

# Nooks

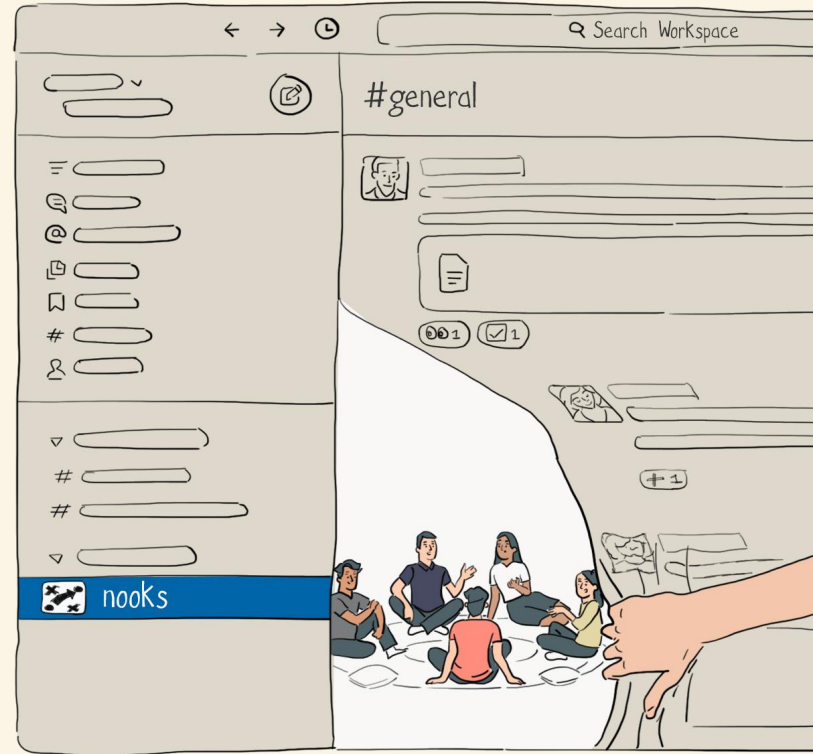
## Social Spaces to Lower Hesitations in Interacting with New People at Work

Shreya Bali, **Pranav Khadpe**, Geoff Kaufman and Chinmay Kulkarni

Carnegie  
Mellon  
University



Human-  
Computer  
Interaction  
Institute



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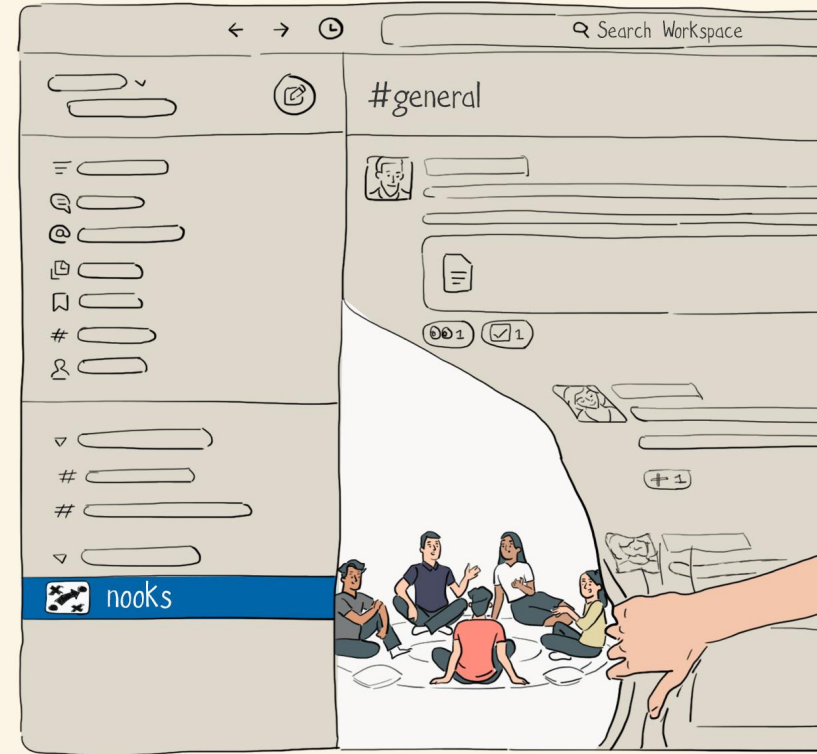
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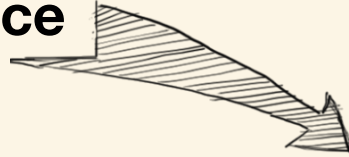
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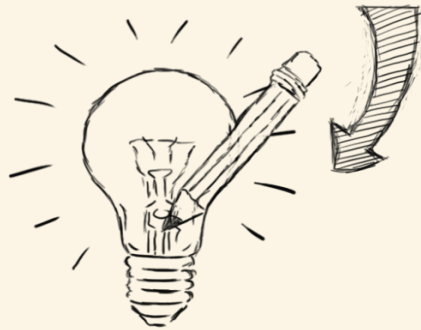
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**Initiating casual conversations is fundamental to how we ease into a new workplace**



