



## SUSTAINABILITY & RENEWAL

Renewal of members and knowledge ensures continued relevance, adapting to changing needs. Ensures that the CoP sustain the rhythm of the community and drive the community knowledge forward and evolving it, keeping it dynamic and sustainable over time.

- Establish core team for future planning, allowing natural departure from the original goals, maintaining the rhythm of the community allowing exit of members and new recruits to join naturally.
- In addition to managing members, renewal of knowledge ensures continued relevance of the community knowledge, adapting to changing needs. This will ensure that the CoP drive the knowledge forward and evolving it, keeping it dynamic and sustainable over time.

### Sustaining the Community Rhythm: Meeting & In-between

#### WHAT

Communities differ considerably in how and how often they interact. Some only meet annually face to face, with few or no interactions in between. Others meet quarterly, monthly, or even more frequently. Some only meet on demand. Some interact entirely asynchronously online.

There is no right or wrong answer about how often to meet or in what mode; it depends on the rhythm of the practice, what they want to accomplish, and how often issues arise that call for new learning.

#### WHY

The community is functioning as a container for social learning. It is establishing a rhythm of interaction that works for members. More people are joining. Members discover what types of activities create value and what kind of leadership is required.

##### **Meeting:**

**Periodicity.** More important than frequency of meetings is their periodicity. A regular rhythm that fits with members' schedules helps to maintain continuity, as does a meeting format with consistent elements.

**Quality.** Synchronous meetings—face to face or online—are precious opportunities for interacting, helping each other, negotiating understanding, collaborating closely, or brainstorming. They should not be wasted with one-way presentations (which could be recorded) or communication of information (best done through asynchronous channels).

**Attendance.** An easy trap to fall into is to be overly concerned with the number of attendees at a given community meeting. The rhythm of a community usually has peak times (often around an important event) and lulls when participants are very busy with their regular jobs. This is normal. If few people are there, celebrate the members in the room and tune that particular occasion to meet their needs. There are many reasons why

attendance varies, and if word goes out that the meeting went well, members who did not attend for one reason or another will usually be grateful to receive a summary of the event. They will feel more ready and able to attend and contribute next time. If a lull continues, don't jump to conclusions but do some back-channel work to see if there is an underlying problem causing the nonparticipation of some folk.

**In-between meetings:**

We have also seen community leaders who believe that members of a true community of practice would spontaneously interact between meetings and worry that they do not. Often, they organize topics for discussion and try to "get people to talk" to generate buzz. Our experience is that this rarely works as a way to build the community. Members have busy lives with competing priorities, which do not allow the luxury of talking about topics, however interesting, unless they contribute to work at hand. What happens in-between regular meetings depends on the culture of the community, but it is mostly in response to specific needs.

**HOW**

The following table provides the Do's and Don'ts of keeping up a community rhythm.

Do	Don't
Develop a regular rhythm of events based on what the community wants to accomplish	Worry about frequency of events as an indicator of the health of the community
Treat community events as a continuous flow of discussions with feedback loops from practice	Run community events as a series of one-offs
Use synchronous meetings to brainstorm, negotiate, or problem-solve as part of an ongoing process	Propose topics of possible interest and try and get members to engage in them
Make sure that urgent asynchronous requests get a timely response	Waste time in synchronous meetings to give out information or hold a presentation