

Communities of Practice

A resource summary

What are Communities of Practice? ^{1,2}

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are self-organising and self-governing groups of people who share a passion for their field and strive, through collaboration, to become better practitioners.

Communities of Practice are not new in the NHS and have an established place in improvement work. The cross-professional and organisational boundary nature of CoPs give them the potential for reducing fragmentation of practice in service into issues that really matter, such as Patient Safety; and that are typically complex and beyond the scope of any individual, profession or organisation.

In the NHS, *“a CoP differs from a delivery network because membership is optional and the ways of working are informal... it’s a conversational relationship of peers who want to share and learn from each other. They will also help... develop cross boundary relationships with leaders in other parts of the organisation or community.”* (From the Improvement Leaders’ Guide, by the NHS Institute for Improvement and Innovation)

What are the elements of a community of practice?³

The Domain. A problem area it wishes to focus on and resolve; an issue that has the potential to make a difference in an area of expertise, which is a shared Domain of interest for all of the Community’s members. Membership implies a commitment to this Domain, and a shared competence that distinguishes the members from people outside the Community. The Domain is not necessarily something recognised as an ‘expertise’ outside the Community; for example, coping with acute deterioration may not be seen as an ‘expertise’ by others, but for those dealing with a particular Domain within their CoP, their collective competence is valued and are open to learning from one another.

The Community. The Domain attracts a group of people – the Community – who through regular interaction, communication and support, develop relationships based on respect and trust. Through joint activities such as the sharing of information and helping one another, each member comes to care about their standing within the Community, which in turn strengthens the social fabric that supports it. CoP members may come from differing professions, institutions and levels, but they learn from and with one another as peers. The Community is also usually dynamic with differing intensities of participation and with membership often growing or shrinking. At the core of any Community are the relationships; these matter as much as the context and the content that members share.

The Practice. Members of a CoP are practitioners; they share a passion for developing the best Practices they can while sharing a range of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems – in short, a shared Practice. Recognising the Practice takes time and sustained interaction. Members collect, document and share explicit knowledge but also uncover tacit knowledge and lessons, building up a knowledge base in the process; for instance, nurses who meet regularly for lunch in a hospital cafeteria may not initially realise that their lunch discussions are one of their main sources of knowledge about how to care for patients. Still, over the course of these conversations, they develop a set of stories and cases that could go on to become part of a shared repertoire for their Practice.

Why Communities of Practice? ⁴

A healthy society is a systems issue, a wicked problem. It is not contained within neat boundaries. As soon as you focus on one particular issue, applying methods to improve it, you realize it connects to more. You may fix the local issue, but not the global one. Solutions for this type of “wicked” problem require Systems Thinking and action as a system.

Communities of practice are intended to be boundary-spanning, across organizations, professions, hierarchies and sectors. They access the intelligence that is already in the system and bring that wisdom and expertise to

¹ Source: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/signuptosafety/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2015/09/ahsn-network-communities-of-practice.pdf>

² See also <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

³ Source: [http://www.hin-southlondon.org/system/resources/resources/000/000/315/original/HIN_COP_Brochure_v6_\(LoRes\).pdf](http://www.hin-southlondon.org/system/resources/resources/000/000/315/original/HIN_COP_Brochure_v6_(LoRes).pdf)

⁴ Source: http://www.londonleadershipacademy.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Communities%20of%20Practice%20Primer%20KSS%20LLA_v1.pdf

bear on what we are trying to do together. They move identity from the narrow role to what we are trying to do for the whole.

Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this. Communities among practitioners create a direct link between learning and performance, because the same people participate in communities of practice and in teams and business units.

Practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing, as well as the more explicit aspects. Communities are not limited by formal structures: they create connections among people across organizational and geographic boundaries.

However, the very characteristics that make communities of practice a good fit for stewarding knowledge—autonomy, practitioner-orientation, informality, crossing boundaries—are also collective competence and learn from each other, even though few people outside the group may even recognize the value of expertise.

What are the dynamics of Communities of Practice?^{5,6}

Most change and improvement efforts focus on the phenomena of organizations—the things you can see and touch, like structures, policies and procedures. However, most of what gets done in any system gets done through people who interpret a policy through the lens of their identity, based on what they value and have been valued for, their network of relationships, and the information they have available to them. Most of our organizations are cultures of silos—professional, departmental institutional and expertise-based identities that are fragmented in purpose, meaning and outcomes. These fragmented cultures take up anything presented to them and turn it back into themselves. This is why “Culture eats Strategy” rings true to people. Working at the levels of structure, policy and procedure often generates unintended consequences of the wrong kind.