**It's how we form valuable social relationships**

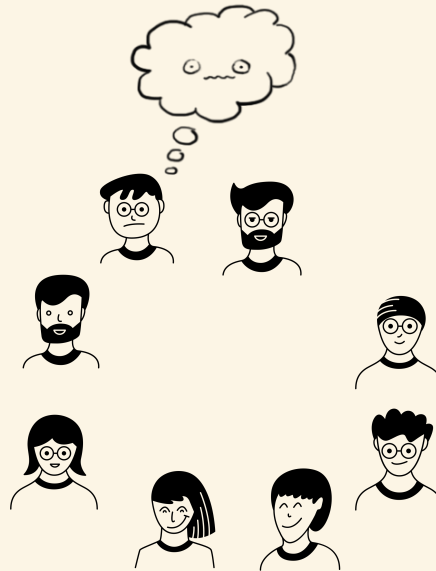


Epley, N., & Schroeder, J. (2014). Mistakenly seeking solitude. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(5), 1980–1999

Franziska Tschan, Norbert K Semmer, and Laurent Inversin. 2004. Work related and "private" social interactions at work. *Social Indicators Research* 67, 1 (2004)

Etienne Wenger. 2000. Key to knowledge Strategy. *Knowledge and communities*. Woburn, Butterworth-Heinemann (2000), 3–21

# And yet, people are often reluctant to initiate conversations that could lead to those social relationships



Epley, N., & Schroeder, J. (2014). Mistakenly seeking solitude. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(5), 1980–1999

Boothby, E. J., Cooney, G., Sandstrom, G. M., & Clark, M. S. (2018). The liking gap in conversations: Do people like us more than we think? *Psychological Science*, 29(11), 1742–1756

Schroeder, J., Lyons, D., & Epley, N. (2022). Hello, stranger? Pleasant conversations are preceded by concerns about starting one. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 151(5), 1141.

## And yet, people are often reluctant to initiate conversations that could lead to those social relationships

“ **76% reported that they had difficulty making connections with their work** teammates, and **58% agreed with the statement “My social relationships are superficial at work.”**”

Hadley, C. N., & Mortensen, M. (2021). Are Your Team Members Lonely?. MIT Sloan Management Review, 62(2), 36-40.

”

# And yet, people are often reluctant to initiate conversations that could lead to those social relationships



How to Hybrid

Yes, People  
Work Friend

Research shows that making  
worth the effort. In the tran:  
to help foster those connect

Collaboration And Teams

What a Year o  
Done to Our R  
at Work

by Nancy Baym, Jonathan Lars

March 22, 2021



Alan Pizzelli / Getty Images



HOME WORLD US COMPANIES TECH MARKETS CLIMATE

“The lone  
team me

Employees Are Lonelier  
Than Ever. Here's How  
Employers Can Help.

by Constance Noonan Hadley

June 09, 2021



Remote Workers Need  
Small Talk, Too

by Jessica R. Methot, Allison S. Gabriel, Patrick Downes, and Emily



Emotional Intelligence

Work and the Lone  
Epidemic

Reducing isolation at work is good for business. by Vivek Murthy

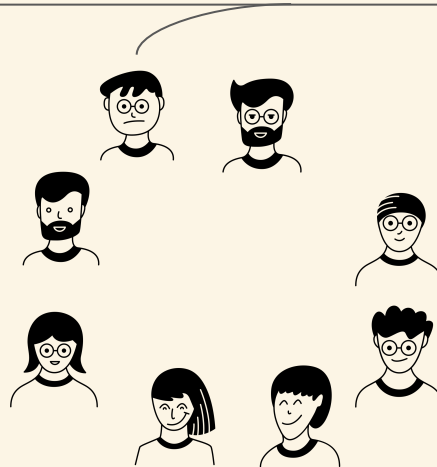
# Why are people reluctant to initiate conversations?



# Initiating a conversation is risky because we're unsure if people will enjoy talking about the things we want to talk about

Will it interest them? Will they find it appropriate?

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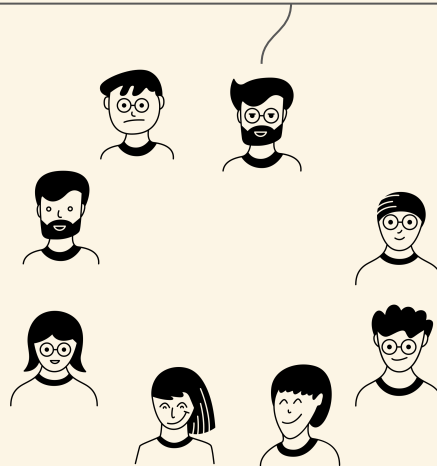
Sandstrom, G. M., & Boothby, E. J. (2021). Why do people avoid talking to strangers? A mini meta-analysis of predicted fears and actual experiences talking to a stranger. *Self and Identity*, 20(1), 47-71.

Svennevig, J. (1999). *Getting Acquainted in Conversation: a study of initial interactions*. Philadelphia, PA: J. Benjamins Publications.



