

Structural Elements of a Community of Practice: Domain, Community and Practice

Structural Element	Definition	Key Challenges in Each Stage of Community Development				
		Stage 1: Potential	Stage 2: Coalescing	Stage 3: Maturing	Stage 4: Stewardship	Stage 5: Transformation
Domain <i>What is this about?</i>	The area of shared inquiry and key issues.	Defining the scope of a community in a way that sparks the authentic interests of members and taps into strategic issues for the organization or field as a whole	Establishing the value of sharing knowledge about this domain	Defining the role of the community in the organization or the field and how it relates to other domains	Maintaining the relevance of the domain and finding a voice in the organization or field	Knowing when the domain is no longer relevant or pressing
Community <i>Who is it and how do they interact?</i>	The membership, relationships between members, and norms for participation.	Finding others who already network on the topic and helping them imagine how to create more value through increased networking and knowledge sharing	Build relationships and enough trust for members to be willing to tackle sticky practice problems.	Managing the boundaries of membership so that the community keeps its core purpose but expands to include new thinking and new members	Keeping the tone and intellectual focus of the community lively and engaging	Deciding when the community is dying or needs rejuvenation and knowing how to disband
Practice <i>What capability does it produce?</i>	The shared repertoire of resources (both tangible and intangible) that members develop over time.	Identifying needs for knowledge that are common to members	Uncovering specifically what knowledge should be shared and how	Shifting from knowledge sharing to organizing and generating new knowledge	Keeping the community on the cutting edge	Institutionalizing or transitioning “ownership” of the tangible resources the community produced

Adapted from Wenger, et al., *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Harvard Business School Press. 2002.

Community of Practice Design Dimensions

Domain	Community	Practice

Narrow, invited membership ←-----→ **Broad, open membership**

Low expectations for member participation ←-----→ **High expectations for member participation**

Unstructured information sharing ←-----→ **Structured group learning**

Diffusely managed ←-----→ **Centrally managed**

In-person ←-----→ **Virtual**