Community Workshop: Problems

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Now we are going to talk about what can go wrong and how to best deal with it.



As the saying goes...

Think, what are the worst things that can happen and devise strategies for dealing with them.

Social Contract: Don't Post Illegal Stuff Don't Be a Jerk.

We covered the Terms and Netiquette already, but it boils down to these two things.

Realities of Our Platform:

- We do not verify real name identity
- If you kick someone out, they can come back in under a different ID
 - "private" messaging issues

So what to do?

Create a group atmosphere where bad behavior stands out.

Insist that sweeping statements and generalities are always backed by facts, documents, reliable quotes, etc.

Trolls hate to be ignored.

Things That Can Go Wrong: (partial list)

- Ad Hominems
 - · 'isms'
- Not enough participation
- Someone talks too much
- Uploading big texts and files
- Copyright violations (Article 13)
- Ad hominems are an obvious problem, but usually fairly easy to minimize.
- More tricky are various 'isms' as in sexism, racism, religious intolerance and such.
- Uploading tons of garbage isn't common but can occur, either by someone who doesn't know better and sometimes for mischief.
- Someone talks too much. Most systems see 10% of the users doing most of the talking. The good news is that Discourse truncates posts that are long so you only see part of it.
- People don't talk enough. No energy in the discussions.
- Trolls. Best to ignore them as much as possible. We can toss them and sometimes they stay gone. But they can come back and do it all over again.
- Uploading copyright violations. This may become more risky for the provider due to Article 13 in the new E.U. rules that assigns responsibility to the provider rather than the user, which is how it is now.



As much as we all want happy productive lives in community with others, negativity and conflict are inevitable. It is part of the human condition. However, it does not have to dominate any group or person.

The best way I know for dealing with negativity is simply don't spread it thoughtlessly or in a way that makes someone else feel worse if it isn't helpful.

I don't mean gloss it over or be fake happy.

I mean trying to separate what you want to say from the emotion that might be driving you to say it.

It's hard enough to have a truthful discussion about difficult issues between people without making it worse by projecting the full load of whatever negative feelings you have. Part of mindfulness is recognizing when you are in a negative frame of mind and not letting it go too far.

Again, this is modeling good behavior. And if you demonstrate it, you can ask others to do the same.

But what about when someone else is being negative, or when they react to your negativity in an equal or greater negative way?

Everyone knows how it feels to be on the receiving end of an angry rant. Everyone gets in a bad mood sometime. We complain, gripe, see the 'glass as half empty.'

What do you do to straighten it out?

Again, try to separate the informational content of what someone is saying from the emotion of it. They might be saying something valuable. Then it becomes more effective to ask someone to tone it down.

Unless they are screaming at you. At those times when the ratio of "signal to noise" is way too far on the noise end of the



Authority is earned, recognized by others and endorsed by the people. Authority can work with a light touch.

Authoritarian is imposing rules and structures more for the sake of reinforcing that authority than for constructively moving forward. Authoritarian uses a heavy hand.

Most social structures have a form of authority chain. Most online systems are managed by a system's owners.

There are times when a situation calls for quick decisive action and you don't have time to "hash things out." Make sure when you "grab the wheel" that you know where you are going. I have encountered people online behaving abusively and made the decision to cut them off. However, in the course of talking online to people day after day, I, like everyone else, am not right all the time. And back in the earlier days when I was younger and less experienced that was especially true. It would have been harmful to my goals and to the benefit of the group if I acted like I was right all the time just because I was the manager of the place. Sometimes you are not correct and someone may point it out to you, either privately or in public. Admitting your mistakes and striving not to repeat them actually builds more of the trust that you need to do your work.

Let arguments run their course.

Make sure there are other things to talk about.

Some arguments can seem to go on forever. You usually can't stop the ones who love to argue, unless it gets too personal or full of "isms"

So instead make sure that those who don't want to go round and round endlessly, have substantial other discussions going. They die down better when there is less attention paid.



Meaning, you want people to be civil and you may have to remind people of it, but if you try to micro-manage conversations to make sure they are always polite, people may tire of your management style.

Think of it like some sports where they say they are not contact sports but some is allowed, like basketball.

A Moderator Can:

- suspend, block or delete a user
- delete, edit or move a comment
 - all users can flag comments

Moderators have a lot of power in Discourse. (That of course leaves a lot of room for abuse..) It is our policy as overall managers of these discussions that you not delete a user or edit their remarks without consulting Noemi or me. To some, editing a comment is worse than suspending them, so be very careful, as in maybe you will never do this.

Flagging a comment is a way of a user alerting management to a comment or behavior they think needs attention.

Crossing the Red Line: Sometimes You Have to Toss Someone Out

Much thought is required as to where to place that red line.

Let us talk about where to put it. I say ad hominems and unsubstantiated criticisms of individuals, groups, nations, etc. trigger a public mention to not do that. Second time a private warning plus another public admonition, and third time gone. Maybe a fourth time, but only if the circumstances seem to justify it.

Make sure you think carefully about all the consequences of doing so, and make sure you have clearly stated Terms of Service that you can point to if someone objects (and there often is).

Also, tossing someone could trigger a 'revenge' reaction in that person and turn them into more annoying trolls..

Conflict: easy to get in hard to get out

In all parts of life, conflict is easy to get into and hard to resolve. This is especially true in the online or virtual world where it is made more difficult by the constraints of the medium.

We're all just so calibrated to MIS-understand each other.

Conflicts can strengthen bonds as well as weaken them.

Now here is the good news. Relationships, individual and group, gain their temper like steel when you know that you can resolve, or at least live with, your disagreements. Knowing that you can – because you have – makes relationships stronger.

Neither seek nor avoid. Don't be afraid of conflict if you have to go there. But do not seek it for any reason other than to gain mutual understanding.

Safety: real and perceived

The amazing thing about good online spaces is that they have atmosphere, tone, and "vibes." It is true that you can't physically hurt someone online, but people can and do feel hurt by what others might say.

I know a woman who was stalked in real life from an online community encounter. I know many who have been pranked in ways that you would probably consider malicious.

It has been my experience that there are many online spaces where women in particular don't feel safe. Unless you don't want both genders to participate equally, it is critical to pay close attention to helping those who may feel intimidated feel safe to express themselves. As my Edgeryders colleague Nadia El-Imam puts it, "quieter voices amplified, louder voices encouraged to exercise restraint."

It sounds easy, but it can be hard to accomplish. There is more art than science involved here.

A word about private messages on the site

We offer it, though it isn't truly private because site administrators can read them. We do not read them unless we absolutely have to, but they are truly private.

It is useful as an augmentation to the group conversations.

It has limited user functions – more primitive than email.

If another user wants to send you a message, you cannot block them from doing it, and you can delete it, but only after you read it. So it can be a tool for harassment.

Harrassing Threatening Stalking Sabotage

They happen sometimes.

When the energy in a group grows, some people come along just to "take a bite out of it" or even try to hijack it.

Go back to your well-thought-through rules and user agreements. Pay attention to messages you get from your group where they flagged someone else's comments.

Booting rarely happens quietly, so be prepared to explain if you choose to do it.

Sometimes people come back and work within the social framework and some come back for revenge. Could be revenge against the system itself, or individuals, esp if they know your identity other places, which they probably will.

In a heated environment like a spirited debate about populism, accusations may occur and even legal threats. In such cases, consult with us and we will collectively find and take the best course of action, or no action – it depends on the situation.