## Others might have the same fears too, leading to collective ignorance

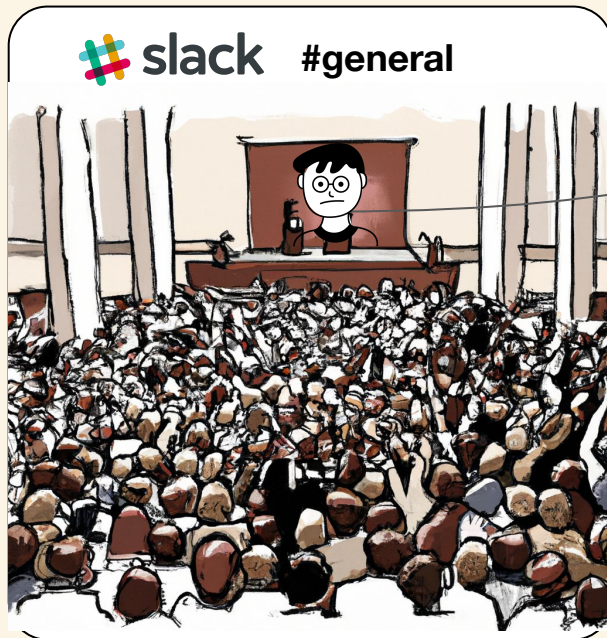
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# Even in online spaces, the hesitation to initiate interactions persist



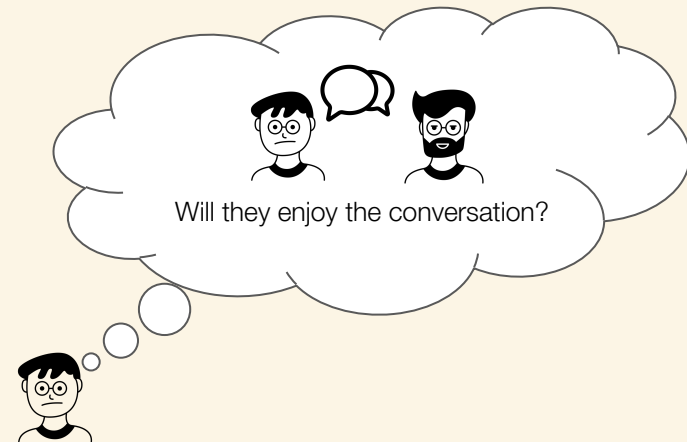
Will it interest them? Will they find it appropriate?

# Why we fear initiating casual conversations

Fears about **approaching others**



Fears about **conversation enjoyment**



## But these fears are often miscalibrated

Fears about **approaching others**



On average, **others are 12% more interested in talking to you than you think they are!**

(e.g. Boothby et al.)



On average, **others will find a conversation with you 19% more interesting than you think they will!**

(e.g. Kardas et al.)



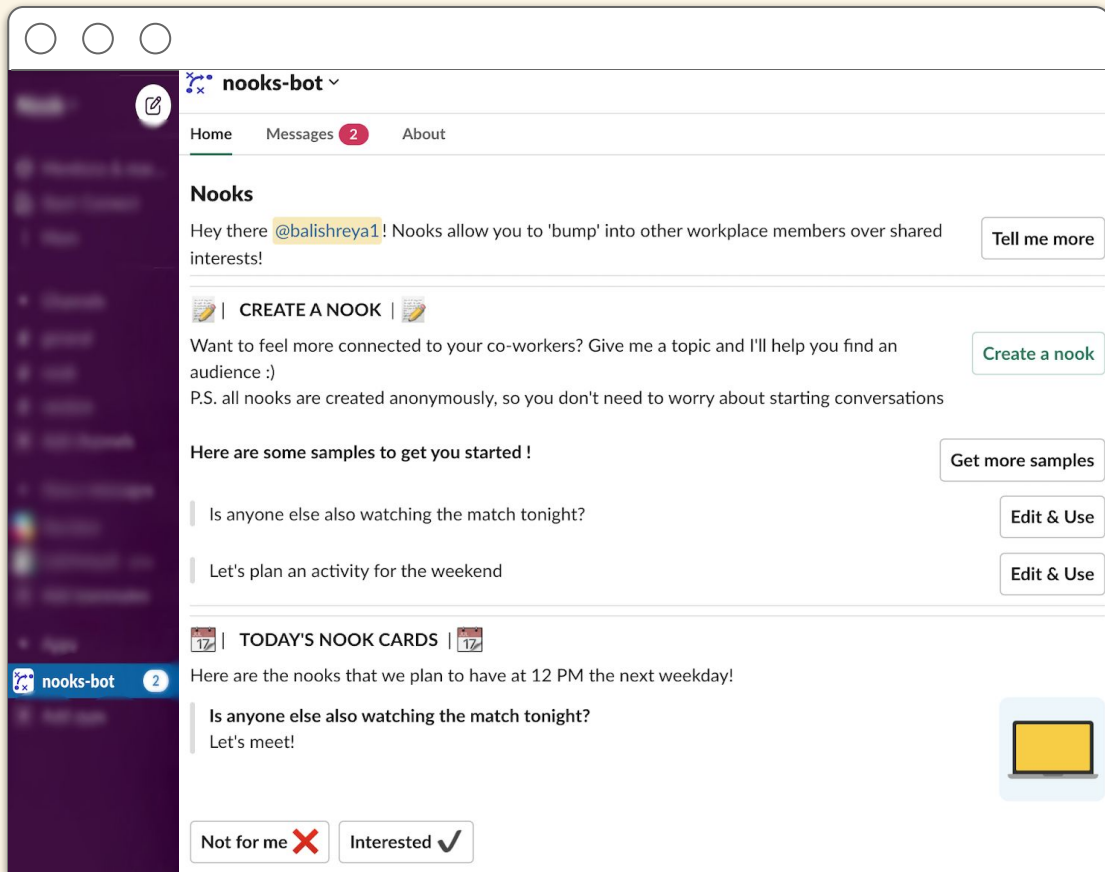
What if individuals knew in **advance** that the people they were about to interact with **were actually interested in talking about the same topic?**