Structure, policy and procedure do matter, but even more critical are the dynamics of organizing—**Identity, Information and Relationships.**

We create meaning through our identity, and act on that meaning through the information we have. Our freedom to act is a function of the level of mutual trust we hold with those we work with and serve. If our identities are fragmented, or too narrowly role prescribed, we will seek information that confirms our world view, and act in ways that are a less than responsive to the complexities of the tasks we face.

If our network of relationships is siloed and curtailed, our actions will impact only a small part of a wider challenge, one that requires open and honest conversation with a wider network of people, from multiple perspectives, different experience and varied expertise, so that we may together touch the infinite dimensions of the challenge characteristics that make them a challenge for traditional hierarchical organizations, and traditional forms of evaluation. However, these characteristics and dynamics of CoPs are congruent with the increasing focus on systemic solutions and the Five Year forward View of the NHS.

Identity – who we are is what we do – NOT what we say about what we do. What are we trying to achieve? What do we value? What is important? Who am I? Who are we together?

Information – there is no hierarchy to information (but there is to meaning!). What information do we have? Who has it? What information do we need? What are the indicators of success? Who decides and how?

Relationship – the quality of our relationships gives rise to the depth of trust. Who has influence, authority? Do we have access to each other? Who will be affected? Who else needs to be here? How do we want and need to work together?

Simple rules:

- Everyone has access to all information.
- Everyone has access to each other.
- We share a view of what’s significant, what really matters.

⁵ Source: http://www.londonleadershipacademy.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Communities%20of%20Practice%20Primer%20KSS%20LLA_v1.pdf

⁶ Source: [http://www.hin-southlondon.org/system/resources/resources/000/000/315/original/HIN_COP_Brochure_v6_\(LoRes\).pdf](http://www.hin-southlondon.org/system/resources/resources/000/000/315/original/HIN_COP_Brochure_v6_(LoRes).pdf)

Myron's Maxims⁷

These are compressed statements congruent with systems theory and action. They are useful as design criteria for processes and leadership of complex systems.

- People own what they help create.
- Real change takes place in real work.
- Those who do the work do the change.
- Connect the system to more of itself.
- Start anywhere, follow everywhere before us, and creatively craft a response.

Key success factors⁸

- **Identity** – passion for the domain is key.
- **Leadership** -- taking the initiative to nurture the community.
- **Time** – ensuring 'high value for time'.

What happens in a Community of Practice?⁹

Community members learn together, develop their practice, and share and build knowledge through a wide variety of "learning activities."

In the image this sample of learning activities is organized along three dimensions:

1. **Horizontally:** Learning from and learning with. When members interact, they learn both "from" and "with" each other. They learn from each other's experience of practice through stories, lessons learned, and advice; and they learn with each other when they act as learning partners in debating issues or exploring new solutions together. Most activities involve both processes. Even a simple request for information can lead to a debate about the relevance of the information provided. Still, it is often the case that one aspect is more salient in defining the basic structure of the activity. On the diagram, this dimension is represented by the horizontal axis: activities that are primarily "learning from" are toward the left and activities that are primarily "learning with" are towards the right.
2. **Vertically:** Informal and formal activities. It is important not to confuse the self-governing nature of communities of practice with an absence of internal structure. Learning activities range from very informal to very formal activities. Some activities require almost no facilitation or organization, such as requests for just-in-time information or spontaneous conversations. Some activities are quite formal, requiring facilitation, organization, and even protocols, such as training sessions, practice-development projects, or the setting of standards. On the diagram, this dimension is represented by the vertical axis with more informal activities towards the top and more formal activities toward the bottom.
3. **Inside and outside.** That the main thrust of communities of practice is peer-to-peer learning does not entail members have all the knowledge and information they need internally. Finding sources of information and knowledge outside is just as much of a community activity as learning from and with each other. Inviting guests and experts or reading research papers together are ways that communities incorporate broader knowledge into their practice and keep abreast of developments in relevant fields. Such boundary-oriented activities help the community avoid the trap of becoming insular and caught in its own limitations. On the diagram this dimension is illustrated by the two rectangles labelled as "each other" and "outside sources." Activities located in the inner rectangle mostly involve members. Activities located on the outer band centrally involve sources of learning outside of the community.

Because activities in the upper left require less commitment, communities often start there, and move progressively to activities in the lower right as they mature.

In addition to locating activities along these three dimensions, the slide also groups them into clusters of related activities that have similar learning effects. These clusters represent variations on a theme and are represented by the bubbles on the diagram:

- Sharing: information, stories, tips, documents
- Productive inquiries: asking for help, working on a case, exploring an idea

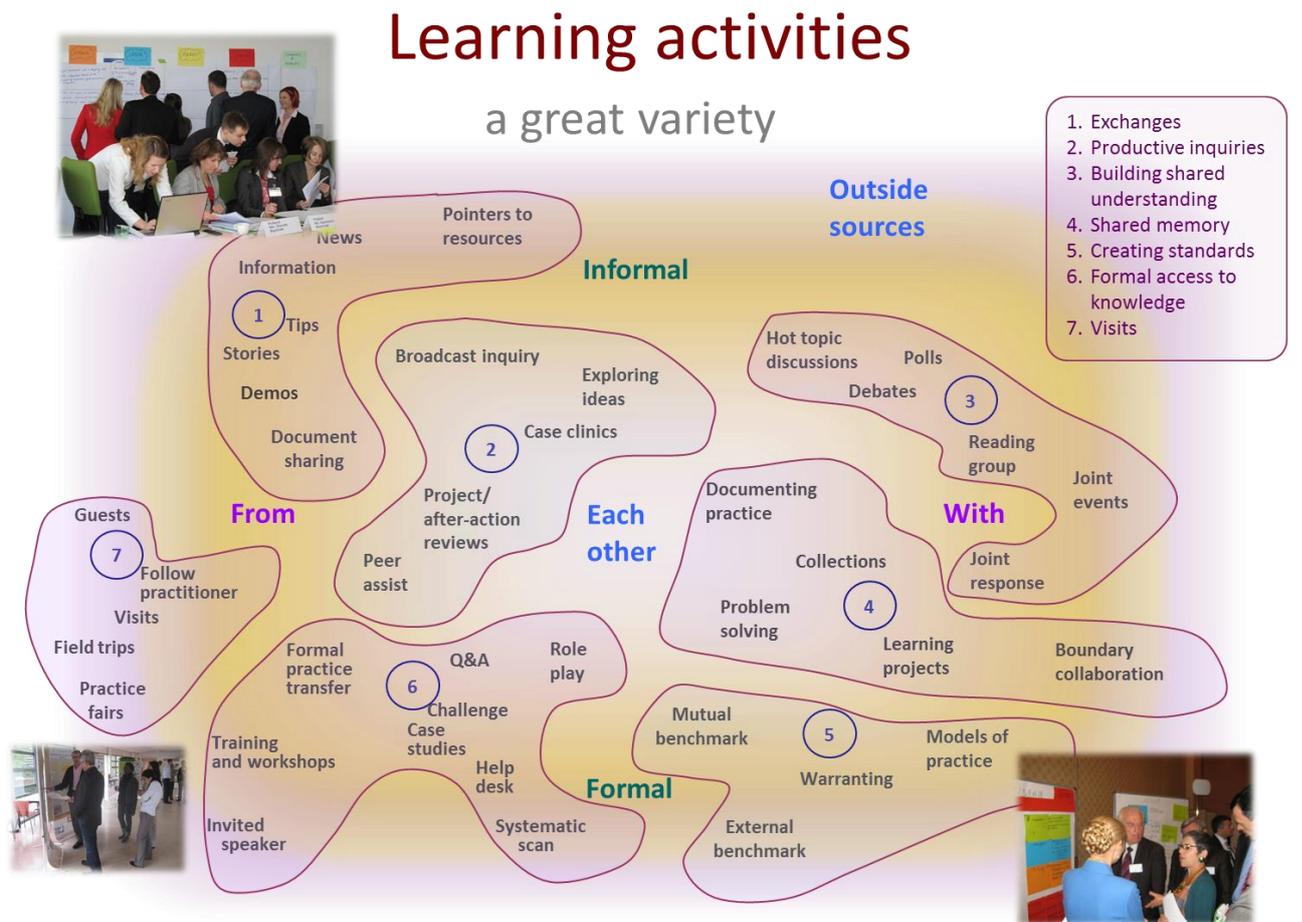
⁷ Source: http://www.londonleadershipacademy.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Communities%20of%20Practice%20Primer%20KSS%20LLA_v1.pdf

