Diverse Voices Essentials

Essentials of Chairing 2 - Event summary

See also Chairing 1 – the pro-tip sheet.
Both are from a 27 Nov 2024 event hosted by Muse; see participants below.

Chairing scenario – a hard day at the office…

Abiola Ogunsami was invited to give chairing a go; what he didn't know was that mentors Ru Anwar, Gillian Harrison, and Shannon Conway had been planted to act as particularly difficult participants, including a panellist who overshared, a belligerent panellist, and a spiky audience member. This fed the discussion on ***how to navigate tough chairing situations:***

- Consider how you can move the conversation on politely, pick up on ideas shared and invite comment from other panellists
- Avoid highlighting your own views/bias – instead use your position as a chair to bridge the gap between participants and find a middle ground
- Your language is important, avoid negative language and instead focus on how you can be diplomatic
- Be careful not to dismiss opinions or views, especially when these are polarising – instead consider the pockets of truth/interesting points which you can use to steer the conversation
- Avoid singling out panellists and instead consider how audience questions could apply to the multiple panellists

Lisa then showed us how she might handle the situation. Top tips from the group included:

- Provide a warm welcome and intro to the topic and the panellists
- Set protocols with panellists just before the session, e.g. there is someone timing for us; if I say "Thank you" that means you're over and I'm going to cut you off.
- Politely interrupt panellists if they are running over and cutting into other panellists' or discussion time – e.g., "I'm going to pause you there" "we'll come back to that point"
- Ask panellists for specific examples and/or to clarify challenging points they've raised to help unpick their viewpoint
- Bring points highlighted by one speaker to another to help facilitate the conversation
- Flag to the audience when and how Q&A will happen, so they can prepare
- Don't be afraid to pause or stop the discussion if it becomes too controversial or provocative
- Host Phil Marsden shared that in his experience the best panels are conversational and candid. To enable this, it's important to build trust between the chair and panellists. Pre-meeting and connecting with panellists can help.
- Gillian – avoid over-prepping, especially as a chair. You don't need a script, instead the session should be conversational and engaging, which is difficult to do if you feel constrained by a tight script.
- Mel Cooke highlighted how it is important to conclude the discussion. You should look to summarise the discussion with a final balanced viewpoint. Remain positive and if possible highlight a key lesson learnt.
- Danny Crump emphasised the importance of movement, for presentation and to help calm your own nerves and physically release tension in your body.

Abiola wrapped the scenario by sharing his experience chairing a conference promotion event – organisers shared questions and speaking points and invited him to arrive early to check the room, tech and do a bit of a run-through. This helped him to feel much more prepared for the session. You can ask for things like this!

Speaker Showcase

We heard and saw four of the 3-slide, 3-minute presentations we include in every event for presenting and feedback practice:

- "Mentorship and work experience for young people" from Abiola Ogunsami
- "Lessons about Inclusivity from Cat Care" from Edgar To
- "Female Genital Mutilation in the UK" from Dr Adebola Ogungbadejo; and
- "Productivity and Wellbeing" from Daniel Sexton.

Top presenting tips from the showcase:

- Sharing your personal experiences is powerful. It helps engage the audience with the topic and can help you feel more comfortable as a speaker
- Audience participation can be helpful – ask them about their own experiences or thoughts, try a hands-up poll. It's engaging for them and humanises it for you.
- Mo Shirazi – You can think about your presentation as 3 chapters – an introduction to yourself and the topic; the main content of your presentation; then a summary of what you've talked about and key takeaways or call to action.
- Ensure text on your slides is big enough and that your visuals are accessible for all viewers/listeners – see these tips on colours & text from University of Warwick.
- Consider the balance of text and graphics/images on your slides – too much text can be distracting; SOME can be useful to visually summarise your key points
- If you lose your train of thought or have a mental block - remember no one in the audience knows your exact 'script' or what you had planned to say next – take your time to collect your thoughts and don't be afraid to look at your slides for a prompt

Participants (final)
Bold are mentors - on the day and possibly longer term. Have a conversation!
Green presented a Speaker Showcase – congrats!

Ru Anwar	**Partner**	**Trowers & Hamlins**
Shannon Conway	**Co-Founder**	**Picture This**
Melanie Cook	Communications Business Partner	Manchester City Council
Danny Crump	**Director of Urbanism**	**Layer Studio**
Gillian Harrison	**Senior Associate**	**Levitt Bernstein**
Phil Marsden	**Managing Director, North West**	**Muse**
Harriett Noall	District Centres Project Manager	Manchester City Council
Abiola Ogunsami	Graduate Development Manager	Muse
Dr Adebola Ogungbadejo	Director	CIC Change Agent
Omer Osman	Associate	Cartwright Pickard
Sarah Richards	Senior Consultant	Hatch
Ruy Scalamandre	Research Consultant	Hatch
Daniel Sexton	Associate	Trowers & Hamlins
Mo Shirazi	Estates Manager	CBRE
Edgar To	Graduate	University of Sheffield
Collette Hayton	Programme & Event Officer	Future of GM
Lisa Taylor	Executive Director	Future of GM