## Nooks

supports initial interactions in the workplace

by enabling individuals to **discover and interact with others they share common interests with,**

while **lowering risks of social evaluation** typically involved



# **Design of Nooks**

## Nooks

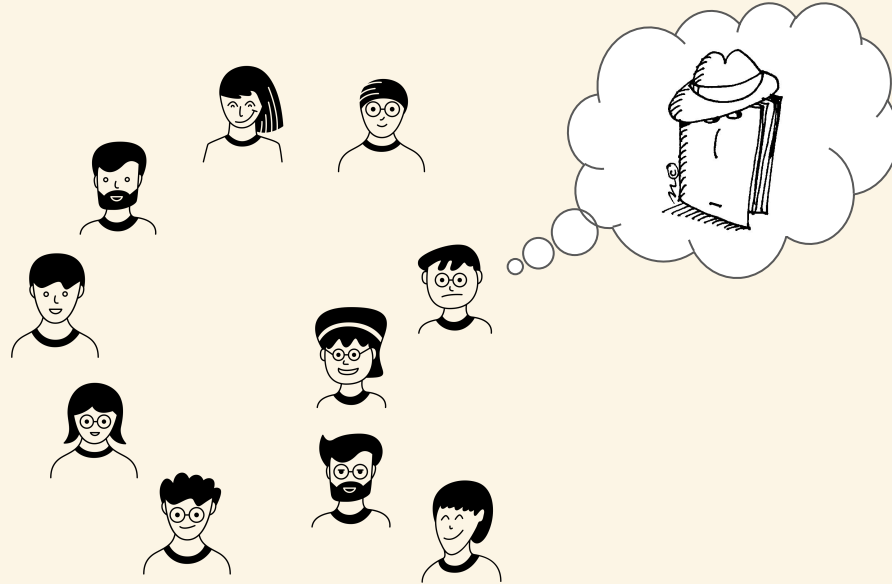
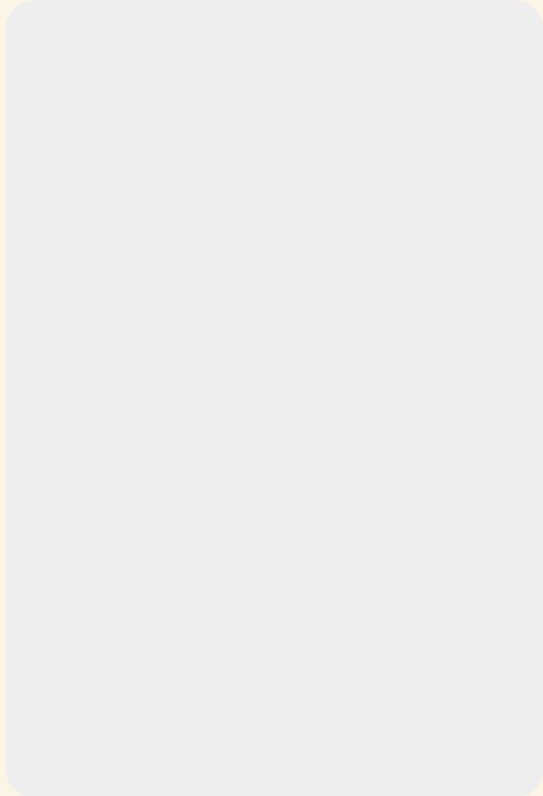


**Anonymous creation**  
of conversations

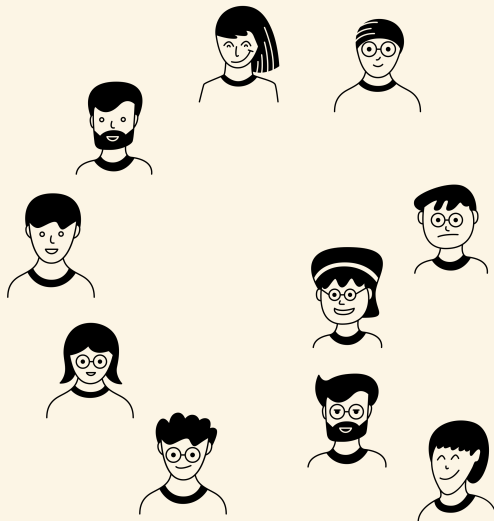


**Limiting participation to  
those interested**  
so that everyone in the  
conversation *wants* to be there





A nook is a conversation room proposed **anonymously**.



