USER EXPERIENCE

A diverse CoP is one where members, irrespective of their background, feel valued and heard. Prioritizing equity ensure that every member has equal access to opportunities and resources. Inclusion creates an environment where everyone feels they belong and can actively participate.

While members from various backgrounds, roles, and experiences bring unique perspectives that enrich the collective knowledge pool, it's the deliberate and strategic efforts towards fostering inclusivity that ensure these voices are truly integrated and valued.

In the context of a community of practice, we understand user experience to be members' and the community ecosystem's experience of/with the community's operational model. This includes:

- the community processes and practices,

- the community's methods for organisation,

- the digital tools used and the way community members use them.

On the Use of Technology – Synchronous Interactions

WHAT

Synchronous interaction refers to real-time communication where participants engage with each other at the same time, regardless of their location. This can include activities like live-streaming lectures, video-conference discussions, and any form of live chat. It's particularly effective for immediate social engagement and quick information exchange, fostering a sense of community and allowing for the clarification of misconceptions.

In contrast, asynchronous interaction allows participants to access materials and communicate at their own pace, over extended periods. This mode is more flexible temporally, giving learners the opportunity to deeply explore and engage with the material.

Both synchronous and asynchronous interactions have their place in learning environments, and often, a blend of both is used to optimize the learning experience.

WHY

Synchronous interactions are essential for several reasons:

- **Immediate Collaboration**: They enable real-time collaboration, allowing participants to work together and solve problems on the spot.

- **Camaraderie and Team Building**: Synchronous communication fosters a sense of camaraderie and helps build strong, cohesive team cultures, even when members are geographically dispersed.
- **Human Element**: It adds a human element to virtual settings, which is crucial for building relationships and maintaining a personal connection among team members.
- **Dynamic Interaction**: Real-time interaction is dynamic and can lead to more engaging and productive meetings or learning sessions.
- **Quick Decision Making**: It allows for faster decision-making processes, as discussions and approvals can happen instantaneously.
- **Feedback and Clarification**: Participants can give and receive immediate feedback, leading to quicker clarification of doubts and misconceptions.

Overall, synchronous communication offers a dynamic and interactive way for individuals and teams to connect, collaborate, and achieve their goals. It's particularly beneficial in environments where immediate responses are necessary or where the human touch is valued in the interaction.

HOW

Face-to-face meetings

Many communities make use of online tools even when they meet in-person, without anyone online. Having a shared online space allows members to take joint notes as well as share photos, documents, and time-sensitive work products that others can reuse right away. Online polling software allows members to register comments, questions, and opinions. Finding out what people think creates a shared picture of what's currently on the community's mind. In the last chapter, we have described using a shared Google doc for a process of joint-individual reflection, which can work equally well during both face-to-face and online meetings.

Online meetings

Synchronous online sessions are now very common, whether for regular community meetings or for an impromptu call to discuss something that demands an immediate response.

Videoconferencing

Now that videoconferencing has come of age, at least for communities whose members have enough bandwidth, seeing each other seems to make a difference to interactions and to the sense of togetherness. Unless a meeting is very large, we find that leaving one's video off disrupts this experience. One feature we have found essential is for participants to be in various configurations of smaller groups at various times during a meeting. When you are with a small group (less than, say, seven) you are much more likely to engage actively. Some tools even reproduce a 3D experience of a physical space with different tables or areas that approximate the experience of moving around a room to join groups.

Chat

Running a chat alongside the video allows participants to quickly insert comments, questions, and links to relevant things without breaking the flow of the main conversation. Some people may find it distracting to have to pay attention to two places at once. Hence, if something significant appears and develops on the chat, it is good to bring it into the main conversation.

We have also used the chat function to take running notes of a conversation. With the chat function, notes are public and multiple people can contribute to the process. This is useful immediately for people who may not have great sound or for whom the language of the meeting is a challenge. Saving the notes then creates a record for later access.

Shared visual workspace

In combination with videoconferencing, we use a shared visual workspace for collaboration, brainstorming, and joint reflection. The workspace also provides continuity across meetings. Text-based workspaces like Google docs work for reflections, as mentioned earlier. But they do not generate quite the same sense of a space for being together as a visual workspace like Mural or Miro.

In the workspace, we create a variety of subspaces for different activities. Sometimes we give everyone a personal space, a reserved area where they can say something about themselves, share some photos or other visuals, or take notes. Participants can then visit each other and say something with a digital sticky note.

We have also started to use the workspace for slides rather than sharing screen in presentation mode. With all the slides laid out in an area of the workspace, participants can see them all at once and move around them freely. We find that slides displayed on the shared workspace tend to become conversation pieces rather than a support for linear one-way presentations. Participants can also place sticky notes with comments or questions. This way the slides area becomes a communal artefact.