



VISION

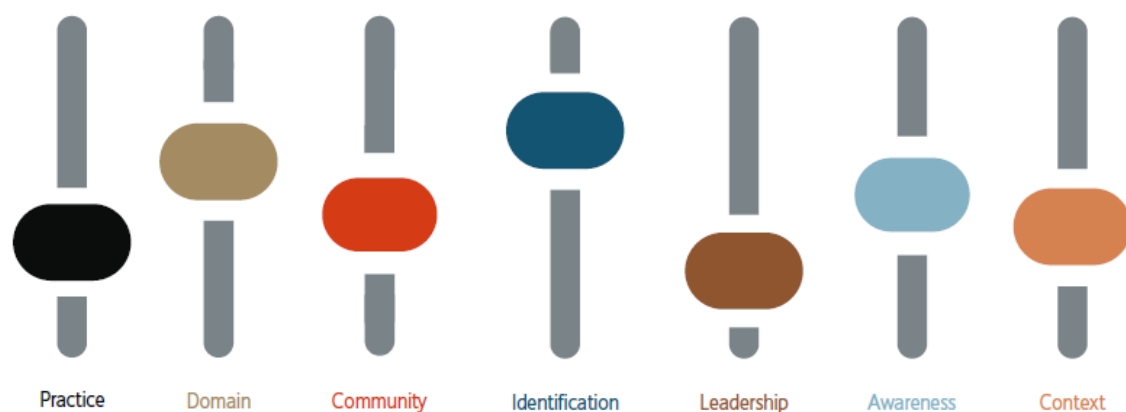
The starting point of any Community of Practice should be the purpose or the mission of the community. Why does the community exist? The community's purpose often comes from the organisation's leadership, corresponding to the organisation's business goals. It is normally predefined by the sponsor alone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

Pushing the Practice

Referencing to the 7 dimensions of intentional development, it more useful to consider a framework with multiple dimensions along which community maturing or some preferred to label as vibrancy can occur. Think of these dimensions as a set of distinct sliders increasing the brightness level of different settings, as illustrated in the figure below. Some communities may try and turn up some dimensions while ignoring others. Even in a given community, some members may be more interested in pushing some dimensions than others. Not everyone has the same view of the ideal setting.



WHAT

Dimension 1: Practice

Some communities primarily develop their ability to serve the immediate needs of practice. They endeavour to make sure that members are successful in projects for their day jobs and use the focus on these projects as a driver for everyone's learning.

WHY

Helping each other push the **practice** through:

- **Helping each other.** Community activities are those that encourage members to bring their problems and ask for advice. Their peers appreciate the subtleties of practical challenges and jump in to work out what to do. Over time, these communities become good at learning this way and develop protocols for making it efficient and useful.
- **Ensuring learning loops.** Communities maturing in this direction make sure that they create learning loops out of the discussions they have.
- **Capturing emergent learning.** Some communities also create summaries to document their conversations and to capture what they are learning from their focus on problems of practice.

HOW

Intentional developmental efforts in this direction include:

- **Helping each other.** Make a commitment to respond within a given timeframe. Develop a sense of accountability to discussing advice they don't agree with or have reservations about. Members find a generally sympathetic audience for their challenges and difficulties, but they also share stories about good approaches and congratulate each other on successes.
- **Ensuring learning loops.** Help a fellow member with advice, follow up later to see how things turned out, what worked and what did not. They don't merely jump from one issue to the next, but they are intentional about learning from the experience of what has or hasn't worked in practice.
- **Capturing emergent learning.** This communal memory can take the form of frequently asked questions, summaries and highlights, stories about cases, reflections on failures, or important insights. All these artefacts can create continuity in the community's learning about practice. It helps people who could not participate, participants who want to remember key points, and newcomers who need to come up to speed.

Some effects of practice-oriented development:

- The learning agenda is driven by the issues that members face in practice; it is emergent, shaped dynamically by the changing needs of practice. This is true even if a community ends up calling on external expertise to help address an issue.
- Value derives from knowledgeable advice and the ongoing improvement of practice that results over time.
- Trust develops from being able to talk candidly about practice and to bring in for discussion your worst problems, challenges, and even failures. The willingness to engage with each other's challenges reflects a commitment to each other's success.
- Innovativeness comes from seeking new solutions to new problems as they inevitably arise in practice. A trusted community is also a good forum to discuss new, perhaps untested ideas with people who can appreciate their potential.
- Identity is anchored in acting and being recognized as a practitioner with real experience of practice (even if one is still a beginner).

Potential upsides	Possible downsides
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The discussions are directly relevant to members' practice • The community is responsive to new challenges • Members' experience is one of mutual support • Belonging to the community provides an opportunity to explore novel ideas before implementing them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus on local practice is too narrow • Learning is mostly reactive • This might not be sufficient for changing circumstances that require radical transformations of practices rather than ongoing improvements