



Overview

In the current business environment much of what workers do occurs in the context of communities of practice (CoP) – either formally or informally. This is where best practices and innovations usually first emerge and where solutions to problems are initially uncovered. That is why many companies are promoting and supporting technology-enabled CoPs, principally in activities where an edge in performance provides a competitive advantage

CoPs are gaining widespread acceptance as a valuable knowledge management (KM) tool and best practice. In brief, a CoP is a distinct genre of informal human and social network that materializes typically from a need for people to collaborate more effectively and/or to acquire new knowhow of a particular specialty or work activity.

At the simplest level, CoPs are modest groups of workers who work together over a period of time and through extensive communication develop a holistic sense of approach and purpose and a desire to share work-related knowledge and experience. CoPs are not new - such groups have been around ever since people in business realized they could benefit from sharing knowledge, insights, and experiences with others who have similar interests or goals.

Since CoPs are voluntary, what makes them successful is their ability to generate excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage existing and new members. Although many factors, such as management support or an urgent problem can inspire a community, nothing can substitute for this sense of aliveness and active participation.

The mission for a particular CoP and the results expected depend upon the process and practice area around which the CoP is organized and upon which it is focused. In general, however, the mission and expected outcomes for all CoPs encompass:

- Stimulating proactive interaction
- Fostering sharing and learning
- Creating new knowledge and insights
- Socializing new members
- Identifying and sharing best practices

TKCI Approach

The CoP Design Review approach includes the below activities:

- Identify and agree CoP domain and scope
- Understand goals and expected outcomes of the planned CoP's domain and business focus
- Identify member university and boundaries and determine value for active participation
- Design CoP entity:
 - Principles and rules of operation
 - Incentives and rewards
 - Structure, processes and interactions
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Communication among members
 - Changes: scope, approach, content, and members
 - Ownership of results
 - Technology support (Portal, Blog, and Wiki etc.)
- Develop ROI and Risk Analysis
- Create forward plan for implementation of CoP within targeted corporate areas

The Bottom Line

The business case for a CoP is this: for a nominal investment in terms of today's resources, organizations can reap huge rewards in terms of tomorrow's results.

The benefits of establishing a CoP include:

- Enable colleagues to learn from one another through the sharing of issues, ideas, lessons learned, problems and their solutions, research findings and other relevant aspects of their mutual interest.
- More broadly share and better leverage the learning that occurs in the CoP with internal stakeholders, customers, and partners.
- Generate tangible, measurable, value-added benefits to support the corporate financial goals.
- Encourage product and process innovation with 'out of the box thinking'.