**What are communities of practice?**

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better.

**Why focus on communities of practice?**

- **short-term value**
  - help with challenges
  - access to expertise
  - confidence
  - fun with colleagues
  - meaningful work

- **long-term value**
  - personal development
  - reputation
  - professional identity
  - network
  - marketability

**What are some critical success factors?**

**community**

- Domain that energizes a core group
- Skillful and reputable coordinator
- Involvement of experts
- Address details of practice
- Right rhythm and mix of activities

**organization**

- Strategic relevance of domain
- Visible management sponsorship, but without micro-management
- Dance of formal and informal structures
- Adequate resources
- Consistent attitude

**Where to start?**

- **educate**
  - Communities of practice are a familiar experience, but people need to understand how they fit in their work.
  - Conduct workshops to educate management and potential members about the approach
  - Help people appreciate how communities of practice are inherently self-defined and self-managed
  - Establish a language to legitimize communities and establish their place in the organization

- **support**
  - Communities of practice can use some light-handed guidance and technology infrastructure.
  - Provide some process support, coaching, and logistic assistance
  - Identify needs and define adequate infrastructure without undue emphasis on fancy technology

- **get going**
  - Starting to cultivate communities of practice as early as possible creates early examples that allow people to learn by doing.
  - Have a few pilot communities going as soon as possible
  - Find communities to start with by identifying areas where there is potential and readiness
  - Interview some prospective members to understand issues, start discussing a community, and identify potential leaders
  - Gather a core group to prepare and initiate a launch process
  - Help members organize an initial series of value-adding activities
  - Encourage them to take increasing responsibility for stewarding their knowledge

- **encourage**
  - Practitioners usually see the value of working as a community but may feel the organization is not aligned with their understanding.
  - Find sponsors to encourage participation
  - Value the work of communities
  - Publicize successes

- **integrate**
  - The formal organization must have processes and structure to include these communities while honoring their root in personal passion and engagement.
  - Integrate communities in the way the organization works
  - Identify and remove obvious barriers
  - Align key structural and cultural elements

**set strategic context**

A strategic context lets communities find a legitimate place in the organization.

- Articulate a strategic value proposition
- Identify critical business problems
- Articulate need to leverage knowledge

**What elements to develop?**

- **Domain**: the definition of the area of shared inquiry and of the key issues
- **Community**: the relationships among members and the sense of belonging
- **Practice**: the body of knowledge, methods, stories, cases, tools, documents

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