

Narrative in online relationship development

Draft Skype Fieldtrip Report 3-4 November 2005

Singapore: 6.00am - Friday 4th
South Australia: 8.30am - Friday 4th
NSW and ACT, Australia: 9.00am - Friday 4th
NZ: 11.00am - Friday 4th
Chandler: 3.00pm - Thursday 3rd
Huston and Chicago: 4.00pm - Thursday 3rd
Eastern US: 5.00pm - Thursday 3rd
London: 10.00pm - Thursday 3rd
Groningen, The Netherlands: 11.00pm - Thursday 3rd

Agenda

Welcome
Introductions
Connections made in reading the introduction emails
What we think of the Skype system
Interested in checking out other tools
Rotate to group 2

Skype Contact Names

Kcurran, Nsmurphy2545, Emartony, Stevegcolman, stephenthorpenz, jdanforth, mwhollingworth, Markwspain, jonceejon

Apologies

Hamish Brown, Chris Harkess, Nancy Settle-Murphy

Some key findings

Audio

Some participants experienced a strong delay and echoing. Others could hear but not speak in the conversation. For one participant it sounded as though she was in a room full of people who were all talking at once.

The delay and echo slowed down the conversation and made some things difficult to understand. At times the conference rooms crashed and it was pretty hard to get past even introducing ourselves.

The conversations became effective in small groups of three with clear audio and free flowing.

Bandwidth may have been a contributing factor, also differing headset, microphone and speaker configurations were being used by people.

Skype did not have any voice settings to help adjust for the operating system and line people were using.

Things that added to the conversation

It was great to hear each other's voices, and we connected on a new level. Things happening in the background of conversations became tied into parts of the group conversation. Strong humor was present. One participant coined the term 'Skype Wrestling' when some loud crashing was heard in the background of a conversation. This term was used again to describe our experience. Profile pictures of each other were useful topics in conversations. During the conference a few participants used the web to finding out information that could be brought into the conversation. The accompanying text chat was useful, particularly when people were dropped off a conversation and at times to communicate who was in each conference room. Discussing pets, particularly dogs were one of our conversation themes.

Boundaries

It was unclear which people were in a conference call and those who were not. How to go about adding and joining people to the conference conversations was unclear and led to people being put on hold or dropped by mistake. Having a full list of contacts added to the Skype system before the meeting may have been useful. At times the system would drop people out of a conference call. For example, one participant received a large amount of error messages and was then kicked out of the conference, other times the conference rooms would crash. Although the process of having two small groups and then swapping was good, managing the way in which people came in and out of these groups was a struggle. It was very frustrating for people who were continually being dropped off from the conference rooms.

Cross platform

One benefit of Skype is that it's cross-platform capability for the 4 Mac users. Skype can also be used to dial into Phone-based conference rooms.

Closing comments

In a way this experience is a very good one, given our topic. So often when we try to do work in a non-collocated way, the first big obstacle to overcome is the technology. Working together to overcome this snafu¹ is such a 'real life' thing.

¹ Snafu - A chaotic or confused situation (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. (2000) Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin).