

# Communities of Practice

Building an effective network for leadership support

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# What is a Community of Practice (CoP)?

- ◆ A group of people of who share an interest, craft and/or a profession
- ◆ Mutual engagement: build collaborative relationships
- ◆ Joint enterprise: shared understanding of what binds them
- ◆ Shared repertoire: produce a set of communal resources
- ◆ The goal: to gain knowledge from each other via information-sharing

# Underlying Principles

- ◆ Learning is central to human identity
- ◆ Could be formal or informal

*“...the individual as an active participant in the practices of social communities, and in the construction of his/her identity through these communities.” (Wenger et al, 2004)*

# What CoPs are not

- ◆ Project Teams
  - ◆ Results-driven
  - ◆ Membership defined by task
  - ◆ Member-roles remain consistent
  - ◆ Mission-driven – dissolves when job is done
- ◆ Communities of Interest
  - ◆ Sharing info on interesting topic
  - ◆ Members are not experts/practitioners

# Defining CoP members

- ◆ A group of people who are active practitioners
- ◆ CoP participation is not appropriate for non-practitioners
- ◆ Purpose of a CoP: to provide a way for practitioners to share tips and best practices, ask questions to their colleagues, and provide support to each other
- ◆ Membership is dependent on expertise – some recent experience performing in the role or subject area of the CoP is required

# Benefits of CoPs for members

- ◆ Group members have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally
- ◆ Domain of knowledge creates common ground; inspires members to participate; guides their learning; gives meaning to their actions
- ◆ Community creates social fabric for learning; fosters interaction; encourages willingness to share ideas
- ◆ Practice is the specific focus of the group; provides context to learning and actions; may increase productivity

# Benefits of CoPs for organization

- ◆ Increasing organization performance
- ◆ Decrease learning curve of new employees
- ◆ Respond more rapidly to customer needs & enquiries
- ◆ Preventing “re-inventing the wheel”
- ◆ Generating new ideas for services and products
- ◆ Community knowledge greater than individual knowledge

# CASE STUDY

## Xerox

- ◆ The core group: Xerox customer service representatives who repaired machines in the field.
- ◆ The shared interest: Reps began exchanging tips and tricks over informal meetings over breakfast or lunch.
- ◆ How it evolved: Eventually Xerox saw the value of these interactions; the Eureka project was created as a result to allow these interactions to be shared across the global network of reps.
- ◆ Some benefits: The Eureka project have saved Xerox an est. \$100 million. The members expanded their own individual knowledge.

# Cultivating a successful CoP

- ◆ Design community to evolve naturally –support shifts in focus
- ◆ Open dialogue within, plus outside perspectives to support learning objectives
- ◆ Allow different levels of participation: core (leaders), active, peripheral group (majority)
- ◆ Develop public and private community spaces
- ◆ Focus on value of community – productivity of participation
- ◆ Combine familiarity and excitement – conventional and radical wisdom
- ◆ Nurture a rhythm for community – sustain vibrancy

# Sustaining a CoP

- ◆ Members should believe they have something to contribute to it, or to gain from it.
- ◆ Keep it easy – should not feel like a job.
- ◆ Create loyalty amongst members – provide benefits/incentives.

Thank you