Hosting Difficult Conversations
COMPLEX
Consisting of many different and interacting parts. The relationships between the parts in a complex system are dynamic and always emerging.

What are the characteristics of complex environments?

• Agents or objects interacting
• Feedback loops
• Emergent phenomenon
• Pockets of order
• Patterns within patterns

Complex environments can be surprising and even volatile.
The Brawl

The story of one of the most memorable fights on TV.
OVERVIEW

This Deep Dive is part of the College of Behavioral Health Leadership’s 2017 Convening

Key Considerations:

- Why do we even need facilitators?
- What’s required to be an effective facilitator?
- How important is design to the experience and the outcomes you seek?
- How can you remain engaged without becoming a distraction in the room?
- What happens when we convene diverse groups around difficult conversations?

Facilitating difficult conversations is both art and science.
Asia-Montana Energy Summit

A facilitated conversation about energy with leaders from the US and Asia
Truly BAD Conversations
NEW TONIGHT
STANDING UP TO TRUMP: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS TELL ALL
Tom Tancredo | (R) Former US Congressman

TONIGHT SPOT
SPECIAL REPORT: MELANIA TRUMP
1 21 44

LIVE
4:38 PM PT

ERIN BURNETT
FACILITATION AS A DESIGN CHALLENGE

Accept the task of facilitating difficult conversations as an immense design challenge

Essential Design Elements

- People
- Places
- Problems

When conversations go poorly, was it by design?
Truly BAD Conversations

By Design
COMMON CONVERSATIONAL MOMENTS

Complex conversations often fluctuate in and out of various stages or what we call “moments”

The 7 Conversational Moments

1. Confusion
2. Contention
3. Conversation
4. Connection
5. Cooperation
6. Collaboration
7. Creation

Learn to recognize and then to manage these moments.
COMMON CONVERSATIONAL LANDMINES
Designing conversations so they avoid these common landmines

The 7 Conversational Landmines

1. Purpose
2. Interests
3. History
4. Risk
5. Identity
6. Institutions
7. Culture

When the conversation stalls, it’s likely because you hit one of these.
Common Conversational Landmines

Beware of these 7 hot spots

- **Purpose**: Different reasons for existence lead us to serve different constituencies.

- **Interests**: Different incentives lead us to pursue our interests through competing agendas.

- **History**: Current perceptions are often shaped by historical events, such as past battles and seminal moments.

- **Risk**: Acceptable levels of risk and corresponding thresholds for action often don’t overlap.

- **Identity**: Different roles, hierarchies, and scripts create divided loyalties and make it hard to form a collective identity.

- **Institutions**: Formal and informal rules of engagement vary, making it hard to agree on a shared process for action.

- **Culture**: Different norms, symbols, codes, language and narratives make it difficult to communicate.
EFFECTIVE FACILITATORS

Throughout the conversation, the facilitator has 6 essential responsibilities

The 6 Essential Duties and Responsibilities

1. Accuracy
2. Unity
3. Tempo
4. Phrasing/Framing
5. Experience
6. Balance

Facilitation is about gracefully negotiating agendas and creating conditions where people can achieve the seemingly impossible.
How You Can Learn To Manage Complex Environments

Before the conversation

**Forecasting**
Generate assumptions about future events or situations that may surface during the conversation.

**Scenario Planning**
Be prepared for a number of likely scenarios. Develop action plans based on the emergence of specific events or situations.

**Ecosystem Mapping**
Organize all of the information you have into a visual portrait that depicts the key forces and their influence on you and your environment.

**Road Mapping**
Generate in your mind or in writing a sequence of actions or steps designed to achieve the goal or to reach the desired destination.
How You Can Learn To Manage Complex Environments

During the conversation

The Indicators of Stress
Use a “cheat sheet” to identify the various signs of stress, including the physiological, emotional, psychological, and social indicators of stress.

Moments of Reflection
Take time to stop, look, and listen. What have you just experienced and how was that experience different from previous ones?

Trend Spotting
Using a wide variety of sources, identify the trends and patterns that are emerging in the conversation. Which ones are healthy and which ones are unhealthy?

Time Lapse Portraits
Use time lapse portraits to better understand before and after states; take mental snapshots of verbal and non-verbal states over time.
How You Can Learn To Manage Complex Environments

During the conversation

Open Windows
Look for windows of opportunity you can exploit in ways that promote and encourage deeper conversation.

Reduce the Contrast
Through your language, reduce the contrast between the existing reality and the ideal and future possibility.

Mobilization Triggers
Identify the emotional, psychological, and other triggers that are catalysts for action.

Grab the Bull Horn
Use your role to keep the conversation focused on what you believe to the “right” issues.
How You Can Learn To Manage Complex Environments

During and after the conversation

Stay Optimistic
Learn how to suppress negative and pessimistic thoughts and to replace them with positive and optimistic ones.

Walk, Don’t Run
Engineer a sequence of small victories that cumulatively give participants more confidence to take bigger risks.

Cultivate Social Connections
Identify pre-existing social connections and work to establish new social connections when possible.

Find a Buddy
Don’t go it alone. Find a buddy who is willing to join you on the journey.