



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.

Value of CoP – Strategic Capabilities

WHAT

Communities of practice are an ideal vehicle for developing strategic capabilities in organizations. This is because they involve the relevant set of practitioners directly in the process, recognizing and leveraging their experience. Their learning directly affects their practice, and they feel empowered to make a difference. A community of practice combines into one social learning process the professional development of members and the continuous development of organizational capabilities.

WHY

We live in times when the speed of change is high and predictability low. Staying up-to-date and the need to keep innovating become key challenges. Having access to information about good practice and new research may be easier with the internet, but it is not enough to make a sustained difference in practice, taking into account the subtle nuances of particular contexts. For this you need a community of practice:

- Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for the learning they need, recognizing that, given the proper support, they are in the best position to drive this process. Even if they occasionally invite an expert to delve into a topic, they are in the driver's seat.
- Communities among practitioners create a direct link between learning and engagement in practice, and thus performance.

- Practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of learning, as well as the more explicit and established aspects.

HOW

When considering the value of communities of practice in organizations, it is useful to think along two dimensions as summarized in the table below:

Short-and long-term value to organizations and members

| | SHORT-TERM | LONG-TERM |
|--------------|--|---|
| ORGANIZATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collectively to solve both local and organization-wide problems • Avoid repeating mistakes across teams, departments, and contexts • Create synergies and economies of scale between organizational units • Benchmark approaches and solutions across contexts • Mentor newcomers to help them get up to speed quickly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build strategic capabilities for ongoing success • Involve practice-based partners in strategic conversations about future capabilities • Transform local innovations into widespread yet locally adapted practices • Build a more engaged and committed workforce • Retain employees and promote them internally |
| MEMBERS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with colleagues beyond one's team • Receive just-in-time help not limited to personal network • Get tips and ideas for one's job • Know what is happening in other teams, departments and organizations • Organize practical and relevant professional development • Find new opportunities for emergent leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new skills and capabilities • Build a stronger sense of professional identity • Gain recognition and reputation by helping people in other organizational units • Gain a collective voice to engage organizational stakeholders around relevant issues • Expand one's professional network • Develop leadership capabilities |

Short-term and long-term value. The focus on practice means that members solve immediate problems and learn immediately relevant skills. But over time these communities also build capabilities that have long-term effects.

Value to organizations and to members. The challenges that communities of practice address and the capabilities they build contribute to organizational success. But a community depends on personal engagement; it will only reach its full potential if members find value in it for themselves.

Bridging across silos

Because communities of practice are not limited by formal structures, they can forge useful connections among people across organizational and geographic boundaries. They can create

human bridges across silos among business units, projects, or local offices. Large organizations tend to swing on a pendulum between centralization and decentralization. This is because each has complementary advantages and problems. Communities of practice offer a middle way to deal with the trade-offs involved in the centralization/decentralization dilemma. Because they are learning partnerships and not regulating entities, they connect without imposing uniformity. Members listen to each other, but they are free to adapt ideas to their contexts. Communities of practice can therefore create synergies across silos without imposing the type of top-down alignment that strong centralization tends to demand. But close discussions of practice across organizational units provide a flexible counterweight to the type of fragmentation that can result from extreme decentralization.