⁸ Source: <https://co-creationnetwork.com/docs/matthew-laurie-basecamp-2015/>

⁹ Source: <http://wenger-trayner.com/project/learning-activities/>

- Negotiating shared understanding: discussing a topic, reading a paper
- Producing assets: documentation, bibliographies, tools,
- Creating standards: benchmarks, maturity scales, warranting knowledge
- Formal access to knowledge: training, practice transfer, invited expert
- Visits: visiting a member's site, a community website

While this sample of learning activities cannot be exhaustive, it is large and varied. Obviously, not all communities engage in all these activities. In most cases, this would not be a good goal to strive for; many communities function very well with a small subset of these activities. But having a broad panorama of various kinds of activities is a useful tool. It can open the imagination of members and facilitators as to what their community could do to foster learning together. This is mainly a menu that community leaders can choose from to help organize their communities.



Version 3.2



What roles do people take in Communities of Practice?¹⁰

<p>Agenda activists: driving the learning forward</p> <p>Any group focused on social learning pursues what we call a joint “learning agenda.” This learning agenda, which may be more or less explicit, includes things like issues, challenges, opportunities, key topics, and aspirations of the community. Agenda activists are guardians of the community’s learning agenda. They are responsible for capturing and driving it. They pay attention to emerging learning needs and opportunities: productive themes and questions, key insights and promising lines of thought, as well as requests and possible action steps. They keep track of this evolving agenda, make sure things don’t fall through the cracks, and think of activities, conversations, and projects that would help the group make progress. They push the inquiry, deepen the thinking, question assumptions, and bring in relevant learning resources. In due time, they may even develop a fuller action plan and propose a timeline to address the learning agenda as a whole. Sometimes people misinterpret this role as one of time-keeping or staying on topic for the meeting agenda. If you see signs of this, it is good to clarify early on that the leadership task is much broader - focusing on the learning agenda of the community.</p>	<p>Take the lead on shaping our joint learning agenda</p> <p>As the agenda activists, you are the custodians of the learning agenda for our community. You keep track of issues, challenges, and learning opportunities. You invite the community to push the agenda with you. Given the concerns of the members of this community, you focus on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What key issues facing community members are we surfacing? • Given the time available, what challenges and opportunities are worth pursuing together? At this meeting? In the coming year? • Where is the group stuck? Are some underlying assumptions closing the inquiry? • Where are there resources the group could use to move forward? What kind of training may be necessary to enable progress on various issues? • How well are we doing? What still needs to be done? • Who will take responsibility for making sure it happens? • What resources are needed? <p>Use your imagination to address these questions productively, keep track of them, and engage others with your task as appropriate:</p> <p>During the meeting, you will reflect on how well we are covering the topics and what remains to be done. You may want to keep a running list and a “parking lot” for issues to be taken up later. For the longer-term design of the community, you keep track of all the questions and needs that come up, and you guide the community in preparing the agenda for the coming year. While you are custodians of these questions through all activities, there are some key moments when you will come together and reflect on them in your leadership group, and when you will be invited to engage the rest of the group with your findings. You will also present your final reflections and recommendations on the timeline at the end of the meeting.</p>
<p>Community keepers: weaving the social fabric</p> <p>The quality of social learning is sensitive to issues of social dynamics. This includes relationships of trust, power dynamics, egos, and the voices that are present or absent, being heard or ignored. All this affects the ability to inspect actual practice, to dissect mistakes, and to question assumptions, as well as opportunities to express personal experience and diverging thoughts. Community keepers are custodians of the dynamics of the community and their effects on its learning capability. They think about the nature of the community that is being built, what brings it together, and what prevents its development. They pay particular attention to voices, levels of participation, and issues of power. They are the guardians of trust and relationships in the group. They are aware of</p>	<p>Take the lead in ensuring that all voices are at the table As community keepers you are paying attention to the different voices being heard - or not - during community interactions. Pay particular attention to the voice of practice. Focus on the following questions, intervening in the process where necessary, and making recommendations at the end:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the key constituencies in the community? Is it one big community, a community with subgroups, or multiple communities? • Are we managing community boundaries properly? Can newcomers find a way in? • Who is here at this event? Who is not? Do we have the right people at the meeting? Are some people missing? • Are we developing the right kinds of relationships? Is the community building enough