### Create a Nook

What do you want to talk about?  
mystery novels

Add some initial thoughts  
exchange recommendations and discuss books

Add a channel title for the nook(use less than less 60 characters and only letters/dashes)  
Write something

Are there any members you don't want to be a part of this conversation?  
Select users you don't want included in this nook

By default, I only create nooks with atleast 3 total members to hide the creator's identity. Nooks that don't satisfy this condition are not created.

Close Add nook to the queue

A nook is a conversation room proposed **anonymously**.

Before activating the nook, **everyone is asked whether they are interested in joining**

TODAY'S NOOK CARDS | 12

Here are the nooks that we plan to have at 12 PM the next weekday!

**mystery novels**  
exchange recommendations and discuss books

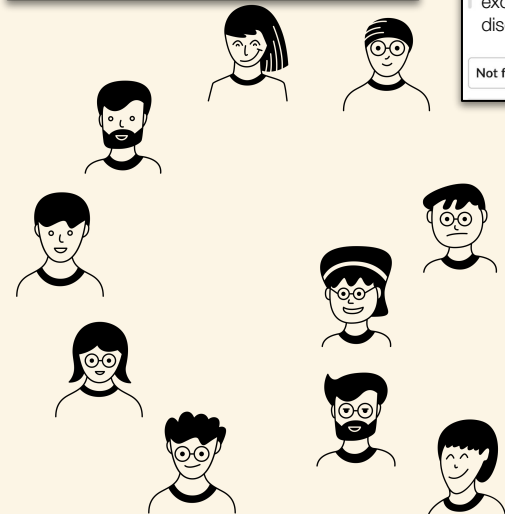
Not for me  Interested

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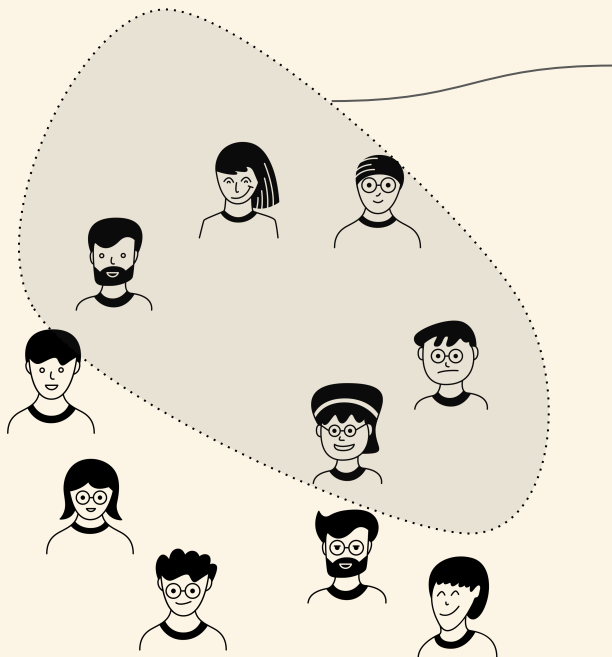
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A nook is a conversation room proposed **anonymously**.

Before activating the nook, **everyone** is asked **whether they are interested in joining**

**Only those interested in the conversation are added to the nook** when activated



🔒 nook-severancetv-04-04-2022-16-00-04-0 Severance is the b...

🔒 nook-severancetv-04-04-2022-16-00-04-0 (archived)

@nooks-bot created this private channel on April 4th. This is the very beginning of the 🔒 nook-severancetv-04-04-2022-16-00-04-0 (archived) channel.

Monday, April 4th ▾

🔗 nooks-bot APP 12:00 PM  
joined nook-severancetv-04-04-2022-16-00-04-0.

🔗 nooks-bot APP 12:00 PM  
set the channel topic: Severance is the best show since sliced bread

📌 Pinned by nooks-bot

🔗 nooks-bot APP 12:00 PM  
Super-excited to hear all of your thoughts on **Severance is the best show since sliced bread**  
What are your thoughts and theories?  
Remember this chat will be automatically archived at 12PM tomorrow 🕒  
P.S type in /get\_role for your task of the day!

👤 Shreya Bali 12:00 PM  
was added to nook-severancetv-04-04-2022-16-00-04-0 by nooks-bot, along with 3 others.

👤 erica 12:12 PM  
@geoff can I come hang out with u and ur cats and watch this? my semester is starting to almost calm down

👤 Pranav Khadpe 1:16 PM  
wait @Morgan Evans did you watch one episode?

