Organizing professional communities of practice

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Guidelines for the CoPOS trajectory

The trajectory has a duration of about 10 months, although the actual length will be somewhat determined by the participants themselves. Meetings take place every other month and should last ±3 hours, but specific details will be discussed with each group. For most groups this will be too long and meetings will need to be shortened accordingly.

*Intervention One: gaining support and participation*

In order to gain management support, the idea of CoPs is presented to the management team. Previous to this meeting, members of the management team (MT) are sent a copy of a slide show giving the business case for starting one. If management decides to support the CoP, potential members are approached by the MT via a general invitation that includes information about the reasons for starting the CoP (problems, etc.), housekeeping issues such as time and place and a copy of a business case similar to that presented to the MT, but altered slightly according to the target group. Important elements of the business case are: an explanation of what a CoP is; how it works; what it means to be a part of one, including investment and returns and a brief explanation of possible interventions.

Critical success factor: Assure embeddedness of the CoP by making concrete agreements about the position of the CoP in the greater organization.

(Please note; the interventions given below are used to discuss the actual content that the members want to discuss. In other words, the interventions are not the focus of the meetings but should be used to facilitate the discussions.)

*Intervention Two: Community kick-off and developing the learning agenda*

The first meeting is about getting to know one another (if this is not already the case) and what it means to take part in a CoP. A short discussion about whether or not everyone is willing to invest in the CoP can be started, but the material sent out before this meeting should have been the first ‘filter’.
Organizing Professional Communities of Practice

Getting acquainted is also about finding common learning goals. This is done using a simple intervention. Participants are asked to write down three questions they would like to discuss in the CoP. Then each participant discusses these with the person sitting next to him or her. Then he or she rewrites the questions on a post-it note. These are placed on a flip-over and then taxonomized by the whole group. A discussion is then started to see which ones will be worked on first and if there is any further input needed. This list is called the learning agenda.

The facilitator, or someone appointed by him/her, makes sure the learning agenda is transcribed (I used a software program called Inspiration) and sent to all participants immediately following the meeting and again as part of the announcement for the next one.

Critical success factor: A crucial aspect of the questions members write down is that they be based on action and problem-solving. To do this, make sure members formulate their questions in a “how” form.

Another consideration is the large number and diversity of the questions raised. However, the learning agenda will have patterns, or recurring themes around which specific questions can be grouped. If there are many divergent themes, the group can later decide to choose one at a time to work on, or if the group is large enough, subgroups can be formed. An example of a learning agenda that was made in the Inspiration program by a group of 14 teachers is shown in Figure 9.1 below.
Learning agenda for TD CoP: Entrepreneurship

How can I motivate the students to be open?
How can I make lectures more interested to the students?
How to get the incubator filled in with the most promising ventures
How to improve my skills so I can improve others’ skills?
How do I find enough experts willing to help?
How do we get stakeholders involved to get the right conditions in place?
How can we improve our external connections?
How to stimulate others in their entrepreneurial behavior?
How can I keep the energy level up in a group?

Figure 9.1. Example of a learning agenda and selected items
Common questions at this point revolve around the idea of what can be done with the learning agenda and how to continue. Sometimes this discussion is continued in the following meeting. Otherwise, the facilitator can explain that a using this learning agenda as a guide, the CoP can develop new knowledge. What for form this takes is up to the group; it could be in the form of a concrete new product, such as a protocol, or in the form of discussions in which problems are solved. Depending on what the group decides, a fitting intervention needs to be decided upon. The following is a list of the ones I used in my research. These are in no specific order, that should be decided at the time of implementation.

**Intervention: new product development**

Groups that decide to try and develop a concrete new product can go through this intervention, which spans several meetings. The following steps give the essence of the intervention.

Step One; briefly explain how knowledge is developed using Nonaka and Takeuchi’s knowledge creation spiral and that this is the guide for the intervention.

Step two; decide what topics from the learning agenda should take priority. If there are several, and the group is large enough, break into two groups and ask them to, using the learning agenda as a guide, discuss what product they would like to create. This could be a new book, a protocol, a presentation, etc. Then ask members to discuss what is from the learning agenda that will be addressed?

Step three: have members go through the design steps as follow, writing down results of each step. Make sure it is mentioned that this process spans several meetings. At the start of each new meeting there should be a short report by group members on what has been done. Group members will usually automatically assign roles among themselves. The steps are as follows:

1. Decide which problem to address (Use the learning agenda as starting point)
2. Formulate product functionality (what is it supposed to do?)
3. Gather ideas (how could it look?)
4. Market analysis (who is going to use it and in which ways?)
5. Making the design(s) (what form does it have?)
6. Theoretically test the target group (does it meet its requirements?)
7. Operationalize the design (work out the details)
Appendices

(Note: none of the groups I guided completed a finished product.)

