Implementing a Community of Practice

Main Components

1. **Community** : active members who are interested in sharing their knowledge and who dedicate their time to the community.
2. **Domain** : it must be a compelling topic; one of interest to many people and of relevance to their work. The potential members must be passionate about the subject for collaboration.
3. **Practice** : the ability to compare one's own work practices to those of others is one of the foundations of the CoP.
4. **Motivation/engagement** : the existence of the community is based only on the motivation of its members.
5. **Structure** : it is important to find a balance between formal and informal structure. Most communities have a concentric structure at triple level (core group, closer circle, outside circle).

Step by Step

1. **Creating:**
   o Decide what topic you wish to address in a community in order to identify the domain.
   o To encourage people to participate, start a discussion on a domain or a small problem and present ideas and/or solutions for resolving this problem.
   o Find a committed leader or coordinator for the community: volunteer to be the community leader yourself or identify someone else. The community leader should know the subject, have energy for stimulating collaboration, regularly spend time increasing membership, lining up speakers, hosting calls and meetings, asking and answering questions, and posting information which is useful to the members.
   o Identify thought leaders to legimate the community and potential members to leverage knowledge. The community will need a critical mass of members. You usually need at least 50 members, with 100 being a better target. Try to take advantage of existing networks.
   o Decide on an initial technology platform and create one or more tools for the community to use (threaded discussion board, collaborative team space, web site or portal, Wiki, Blog, or newsletter).

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2. **Starting-up:**
   - o Publicize the existence of your community once it is established to help recruit new members.
   - o Watch the production of intermediate results, summaries and conclusions of the discussions.
   - o Gather a core group (leader, experts, stakeholders) and maintain one closer circle (involved members) and one outside circle (interested members, contributors, readers).
   - o Keep the community active : regular conference, periodic events, weekly meetings and collect examples of value.
3. **Developing and sustaining**
   - o Maintain interest and commitment by organizing workshops and meetings on major topics.
   - o Introduce new and challenging perspectives.
   - o Maintain the energy by recruiting new members.
   - o Rotate roles and responsibilities between members over time.
   - o Manage knowledge by creating knowledge maps, processing knowledge sharing , organizing resources, and identifying knowledge gaps.
4. **Closing:**
   - o Ending the CoP when the domain is less relevant or the purpose ended.
   - o Celebrate its life and achievements by organizing a special event.
   - o Create a new CoP on a different topic.

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