



INVESTORS / LEADERS / SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Identify potential sponsors, SMEs, mentors and young leaders for the CoP.

Get support from top management as the sponsor & to suggest useful executive action for young leaders. Officially appoint SMEs and mentors for advices and guidance.

SMEs are the backbone bringing specialized knowledge often pivotal in addressing and resolving intricate challenges. Senior professionals as mentor, with their years of experience serve as beacons for newer members. Young leaders positioned at the crossroads of strategy and execution, often offer an unique vantage point.

Strategic Engagement: Sponsorship

WHAT

Organizational environments that are conducive to successful communities of practice involve two kinds of organizational roles:

- **Strategic engagement:** senior leaders and executives who carefully and purposefully connect communities of practice to organizational objectives, resources, and structures
- **Operational leadership:** a social learning team that helps communities of practice achieve their full potential.

WHY

Communities of practice are most likely to reach their full potential when they are well integrated in the formal structure of the organization, when their work is supported, their voice is heard, and their value is recognized. This is where managers and executives can play an important role by providing *sponsorship* to communities of practice. It is useful to distinguish four main types of sponsorship.

HOW

- **Initiative sponsor.** This level of sponsorship is directed at the portfolio of communities of practice as whole. It is provided by a high-level executive or a leadership team. The goal is to legitimize the cultivation of communities of practice in terms of strategic priorities, ensure that the value of community participation and leadership is widely appreciated and recognized, and create an environment conducive to sustained learning and honest reflection.

- **Domain sponsor.** Not all communities of practice have a specific sponsor for their domain, but it is often a useful addition to the generic sponsorship of the initiative. Domain sponsors are line managers who can appreciate the strategic importance of a community's domain. Because of their responsibility for results, they are attuned to the learning of the community and the specific contributions it can make. They listen knowledgeably to members' questions and suggestions, which they take to other organizational actors when relevant. It is also a person who is able engage with the community without expecting to control it.
- **Local sponsor.** In complex organizational contexts, it is also useful to secure the support of local managers for specific regions or organizational units. They will encourage and recognize local participation in broader communities of practice.
- **Individual sponsor.** In some cases, it is necessary to enlist the sponsorship of the direct supervisor of individual members to ensure that their time and effort in the community is recognized as part of, and a valuable contribution to, their work.
- The role of sponsor requires the power and influence of a hierarchical position, but it is different from traditional management roles. It involves engagement and conversations rather than control. It is a way to channel resources and attention—providing a two-way connection with the formal hierarchy while recognizing that communities do not fit neatly in traditional organizational structures.