Tuesday, April 5th ▾

👤 geoff 9:43 AM  
Yes, anyone is welcome to come over and watch it. We can even plan for a watch party sometime. The last episode of Season 1 premieres this Friday 😊

👤 erica 9:49 AM

A nook is a conversation room proposed **anonymously**.

Before activating the nook, **everyone is asked whether they are interested in joining**

**Only those interested in the conversation are added to the nook** when activated

You **don't worry about social rejection** when initiating

You're **not solely responsible** for making sure others enjoy the conversation

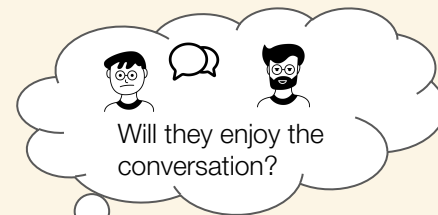
You know they **want** to talk

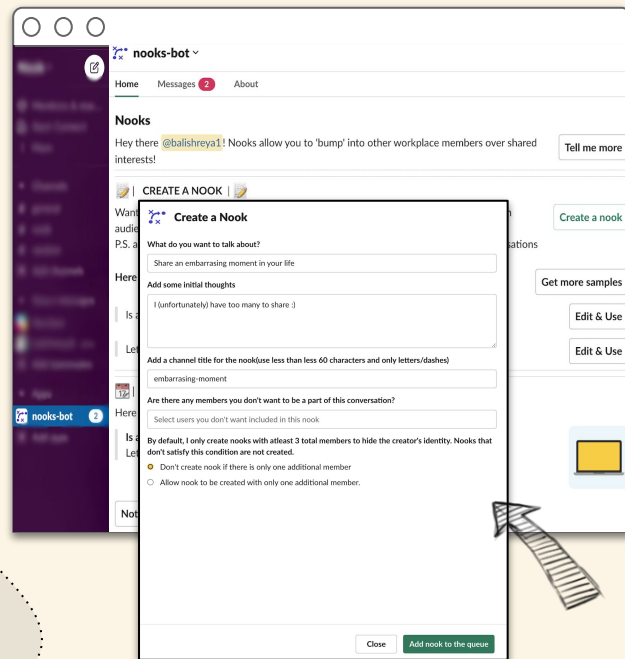
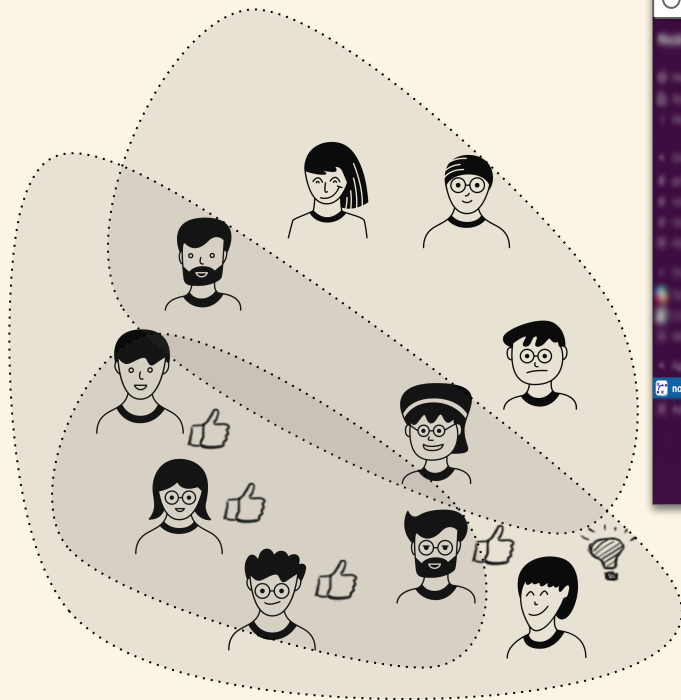
You know everyone is **interested in the topic** so they will likely enjoy