¹⁰ Source: http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/12-09-17_Leadership_groups_V1.1.pdf

<p>constituencies, boundaries between them, and diverging perspectives and learning needs. They make sure that the voice of newcomers is heard and the voice of old-timers is not lost. If necessary, they should be encouraged to intervene at any time if they see an issue that needs addressing or ways to improve the dynamics.</p> <p>Sometimes we combine this role with that of the critical friends.</p> <p>If some people are participating online and others face-to-face, this role becomes critical in making sure that both types of participation are well integrated.</p> <p>It is also an important role for surfacing issues related to language and culture.</p>	<p>trust and commitment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well are we grounding conversations in stories of practice? • Whose voices are being heard? Whose are not? Why? What can be done about it? • Are issues of power coming in the way of learning? • Is language an issue? <p>During the meeting, you pay attention to dynamics and voices. You can intervene creatively or strategically to bring voices in or improve the dynamics of the group. For the longer-term design of the community you consider what should be done in the future about its development in terms of constituencies, membership, boundaries, and newcomers. You propose processes and milestones for tracking how you are doing. While you are keepers of the community throughout the meeting you will have key moments for reflection in your leadership group and time to engage the rest of the community in a discussion about your reflections. At the end of the meeting you will make recommendations based on your observations and reflections.</p>
<p>Critical friends: reflecting on the process</p> <p>Social learning during a face-to-face or online event depends on the quality of the process, including a variety of appropriate, well-designed, and well-conducted activities, good pacing, smooth logistics, and adequate infrastructure. Critical friends pay attention to the process and capture feedback about what's working well and what's not. They monitor the level of engagement, the response to activities, and the general atmosphere. This is an important part of the self-design of the community. Their role is not simply to give feedback, but to collect it from all participants, collate it, present it, and make sure it is somewhere that can be referred to over time. Where relevant they should also review the feedback from critical friends in previous events to make sure that the community design is an evolving one. They should also be encouraged to intervene during the event if they feel that things are not going well and if they have any suggestions about how to improve the process.</p> <p>Sometimes we combine this role with that of the community keepers</p> <p>Strategies from critical friends we have seen working well include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • passing round different coloured post-it notes and inviting people to record something that is going well and something to be improved • collecting small group reflections and feedback rather than individual ones • instantly keeping comments and suggestions in the shared wiki so they can be referred to or added to as the event 	<p>Take the lead on noticing what's working and what's not As critical friends you are custodians of the process, the rhythms, the logistics, and the structure of the meeting. You reflect on what is working well - and not. You collect and provide feedback and suggestions. The kinds of questions you care about include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What feedback should we be collecting from members? How? • What is working well? What is not? • What kinds of learning activities and innovations seem to engage people? • How could we do some things better to make best use of our time together? • Are we learning from past events and implementing past recommendations? • How should the feedback be consolidated and presented? Who should hear it? <p>During the meeting, you pay attention to process on behalf of the community and intervene if necessary. At the end of the meeting and based on your findings you make recommendations to the whole group about what went well and what could be done better next time. For the longer-term design of the community, keep a record of the feedback, and use it to influence the design and agenda for upcoming events. While you pay attention to process throughout the event, there are designated times when you can work together, engage the community in reflection, and consolidate your findings. You might want to be systematic in collecting feedback, for example, by creating reflective moments for the whole group, interviewing members, or inviting people to leave their feedback on post-it notes. The feedback should be written up and recorded for future events.</p>
<p>Social reporters: creating a shared memory</p> <p>An important element for continuity of learning across meetings and events is the creation of a shared memory. The idea is to capture significant moments in the life of a community as well as the learning that is taking place over time. Social reporters help their community generate a history of what happens from the different perspectives of</p>	<p>Take the lead on creating a shared, internal memory As social reporters you take the lead in for creating a shared memory for the group. This could be something as simple as a slide show, a report through a cartoon strip, or a consolidated presentation from a mix of different social media. You are encouraged to make it informal, creative, fun, and memorable. The kinds of questions you should discuss are:</p>