Critical success factor: Assure the group that the products serve two purposes; one is to influence the organization and the other is to learn and build knowledge while working on the concrete goal.

**Intervention: Socratic questioning**

This intervention comes from the original workshop on storytelling and is used to facilitate group discussion. A whole workshop on storytelling can (and should) take three to four hours, but the essential aspect (that members guide their own part of the discussion more like a dialogue) can be given as a guide for discussions within the group. The following list comes from a slide entitled “Essentials of Socratic questioning” based on Straker (2007).

**Table 9.1. Socratic questions slide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual clarification</td>
<td>This is about trying to understand at a deeper level.</td>
<td>‘Tell me more’ or ‘What does that mean exactly?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering preconceptions and presuppositions</td>
<td>Finding out on what beliefs arguments or statements are founded.</td>
<td>‘What else could we assume?’ or ‘Why do you say that?’ or ‘please explain why or how that could be.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing rationale, reasons and evidence</td>
<td>Trying to understand a person’s reasoning and support for a statement or argument.</td>
<td>‘Do you have any concrete proof of what you are saying?’ or ‘What is the true nature of what you are describing?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning viewpoints and perspectives</td>
<td>Looking for alternative viewpoints.</td>
<td>‘What would be another way of looking at this?’ or ‘What if you compared ... and ...?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe implications and consequences</td>
<td>Checking to see if the implications for a statement are logical.</td>
<td>‘What are the implications of what you are saying?’ or ‘How would that affect ...?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about the question</td>
<td>Turning the question back into itself in order to reflect on it.</td>
<td>‘Why would you ask that question?’ or ‘Why do you think I would ask that question?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizing Professional Communities of Practice

**Intervention: de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats**

This intervention has two aspects. The first one is about helping group process by exploring different ways of understanding. In this sense it is linked directly to Socratic Questioning. The second aspect of the Six Thinking Hats is about stimulating creativity. Members have been sent a copy of the slides and an introduction to de Bono’s system beforehand, but might not have read it. This means a short explanation should be given as to how the hats are used, and, taking a problem from the learning agenda, a solution is discussed using the Six Thinking Hats system. This can also be the first step in new product development. Again, the complete intervention can take between three and four hours, so a shortened version is recommended.

Critical success factor: Important considerations concerning the intervention are related to keeping to the system as it is meant to be used – it is easy to stray from the intended goal, which is to improve group process and stimulate creativity.

**Intervention: Guest speaker**

Using the group as a resource, members can be asked if anyone would like to invite a guest speaker who can talk about a theme or an aspect of the learning agenda. The meeting is set up so that there is a short presentation by the guest speaker, followed by a discussion of how what was brought up can be used in members’ practice. Questions such as ‘has anyone else had a similar experience’ or ‘how could we use this (in our practice or product)’ can be guiding. Another way to apply this intervention follows what was done in the Learning Network CoP, namely that a guest speaker gave a short presentation followed by members splitting into smaller groups in which they discussed questions formulated previously by the organizing committee. Groups wrote down their discussion points and reported on the to the larger group, which then discussed them further.

Critical success factor: Have several questions or discussion points prepared beforehand that can help guide the discussion. These can come from the guest speaker as well.

**Intervention: Evaluating the CoP**

This meeting focuses on group reflection guided by the evaluative survey given at the end of the fourth or fifth meeting. The point is to reflect on what processes are going well and what needs to be improved, as well as how to improve them. For a
copy of the survey, see Table 10.2 below. This should not be the focus of the meeting, but only a part. However, it is important to discuss the continuation of the CoP and how this will be assured, or if to be stopped, how to go about this. Critical success factor: use the evaluative survey as a guide and give examples. Ask the CoP members explicitly if they want to continue and if so, how? What needs improvement? Are the results of the evaluation valid and recognizable?

**Appendix 2: Consultant competence survey set-up**

The setup of the domain competence surveys for both teachers and consultants is identical and is shown in Table 9.2 below. For the complete list of teacher and consultant competences, please see chapter 3.

*Table 9.2. Domain competence survey set-up*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Competence &amp; change therein</th>
<th>Link to type of interaction</th>
<th>Example showing change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence Group - teaching preparation</td>
<td>X = begin situation Y = end situation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td>(circle one or more)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Preparing course curricula
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   (circle one or more)

1. Developing learning agenda
2. Storytelling/Socratic questioning
3. DeBono’s Thinking Hats
4. Guest speaker
5. Group reflection
6. Other (name)