

IIT Serendipity Coffees

1st anniversary feedback

I HAVE NO SPECIAL
TALENTS. I AM ONLY
**PASSIONATELY
CURIOUS.**
-ALBERT EINSTEIN



The Institute for Research in Technology – IIT for its initials in Spanish- is a research institute associated to the Engineering School of Comillas University in Madrid. It has 32 years of history, and currently gathers about 100 researchers, of which roughly half are doctoral students. Research at the IIT covers energy modelling and regulation, railways, intelligent systems, computational mechanics and advanced materials. Given the variety of topics covered and the fact that we are spread in various buildings, internal communication and knowledge sharing has not been as fluid as many would wish.

This issue was reflected in the yearly polls to doctoral students. The 2015 survey showed a low degree of satisfaction in knowledge sharing (59% of negative responses) and internal communication (53%). Suggestions for improvement of “internal communication and collaboration” were part of the main conclusions, and there was a call to promote events where doctoral students and experienced researchers could interact.

Some doctoral students began to discuss what type of solution could work in our institute. We came to the conclusion that we didn’t need any technological solution or complex procedure, we just needed to talk more often to colleagues we normally don’t get the chance to. Then we discovered the Spark Collaboration platform and... yes! That was the solution we were looking for. We set the community and in November 2015 sent this invite to our colleagues:

Have you ever felt it would be great to hear what other colleagues at the IIT are doing and spark some collaboration across research groups? A group of us having this feeling agreed that a simple and fun idea, yet powerful, to promote more communication among IIT members was just to have coffee from time to time with the least expected colleague. So here we are with a proposal: the IIT Serendipity Coffees.

The idea is simple: IIT Serendipity Coffees is a community open to anyone in the IIT that would like to meet once a month with other randomly selected IIT member.

To join this community you just need to register [here](#), and the Spark Collaboration platform will send you one e-mail a month suggesting a person to have coffee with. Sometime during that month, you can contact each other and find the best time to meet over a cup of coffee. Joining this community is of course optional and you will be able to opt-out from the program at any point.

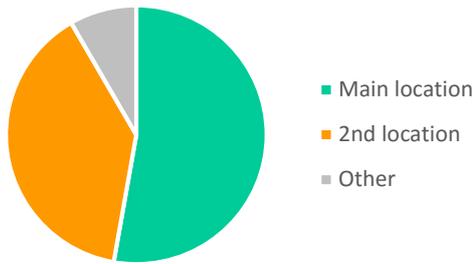
It would be great to see many of you -from the student who has most recently joined to the busiest professor- joining this community and having coffee :)

We suggested these coffee meetings would be an opportunity to:

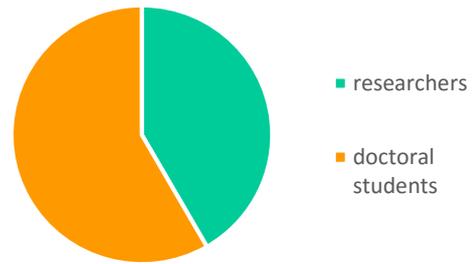
- ✓ learn from each other’s work and perspectives [knowledge transfer]
- ✓ exchange ideas and generate new ones [creativity ignition]
- ✓ develop better relationships among colleagues [work environment]

One year after the IIT Serendipity Coffees initiative was launched, we have a community of over 30 participants and the feedback received has been very positive. Next figures summarize the results of a survey on the initiative some months down the road.