<p>the members. The genre of social reporting tends to be informal, visual and a representation of perspectives from different places and angles. The shared memory provides an entry point for newcomers and an evolving reference for old-timers. A shared memory goes beyond typed notes to include testimonies, opinions, images, videos, and other uses of social media. New tools and technologies are thus essential for social reporters. They are changing the way communities create, store, and retrieve things from their shared memory. Social media tools such as wikis, blogs, and tweets are redefining who participates in creating the memory and who has access to it. In many cases, the products of social reporting can be made available immediately as events unfold. It isn't necessary, however, to have specialist tools - the best tools are the ones at hand. Social reporting is now well within the reach of anyone who has a smartphone or a digital camera.</p> <p>Depending on the size of the group and what we want to achieve, sometimes we combine the social reporters and the external messengers. The group then decides what is internal to the community and what should be in the public domain.</p> <p>Two approaches to the work of social reporters seem to be emerging. Some groups attempt to create a more systematic record of what has taken place. In other cases, especially if there are already note-takers and a crew documenting the event, social reporters take a lighter approach, emphasizing more subjective reflections, personal opinions, quirky moments, and producing something fun, light, and memorable.</p> <p>Try to get everything done as you go along during the event. People are usually unrealistic about what they will do or finish once they go home.</p> <p>Invite members beforehand to bring their digital devices (and the corresponding lead to a USB port) to the event. Gather any devices you or your organization has that can be lent out.</p> <p>Decide where the memory "home base" will be, e.g., a wiki, blog, slideshow? Will you use an existing online space, or create one especially for it?</p> <p>While it is good to have at least one person in this group who is confident in the use of tools and social media, not everyone has to be. Enthusiasm, willingness to learn, and playfulness are all key ingredients for making social reporting effective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What insights, stories, and community outputs should be captured and recorded during this event? Whose perspectives need to be included? • How will we divide up the work? How do we involve other people? Who will do the final editing and production? • What tools do we have to capture memories (e.g., mobile phone, cameras, webcams) and what application(s) will we use to present the output (e.g., Animoto, Comic Life, Windows Photostory, PowerPoint)? • Where will the memory be showcased or archived (e.g., wiki, blog, Twitter)? What will be the hashtag? • What level of privacy do people need in order to have candid conversations? How or when will we have this conversation with the wider group? <p>During the meeting you focus on memorable moments, key highlights, people, and reflections. You can also use the breaks for capturing some spot-interviews. For the longer-term design of the community, you need to decide how you will store and provide access to the shared memory and how to continue harvesting and displaying highlights. While your custody of the shared memory is ongoing, there are key moments when you will come together, consolidate your work, and reflect on what you are doing in your leadership group. You will also have time to engage the whole group in any discussions, such as issues of privacy. You will present your final production at the end of the meeting and reflect on what you learned in carrying out the task.</p>
<p>External messengers: communicating with external audiences</p> <p>While community events can be quite inward focused it is important to pay attention to what messages need to be publicized for external audiences, shared with a wider community, or taken back to members' organizations. External messengers are responsible for identifying who the potentially interested parties are, what types of outputs or communication would be valuable for them, and how best to present the community's messages. They pay attention to insights, statements, or documents that could be shared more widely. And they craft products for these external audiences. Sometimes we combine external messengers with other leadership groups:</p>	<p>External messengers: getting the message out Responsible for crafting a public narrative</p> <p>As external messengers, you take stewardship of the public face of the community. You consider who outside the community may benefit from being informed of what is happening. You pay attention to pearls that should be shared more broadly. And you craft additional communiqués, where necessary. The kinds of questions you focus on include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the key external audiences and how are they best reached? • What are the key messages we want to convey out of this meeting? In what language(s)?