Lower fears about **approaching others**

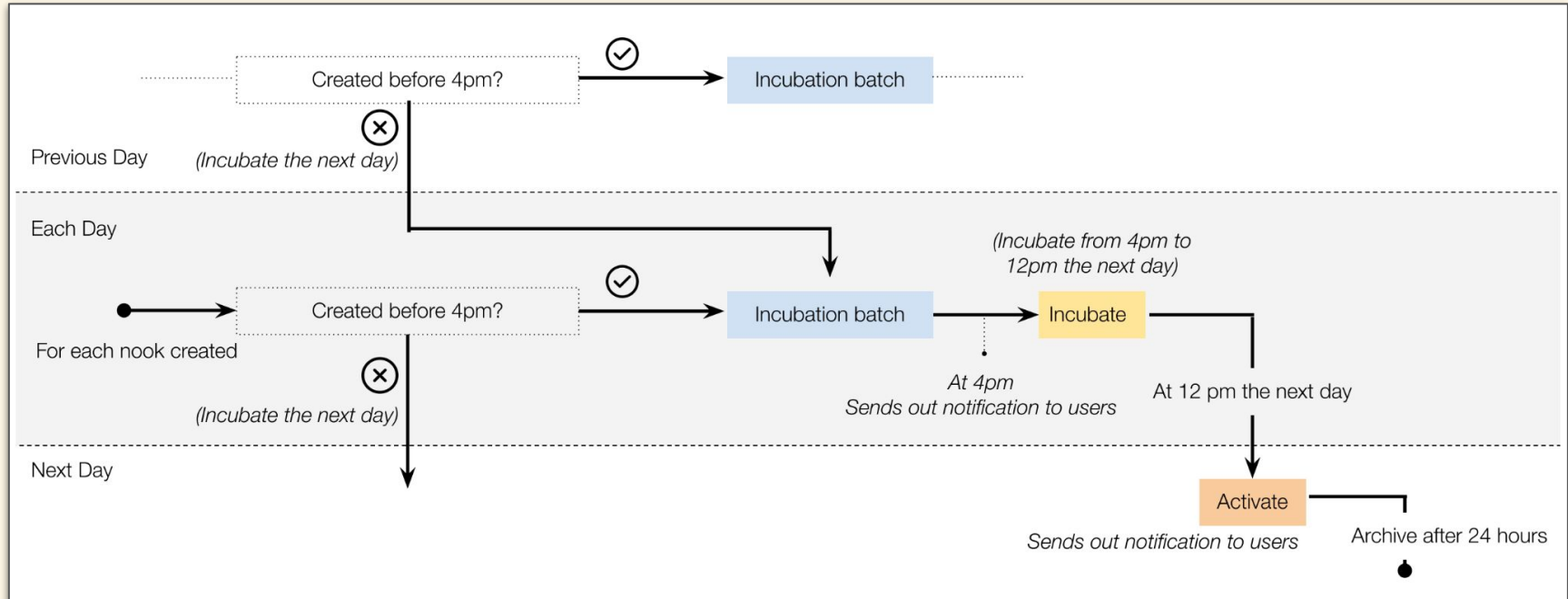


Lower fears about **conversation enjoyment**





**Periodic intervals** during which nooks are proposed, users can express interest in proposed nooks, and interested individuals are convened in nooks.

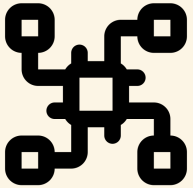


# Deployment



**We deployed Nooks for nine-weeks with students starting out in Carnegie Mellon's Summer Research Program in the Human-Computer Interaction Institute**

## Research Setting



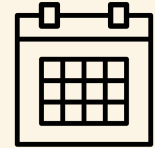
Worked across 4 buildings



80% were new to the university and most were unacquainted



Slack workspace



We deployed during week 2 of the 10 week program

## Methods



Invited all participants (**25**)  
to participate in interviews.  
**9** participants agreed to be  
interviewed



Reflexive thematic analysis on  
interview transcripts and usage  
data

# Findings

## Examples of nooks initiated by participants



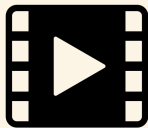
### Books:

talk about favorite books, give each other recommendations, plan group reading dates



### Let's plan an activity for the weekend:

Museums, parks, food?



### Fav tv shows and movies:

talk about our favorite tv shows and movies, maybe have a movie night or something



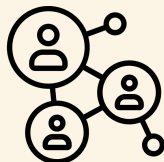
### History of HCI talk:

What did you guys think about the talk?



### Cafes:

reviewing places, meet up, etc



### Sharing LinkedIns:

It'd be good to stay in touch after the summer!

# 1 Nooks provided a low-risk way to initiate interactions

“

I think it's less intimidating and it's also anonymous so I think people who might not be super extroverted or uncomfortable just throwing an idea out there to the group, would feel most comfortable in Nooks. (P5)

”

## 2 Participants used Nooks to **initiate in-person activities**

Of the **16** nooks created by users, **10** were either direct or indirect attempts to initiate an in-person activity

### **July 4th Plans!**

What do you want to do to celebrate together?

### **We should plan an outing for this weekend**

What should we do?

### **Books**

talk about favorite books, give each other recommendations, **plan group reading dates**

### **Fav tv shows and movies**

talk about our favorite tv shows and movies, **maybe have a movie night or something**

## 2 Participants used Nooks to **initiate in-person activities**

“ Since there was like no one in my office—it was just me—I didn’t get to interact with that many students in-person. So, I used Nooks to make plans with them so that I could hang out with them later on. (P7) ”

### And things actually “left the group chat”

“ One nook that worked out well was a cafe nook and we actually did go out and get food together. (P8) ”



## 2 Participants used Nooks to **initiate in-person activities**

**In fact they found Nooks especially useful for initiating activities**

“ If I try to initiate plans in #general, there's a chance I just get like an emoji reaction on it and I didn't want that, so I just used a nook because I knew that I would actually get a response from those who were actually interested. (P7)

”

### 3 Nooks promoted inclusivity

#### By making it easier to include others

“ Creating a channel and adding a bunch of people intentionally is bound to create some conflict, if you forget a person or something so I thought Nooks was a low effort way to allow other people to opt in. (P16) ”

#### And making people feel included in the program

“ When I came in there were already some groups forming and I didn't know who should I talk to. Without Nooks I'd only know what they look like and probably their name. (P17) ”

