



CONVENE & CONNECT

Convening is the art of bringing the community (of practice) and relevant stakeholders together to connect members and engage them in meaningful conversations. The diversity of a community and a risk-free and inclusive environment help develop conversations and engage members.

Start small, create the conducive environment to convene and network people.

Proper community management to ensure diversity of views, prioritize equity for access to opportunities and resource and where everyone feels they belong and can actively participate.

Diversified, equity and inclusiveness environment where there is diverse representation, fairness and everyone feel valued and heard.

Activities oriented to developing the practice – Role-Play and Hand-On

WHAT

Role-Play and Hand-On

Depending on the domain, a community may prefer activities that involve learning by doing.

WHY

Using the complexity of a full project to learn together by reflecting on the whole thing.

HOW

Learning by doing is often highly engaging for members and its embodied character leads to “sticky learning,” which is more likely to be used in their day jobs. Real or simulated activities help members prepare for difficult or unfamiliar situations. They get a feel for approaches that are likely to work and those that are counterproductive. Learning by doing in a community context can help build up experience and self-confidence in a safe environment.

Sometimes it is possible to engage in actual practice together, especially if there are online tools that enable this type of joint practice. For example, software engineers may enjoy honing their coding skills by practicing together using mob programming or screen-sharing activities.

Often, however, participants have to role-play the kind of challenge they face in practice, taking up different roles. A role-play is a semi-structured and semi-improvised activity that can help

members practice a challenging situation they are likely to face in their work. The community identifies the situation, sets up a scenario that feels real, assigns roles, and then acts out the scenario. Sometimes, participants take it in turns to play the protagonist, trying different ways to change the situation or the course of events. This can be done online as well as face to face.

After each role-play there is a general discussion about what the protagonists did that “worked” or what others would have done differently. Community members then acts as peer coaches to reflect on what was done well and what could be improved in a member’s response or “performance” during the role-play.

We have seen communities do this for a member preparing for an important meeting or presenting a value proposition. We have seen communities help prepare new members for an important practice in their profession, for which they have had no experience.

Variations

Antagonistic situations. We have found that a role-play can be especially useful, and fun, when some members act as devil’s advocates or difficult interlocutor, for instance, as angry customers, resistant buyers, sceptical managers, demanding clients, or aggressive negotiators. Often, the most animated conversations arise around role-plays that highlight “wrong” practices as this can more readily provoke opinions and lively debate.

Live demos. Practitioners are very interested in tools of the trade. A good way to introduce a tool or a piece of technology is to include a live demo where members can try the tool themselves. This can be followed by discussions of how the tool can affect the practice, what new doors it opens, and possible downsides.

Working out loud. Sometimes it is best to witness a practitioner engage in typical activities of the practice while verbalizing their thoughts during the performance of the activity. This can be done as an ongoing commentary on a video. It gives member insight into the complex but largely invisible reasoning, uncertainties, and continuous decision-making underlying what can appear to be seamless masterful performance.

Use Case:**Technologists like to get hands-on**

Many of our communities tend to prioritize hands-on activities because that's what their members want.

Some communities focus on programming languages such as Python, Java, or JavaScript; others explore methodologies such as Test-Driven Development; and others, like our "Coding for Non-Coders" communities, help people learn the basics of software development.

By including hands-on activities such as pair or mob programming, simple coding katas, or even project development over a series of meetups, they find that the relaxed, social nature of the community is an ideal place to learn.

These communities have provided a home for new technology talent, supporting people who move from other roles into software engineering—transformational value in action.

Wrong to be right. An Agile community in Delaware acted out "the wrong way to run a team retrospective." Their goal was to showcase obvious anti-patterns in an engaging, funny way that captures the attention of the audience, as they are asked to call out the issues by typing in a chat pod on the side. It proved to be so popular that the text scrolled so quickly it was impossible to keep up! In the end, this activity was adopted into our tech conference because it was said "more people need to see this!"

Demos. Live demonstrations of new tools and software packages are popular, especially when the participants can subsequently try them for themselves. But even simple demos can be inspiring. At an *Ignite* 24 session, a member of the *Ignite* Internet of Things (IoT) community