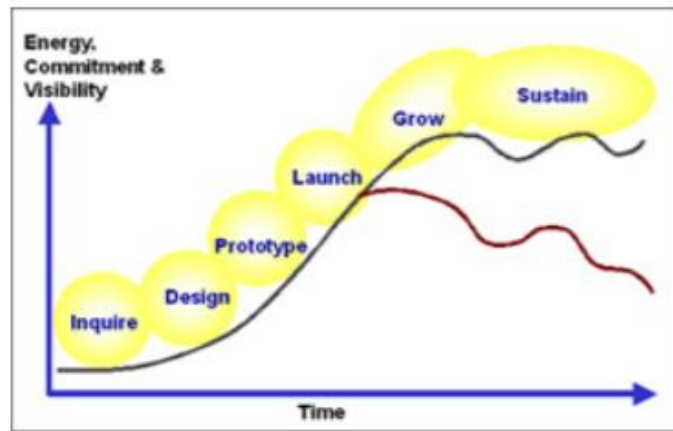# Best Practices for Communities of Practice

This document was produced by the Kx Unit for internal use but has been made available to the UBC community as it compiles Kx-related resources that may prove valuable to communities of practice. Please note that this is not an exhaustive resource.

Key considerations for building a CoP

(adapted from McDermott, 2002)

Figure 1. Lifecycle phases of communities (Cambridge et al., 2005).

- *Inquire:* identify the community members and stakeholders as well as the key issues and the nature of learning the community will address. Set goals and outcomes that will benefit the CoP and its stakeholders.
- *Design:* define the activities, groups processes, roles, and resources that will support the community's goals.
- *Prototype:* pilot the community to test assumptions, gain commitment, refine the strategy, and establish a success story.
- *Launch:* continue to refine roles, measure success, and work towards goals.
- *Grow:* engage members in knowledge sharing activities and increase participation through individual and group activities.
- *Sustain:* assess the learning, knowledge, and products created by the community to develop ongoing community processes, resources and strategies that can be used in the future.

Supporting activities for all six steps may be found on pages 4 – 7 of Community of Practice Design Guide

Establishing purpose

- Successful and sustainable communities have focused, well-defined purposes that are directly tied to the sponsoring organization's mission
- Purposes should be defined in terms of the benefits to the community's stakeholders and the specific needs that the community will be organized to meet. Purposes can be categorized into the following four areas of activity: develop relationships → learn and develop practice → carry out tasks and projects → create new knowledge

Factors affecting participation

- Mutual confidence between members is created through spaces where members may freely express themselves without worrying about judgement or embarrassment from others.
- Reliable knowledge, relevant discussions, and user-friendly infrastructure help ameliorate member experience and increase tendency to contribute
- Main concerns: Fear of not being relevant; Fear of losing power by sharing; Perception of offering less information than getting it; Lack of time (depending on the member's priorities and not necessarily because of lack of time from superiors); Culture that does not support knowledge sharing; Perception that it is extra work; Lack of answers or too much time to respond to questions asked.

Achieving success in a community

- Evaluation should be dynamic, conducted at regular intervals and regular intervals and address different elements appropriate to the stage of development of the community
- Implement an appropriate degree of formality to justify the time that members devote to the community
- Incorporate facilitation on a regular basis to develop a sense of belonging
- Allocate time to reflect on practices and progress
- Visible leadership must be present at each level of the community
- Recognition of members' time and participation
- Ensure that the themes, tasks, and expectations are stimulating for members
- Promote autonomy in the CoP
- Translate the strategy of the organization into domains that are populated by members who can take care of the knowledge in their domain
- Engage practitioners in the development of their practice. Useable knowledge is produced by experience.

Factors contributing to member success

- Openness to new ideas
- Curiosity
- Self-discipline
- Flexibility
- Initiative, interest
- Authentic interactions and connections beyond assigned roles
- Participation – members must set aside time for themselves

"In CoPs, 'belonging is enacted through the mutual engagement, sharing of repertoires, and negotiation of the joint enterprise(s)'" (Pyrko et al.). Members should be encouraged to share ideas, ask questions, and listen to problems encountered by others. They must be aware that they are not only accessing a service, consuming information, but that they are entering into a relationship that requires their active participation. The knowledge and resources shared should be organized for easy access so that people can be connected quickly with what they are looking for. This may be done through a directory outlining points of contact and sources of information.

General Tips:

- Establish clear plan or structure, while keeping in mind the informal and social nature of CoPs
- Start sharing ideas in an introductory meeting through discussing goals and objectives
- Hold meetings on a regular basis to keep the momentum going
- Consider using project management tools to share resources and delegate tasks
- Survey members to define problems that could be addressed in regular meetings
- Stay conscious of the knowledge and experience that each member offers
- Appoint a moderator to help keep groups on task, provide guidance during meetings, and serve as a liaison
- Ensure that members have various means to share ideas and work together
- Consider CoPs as a process rather than an entity that can simply be set up
- Overall these best practices are achieved through bringing together: the people, the technology, the structure/process, and the mindset

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