## 4 Nooks provided ambient awareness

### about others' interests

“ You don't even need to interact with other people to learn what they are interested in. Because, you, swipe through the nooks and you see oh there's a group of people interested in like board games, or something. I think it's even useful just to gauge what the interests of your colleagues are.  
(P5) ”

## 4 Nooks provided ambient awareness

### and their desire to socialize

“ It allowed me to see [who was] willing to connect with other people and would be down to maybe have a chat. (P5) ”

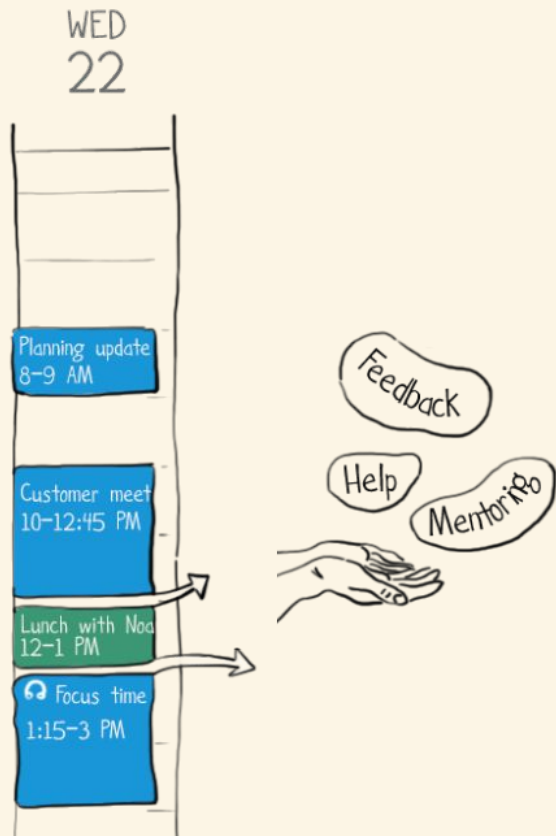
## 5 Motivation to interact **reduced once people had formed connections**

“ halfway through, a lot of people kind of found their little groups and have mostly stuck to them, myself included. (P8) ”

“ I had quite a few friends already in Pittsburgh for the summer, so I wasn't as invested in these conversations. (P13) ”

“ I was really close with the people I was living with. (P20) ”

## Reflections and Future Work



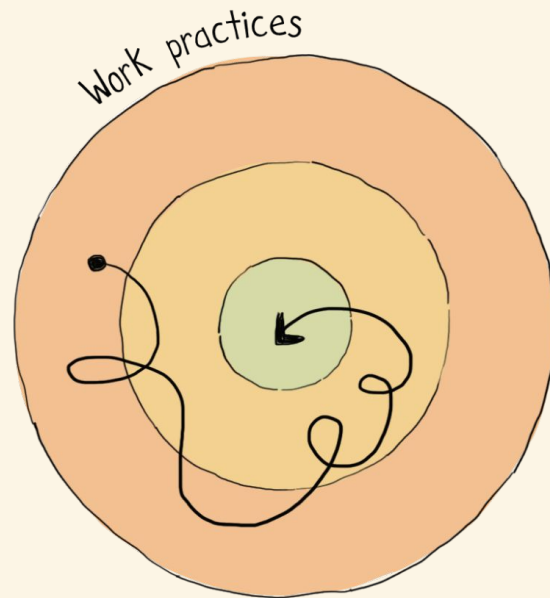
Nooks allows people to use micro-moments to participate in casual conversations

**Can we harness micro-moments for other kinds of caring and supporting interactions at work?**

## Reflections and Future Work

Nooks allows individuals to “test drive” new conversations, alternate social spaces, and even affinity groups

**What tools might help individuals or teams “test drive” new work practices, or run team-experiments?**



## Reflections and Future Work



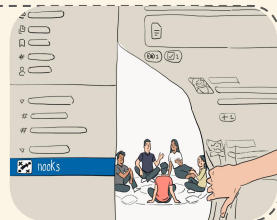
Nooks is an amplifier for people's motivations to seek and build community

**How might Nooks support community builders in their efforts?**

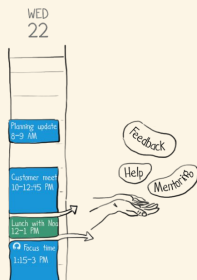
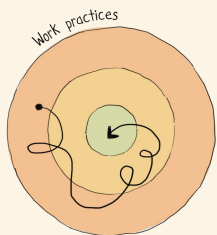


# Thank you!

Nooks can:  
 lower risks of social evaluation involved in initial interactions  
 provide ambient awareness  
 promote inclusivity  
 support orchestration of shared experiences in-person



## Reflections and Future Work



**Shreya will be applying for PhD positions in the Fall!**

**Chinmay is hiring PhD students at Emory University! Come join us!**

**Come talk to me about any of this! Or write to me at [pkhadpe@cs.cmu.edu](mailto:pkhadpe@cs.cmu.edu)!**