

Distributed communities of practice: USEM workshop. Heerlen, LEX 4rd of June 2009

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Topics

- Learning in interaction: learning networks, communities of practice.
 - > background, characteristics, potential
- Untapping the potential of communities
 - > attracting participants,
 - > enabling interaction
 - > commitment and continuity
- Enabling practices
 - > creating affording conditions
 - > actions to create and sustain engagement
 - > suggestions for moderation.

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A Community of Practice

Group of people who *share a concern, a set of problems or a passion* about a topic, and who *deepen their understanding and knowledge* of this area *by interacting on an ongoing basis.*

(Etienne Wenger et.al., 2002)

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Communities

Flavours

- Communities of practice
- Professional Networks
- Knowledge sharing communities
- Social communities
- Communities of experts
- Communities of learners

What's in it for Me?

- Shared concern.
 - Connects: helps finding relevant people, information, contacts and learning opportunities

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Pitfalls

- Continuity trap: panta rhei, lifecycle change of the community over time.
- Local learning trap: too much attention on local knowledge sharing without addressing the overall concern how USEM as whole can benefit
- ICT-trap: too much optimism ICT information provision, tooling.
- Management trap: too much opportunity driven, too little user problem-driven.
- Self-organization trap: assuming that once kick-started the community will continue on its own.

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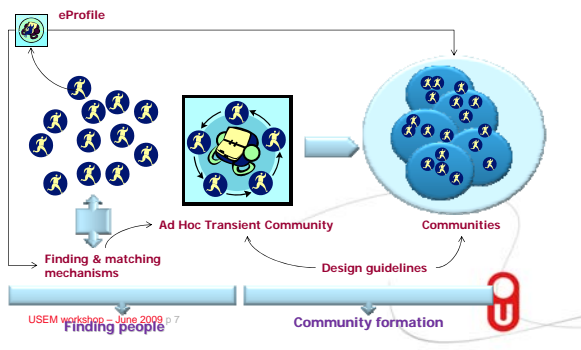
Considerations: be aware

- The community has to be a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- Some COPs run self organized, but most don't.
- Moderation is needed: vision, leadership co-ordination.
- Active encouragement is necessary to get a wide range of views
- Connect to daily practices in the "outside world" is needed
- Draw outside resources inside.
- Create conditions for deep engagement, peer trust and help.
- This requires a "safe" space: usually requiring "limited access"/privacy.
- Start simple but interactive. Connect to what people already use
- Approximate (real "in-person") worthwhile experiences, organize learning events

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Learning network: ad hoc communities



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Community enablers

- Nurture shared concern and passion.
- Enable the person to present him/herself and keep in control.
- Keep going: provide activities, events.
- Support heterogeneity.
- Participants look for contributing and gaining: "giving and getting"

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Conditions for successful community

- **Boundary dimension:** facilitate cooperation or collaboration in a community. The community needs to have clear boundaries and a clear set of rules that can be monitored and "sanctioned" within the community.
- **Heterogeneity:** to assure liveness a heterogeneous population of the community. A variety of perspectives to ignite creative interaction (so both veterans, newbies, lurkers, posters, experts and novices)
- **Accountability:** users need to be recognizable, committed to the community and accountable for their actions, and responsible for their share in the continuity of contact

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Requirements for a learning community

- Learning networks/communities provide learners with opportunities to collaborate interactively with peers and tutors on specific issues.
- Sustainable online communities should have functionalities for



- 1) self-management
- 2) self-organization
- 3) self-categorization
- 4) self-regulation.

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Support self management

- Creation of profiles including (PEXPI) personal expertise inventory or personal identity and expertise profile
- Including support the *creation of contacts*
- Including *graphical representation of the connections*
- Support for *awareness*, interaction and the exchange of reputational information.

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Support heterogeneity: the personality mix

Central Connectors: people communicating/ connected to many others in the community. critical to the network.

Boundary spanners: provide critical links between groups of people.

Information brokers: peer to peer linking information between people in the net.

Bridgers people linking indirect connections i.e Frans and Wim have no direct connection but each has a relationship with Herbert (so they are connected through her); people such as Herbert play a brokering role that can hold together entire groups.

Peripheral specialists one/few connections. Not linked to each other. Newcomers: "stuck" in the periphery. Sometimes by "choice (like experts).

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Facilitate self organization & interaction.

- Facilitate participants' interaction with others and support knowledge.
- Help participants to classify and evaluate their own contributions but also those from others.
- Allow participants to control the level of privacy of (their) contributions, as well as to decide whether these are offensive or not.
- Promote the exchange of off-task personal information.

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Support self-organization, categorization and regulation

- Enable building of swift trust.
- Show and exchange information on the reputation of participants.
- Show information about presence, activities, and availability of participants to the community.
- Show information about the characteristics of the community.

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Provide learning opportunities, interaction and feedback

"For professional development to truly build practitioner knowledge and expertise, a community must provide the opportunity for ongoing learning and access to timely feedback on relevant issues in practice."

Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000

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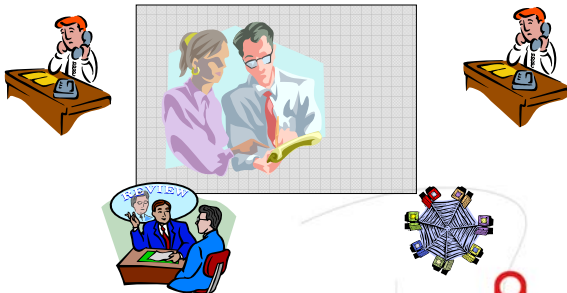
Moderate: core for interactivity, participation & shared focus

- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- Make sure people are constantly given opportunities to connect to your interest in meaningful ways.
- Always ask who is not at the table and could contribute
- Stay focused on shared concerns
- Engage participants according to their needs and "role"

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Create opportunities, organize activities: Events, webinars, debates.



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Translating these guidelines to USEM community

- Characterize *USEM community*.
- *Shared concern*, shared a set of problems or passion.
- Need for *deep understanding*: learning & knowledge.
- Commitment to *interact* on an *ongoing basis*.

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