIGN CONVERSATION is a knowledge and experience based methodology for disciplined inquiry.





PASSING THE FIRE  
Yoshihide Horiuchi

Several issues were discussed as future research tasks on the conversation. For passing the Conversation torch to its 'customers,' especially to the non-systems types out there, research on such matters as below would help.

Tasks are listed in an outline format. 'Choices' for each research tasks are listed as examples of possible answers, rather than multiple choices.

Target 'Customers' of the Conversation

Who are the customers of the Conversation? This question is related to the desirable competence of the Conversation participants as described below, as well as on the format and other fundamental aspects of the Conversation.

Dimension I

- a. The participants of the Conversation
- b. Potential and current participants of the Conversation
- c. The general public.

Other Dimensions: See the participants competence below.

Participants: Competence

What kinds of qualifications are desirable for the participants? Is it possible to organize a Conversation with the participants who have no formal training in systems thinking?

The Group identified two schools of thoughts on this matter: (1) 'Why not' approach. Whoever is interested in systems notion, and eager to work on it, can successfully participate in a Conversation; (2) 'Why bother' approach. In order to keep the fire burning at a Conversation, certain competence qualities are desirable, as listed below.

1. Extent of understanding of systems approach
  - a. Systems types;
  - b. Basic understanding of systems approach
  - c. Possession of some systems sense
  - d. Interests in systems notion
  - e. No requirements of systems knowledge.

Our Group considers d. above is the desirable competence, which many people without formal training on systems approach

already have which the Group considers.

2. Command of language of the Conversation
  - a. Speaking/Listening and Reading/Writing.
  - b. Speaking/Listening only.
  - c. Reading/Writing only.

The Group regards a. above is desirable, since this is a Conversation, rather than a conference of paper presentations, or just a social talk.

3. Characteristics/General abilities
  - a. Open-mindedness.

How we can measure this quality, is an intriguing research question.

- b. Capacity to develop critical thinking.
- c. Concern about contributions to mankind.
- d. Appreciation of problems of complexity.
- e. Openness to group process.
- f. Any requirements for schooling, such a minimum of elementary school education. Or can children before school age have a Conversation among themselves, if the Conversation is carefully designed?

The Group reached a consensus that the knowledge of systems terminologies is a luxury among the potential participants.

4. Background

- a. Experience of group works needed?

5. Expectations

- a. Concrete goal for the Conversation.
- b. Procedural goal for the Conversation.
- c. No particular goal.

These research questions can be summarized as: 'Who is an ideal candidate for the Conversation?'

#### Cultural Factors

The Conversation concept stands on the assumption that the participants converse. What if half of the participants come from the culture where people do not express their feelings but keep them to themselves?

Examples of cultural attributes to consider are listed below, however, these are illustrative, rather than exhaustive. Also, some questions are interrelated.

1. People do not want to lose face, and avoid making making mistakes in public (in the Conversation).
2. Hierarchical society, where people are not supposed to openly challenge opinions of the people (participants) of higher status.
3. People are not trained to be expressive, where they keep their opinions to themselves, or, maybe, they feel secure to follow orders.



4. Passive culture, where people take life as a fate, "fate-driven pessimism," rather than actively design their own future.
5. People come from a result-oriented society, where the process does not essentially count, and outcome is the performance criteria.

#### Research Questions Related to Spreading the Conversation Culture

1. Composition of the Participants:  
Ratio of newcomers versus participant who have the Conversation experiences.  
Is it possible to have a successful Conversation with newcomers only? Is it more productive to have a Conversation with experienced Conversationists as the core of the participants?  
The Group felt that it is essential to have newcomers to a Conversation since they provide fresh winds.
2. Conversation with a rather detailed structure versus more open structure. This issue is interrelated with issues 1 and 3.
3. Measurement of the success of a Conversation.  
The participants in a certain conversation Group usually has a clear idea about the performance of the Group. It is time to operationalize such feelings, in order to spread the conversation culture to general public outside of the systems specialists.

#### AN OBSERVATION ON THE CONVERSATION WITH AN 'ASIAN PERSPECTIVE'

If we call an attitude of naturalism in the sense that things 'happen' rather than they 'are caused by people,' a question 'arises' regarding the start of the Conversation fire.

Do the participants actively 'Start up a fire,' or they prepare the environment in such a way that 'Fire starts naturally?' If the latter is the case, the participants help producing a critical point for the fire to start.

If the former is the case, necessary system 'components' to start a fire can include items produced by people, such as input papers and triggering questions. Physical environment, such as the room layout, temperature, noise-level, etc. would formulate a 'causal environment' for the Conversation.

If the latter is the case, the causal environment above has a larger role to play, compared to the former thinking.

#### FINAL NOTE

The rich and productive results of applying a metaphor highlight the importance of metaphor in human conversation. Our use of metaphor enabled us to join our conceptual schemas and ideas with our many experiences. The

metaphor also served as a means through which every member of our conversation could contribute, feel part of the group, and develop the conversation.

#### REFERENCES

Rodriguez Delgado, Rafael, and Banathy, Bela H. International Systems Sciences Handbook. Madrid: Systemic Publications, 1993.

<Other references?