<p>With social reporters: the group must distinguish between what is private and what is public for different audiences.</p> <p>With organizational brokers: the group should decide if most of the external constituencies to address are organizational stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is responsible for final editing and publishing of these external messages? Through which media? How to get input on the final draft from the whole group? • Should the community have a website for external audiences? • Are any public/private issues raised by the desire to communicate externally? <p>During the meeting, you collect messages for external audience and create a draft of the output in the appropriate format to present to the whole group for their endorsement. By the end of the meeting you may want to have a narrative that participants can take back to external community stakeholders. For the long-term design of the community, you think of the kind of public face that would be useful. This may include a website, but also publications, presentations, and workshops. While you are custodians of these questions through all activities, there are some key moments when you will come together, consolidate the messages you are crafting, and reflect on your task in your leadership group. You will also have time to engage the rest of the group with your evolving drafts. You will present your final reflections and recommendations at the end of the meeting.</p>
<p>Value detectives: making value-creation visible</p> <p>Social learning is meant to produce value for both people and organizations, in terms of improved capabilities and performance. This value, however, is not always obvious, as it often manifests outside the group, when members apply what they have learned to a project they are working on. Many constituencies can benefit from a more explicit account of this value: members who will be inspired, community leaders who will be able to see what activities are most productive, and sponsors who will understand the effect of their investments. Value detectives are on the lookout for this value and they attempt to make it visible, through an appropriate mix of stories, assessments, and measurements. They apply the methods outlined in the “community value-creation assessment framework”² to develop a series of key indicators, select relevant stories, and devise data-collection plans. They assess who needs to know what and prepare accounts of value creation to serve the needs of various constituencies.</p> <p>There is a balance between being thorough and being realistic. Look out for the trade-offs between the time required to collect a lot of data (the easy bit) and the time it takes to produce a convincing account of the value creation of the community.</p> <p>This leadership group is not one that we would use for a one-off event.</p>	<p>Take the lead on making the value created by the community visible As the value detectives, you ferret out nuggets of value that the community has created—or could potentially create-- and you make them visible with stories, indicators, and when relevant quantitative measurements. You invite the community to join your investigation as you address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who needs to be aware of the value created by the community? What do they need to know and why? What can they do with this information? • What indicators would demonstrate value creation? How should they be monitored? • What kind of data would be useful? Who will collect it? • Who has a value-creation story to share? • What value can the community aim to create? How will we know? What stories would the community want to hear in the future if it is successful? <p>Use your imagination to address these questions productively and engage others with your task as appropriate:</p> <p>During the meeting, you keep an eye for indicators of value and for value-creation stories, actual or potential.</p> <p>For the longer-term design of the community, you plan a strategy for monitoring value creation and providing accounts of it to relevant constituencies. You may want to do this in a systematic way. You can use the templates of the value-creation assessment framework to collect stories, devise indicators at each cycle, and build a matrix that integrates stories and indicators. You may also want to interview community members as well as others interested in understanding, increasing, and leveraging the value produced by the community. There are some key moments when you will come together and work on your task in your leadership group, and when you will be invited to engage the rest of the group in your efforts. You will also present your final reflections and recommendations at the end of the meeting.</p>

Organizational brokers: connecting with organizational stakeholders

Most communities of practice and other learning groups have to interact with organizational stakeholders, such as sponsors, IT departments, and managers. Organizational brokers are custodians of the interface between the community and organizational stakeholders. They are responsible for finding ways to align the community’s agenda, activities, and outputs with organizational strategies—and how the work of the community can feed back into strategy. They pay attention to references to strategic capabilities, resources needed, support desired, infrastructure, management role, formal structures, expectations, recognition and certification, and channels of communication with the formal organization. They seek ways to engage the right set of stakeholders and negotiate the relationship between the community and the relevant organization(s).

Depending on the size of the group we sometimes combine this role with the external messengers. If the groups work separately, you can build time into the agenda for them to come together and consolidate what they have done.

There are usually people at the meeting who already play a brokering role with organizational stakeholders. We try and make sure they are in this group.

Take the lead on negotiating the interface with organizational stakeholders As organizational brokers; you are taking the lead in understanding what the various organizational stakeholders and constituencies are and how the community should relate to them. You think about the role of the organization in enabling your community and the way your community contributes important capabilities. The kinds of questions you ask include:

- How does the community fit into wider organizational contexts and agendas? What is the strategic argument for this community?
- What organizational resources are going to be necessary? What kind of support?
- Who are organizational stakeholders? How can we engage them?
- What are their expectations? What are the expectations and aspirations of the community?
- What resources do they offer? How are expectations and resources matched? Is there a contract?
- What do organizational stakeholders need to know? And what form should this communication take?
- What kind of input should they have into the community’s learning agenda?
- What recognition from the organization is necessary for participating, leading, and contributing?

