



VISION

The starting point of any Community of Practice should be the purpose or the mission of the community. Why does the community exist? The community's purpose often comes from the organisation's leadership, corresponding to the organisation's business goals. It is normally predefined by the sponsor alone or by the sponsor with a group of people.

Once the sponsor sets the 'why', we will be co-creating the vision for the community with our sponsor, a preliminary core group and potential members. When the vision has been formulated and aligned, we will be working on the strategy in support of delivering on the vision. At this stage, we will be working on high-level objectives.

- how to design and communicate our purpose, vision, objectives and strategy.
- how to use appreciative inquiry to identify and design a vision for our community needs, challenges and opportunities.
- how to pitch our community's value proposition and creation.

Forming a Community of Practice

WHAT

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly". The concept was first proposed by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their 1991 book *Situated Learning*.

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope.

The idea of connecting people through their practice both within and outside organizations has been around as long as people have been part of organizations. The increasing interest in CoP in organizations could be attributed to the useful perspective they provide on explicit and tacit knowledge, learning and development within a field of practice as being key to improving performance. Resilient organizations invest in the learning and development of their people and the organization as a whole.

WHY

We have defined a community of practice as a sustained learning partnership among practitioners who are ready to interact regularly over time to get better, collectively and

individually, at a practice they share. It is useful to translate this definition into a set of more concrete questions.

HOW

Do you have a good domain?

- There is an area of capability that enough people can identify with as a significant part of their work and identity.
- It is easy for people to know if they belong, and the domain does not duplicate other communities or organizational units.
- The domain is not so general that everyone could belong; but it is not so specific that people would need to join too many communities to do their job.

Can you see the community dimension?

- There is a clear group of people who want to form a community.
- The companionship is likely to become a valued experience.
- There are (potential) members committed enough to take some leadership.

Will the practice piece be meaningful?

- The practice is dynamic; it gives rise to emerging challenges that push learning and make ongoing community participation useful.
- Members are free to disclose enough of their experience of practice for learning to be driven by the challenges and opportunities they face.

What will they do together?

- Members interact regularly to help each other and make progress together
- in ways that they couldn't do alone, they work on shared problems, create, documents, benchmark their practices, and help each other through difficult times or to take advantage of opportunities.
- Meetings dovetail with each other; they are not discrete events. Members revisit issues to assess progress. They follow up their advice to know what worked or not and to learn from the outcome.
- Sometimes the community brings in an outside expert to help them think through sticky issues, but this is not the mainstay of the community.

What will the conversations look like?

- They share a language; they love to engage in "shop talk."
- When someone brings up a problem of practice, other members can hardly stop themselves from chipping in with their own experience.

What will the group dynamics feel like?

- Members are excited to see each other; they respect the experience of mature practitioners and want to help newcomers.
- Members feel comfortable sharing what's not working for them.
- It is a welcoming space for people to take initiative.
- There is respect for different levels of engagement.
- Power relationships inevitably exist, but they do not come in the way of learning by, with, and from everyone.