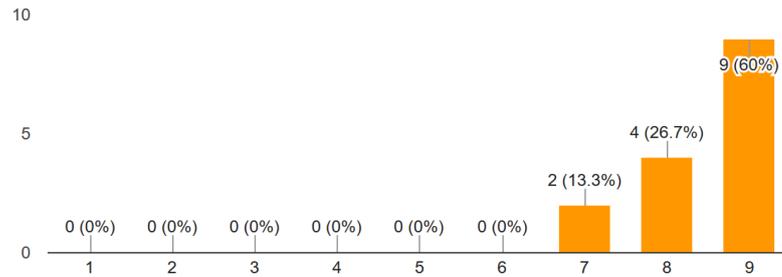
Participation by location



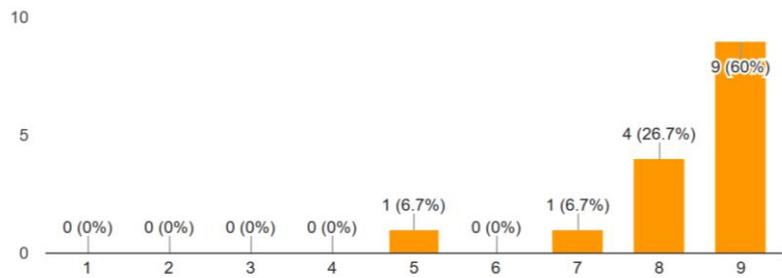
Participation by category



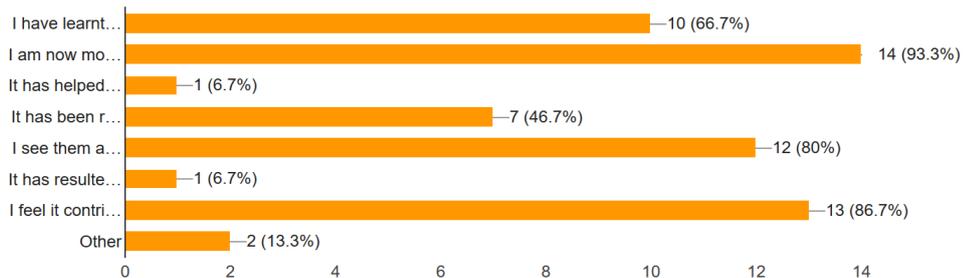
Are you enjoying our Serendipity Coffees? (15 responses)



Are you finding them valuable? (15 responses)



In which ways do you find them valuable? (15 responses)



- I have learnt something new
- I am now more aware of what other colleagues are working on
- It has helped me to generate new ideas for my research
- It has been refreshing and inspiring
- I see them as an opportunity to generate more communication and exchange knowledge among colleagues
- It has resulted in a collaboration with another colleague
- I feel it contributes to create a more dynamic and communicative culture in the IIT

Beyond the formal feedback, many colleagues have expressed informally their enthusiasm and gratitude about the initiative. Some newcomers were thrilled by the opportunity to talk to senior professors, some have found career guidance and even an introduction for a job post, some were surprised to discover they were using similar methods in their research, some even began a research collaboration after having a coffee.

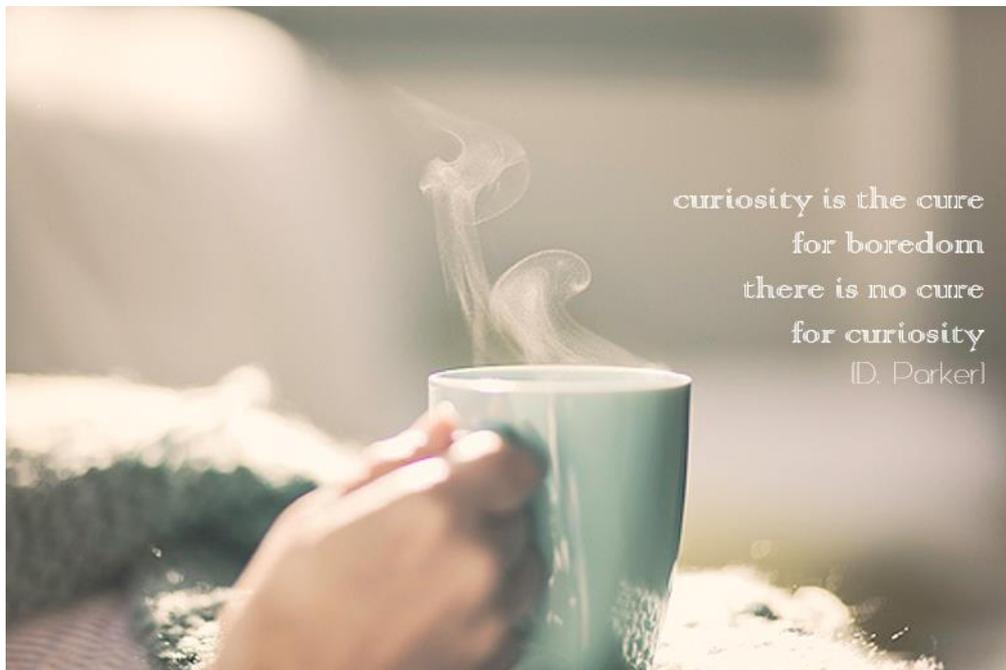
These are just a couple of approximate quotes of comments by some colleagues:

IIT Serendipity Coffees have opened the door to more intentional conversations between colleagues. Now, if I need some time to talk to someone, I go and suggest: why don't we have a "serendipity" coffee?

All the Serendipity Coffees I have had have taken me to talk to colleagues that are interested in innovating in education. It has been inspiring and motivating!

As we like to say...

*"In the end it is about more than having conversations over a coffee:
It is about building a more open, dynamic and collaborative culture for the IIT"*



Many thanks to Michael Soto and Spark Community for the support to make the IIT Serendipity Coffees a reality!