Use your imagination to address these questions productively, keep track of them, and engage others in your task as appropriate:

During the meeting, you bring the organizational perspective into activities and conversations. For the longer-term design of the community, you map the relevant stakeholders and develop a system of sponsorship, support, and communication that will enable the community to evolve, find its place in the organization, and contribute its full potential. You may want to do this in a systematic way, for example, by listing all the stakeholders and creating a table of what they expect, what they offer, and how the community should interact with them. You may also want to interview community members and representatives of these organizational constituencies. While you bring this perspective to all activities, there are some key moments when you will come together and reflect on your perspective in your leadership group, and when you will be invited to engage the rest of the group with your findings. You will also present your final reflections and recommendations at the end of the meeting.

How can we facilitate a Community of Practice?¹¹

Monday	10 minutes	Respond to membership requires and craft an individual resource based on the members reason to join
	10 minutes	Responding to discussions and encourage other members to respond (backchannel)
	10 minutes	Check analytics to see what worked last and where members visited (What time and day do members visit the most e.g. Wednesday 10am)
	30 minutes	Complete your upcoming content for the next few days, e.g. interviews, advice/ opinion posts, regular content or solicit opinions from members in a summary piece
Tuesday	10 minutes	Respond to membership requires and craft an individual resource based on the members reason to join
	10 minutes	Responding to discussions and encourage other members to respond (backchannel)
	20 minutes	Contact your top members and ask questions about things you have in mind for the community. Gain their feedback and act on it.
	10 minutes	Invite members to join the community or contact members who have not returned for a while. Take time to craft your approach and personalise it.
	10 minutes	Update your announcement to highlight content and events (don't forget you can recycle content).
Wednesday	10 minutes	Respond to membership requires and craft an individual resource based on the members reason to join
	10 minutes	Responding to discussions and encourage other members to respond (backchannel)
	30 minutes	Send out a group message or write a newsletter highlighting a particular discussion, a piece of content or community activity.
Thursday	10 minutes	Respond to membership requires and craft an individual resource based on the members reason to join
	10 minutes	Responding to discussions and encourage other members to respond (backchannel)
	20 minutes	Participate. Ensure everyone is getting a response. Give your opinion on issues. Initiate discussions to generate further activity and engagement.
	20 minutes	Plan and prepare events and activities in your community to push the barrier.
Friday	10 minutes	Respond to membership requires and craft an individual resource based on the members reason to join
	10 minutes	Responding to discussions and encourage other members to respond (backchannel)
	10 minutes	Check your collected content e.g. Google reader to see what interesting content and discussions could be added to your community next week.
	30 minutes	Plan your strategy for next week. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What events are you working on? • What are you planning for your community? • What content do you need to create, discussions you need to initiate, messages you need to send • Who do you need to contact to develop your community beyond what it is today?

Contributing to a community of practice¹²

Don't wait for the Facilitator. **Anyone involved in the Community of Practice is welcome to make contributions to it; ask questions, encourage conversation, to connect.** In doing so, you help to maintain the CoPs momentum and share accountability for it across its members.

- You don't need as much time as you think. Log into your website account once a fortnight or so. Set aside some time (less than 30 minutes) to add posts, start forum conversations, upload documents, or catch up with posts in the general discussion.

¹¹ Source: <https://mik0ton.wordpress.com/2012/08/22/i-dont-have-time-to-facilitate-the-community/>

¹² Source: <https://co-creationnetwork.com/2017/06/15/contributing-to-a-community-of-practice/>

- Attend events. It's also a great opportunity to attract new members to your CoP, either by getting to know those who are there or using this time and space to invite people you would like to be part of your CoP to find out more about you, and the Network as a whole.
- Get involved or host virtual teleconferences or tweetchats.
- Offer to share some of the accountability for the meet-up going ahead such as; suggesting a quiet cafe you can meet in, taking notes of the actions to share in the CoP virtual space, setting up accounts for those who haven't used video calls before.
- If taking written notes is too time consuming, using the voice recorder on a smartphone for your meeting to create a sound file to upload is a quicker option.
- Share your events and local meetups with others.
- For a series of linked tweets using the same hashtag, you can use Storify to pull these together and show them in chronological order.
- If hosting a conversation on other types of social media, you could perhaps screen shot the relevant parts of it to share, or copy and paste into a word doc along with the date and where the online conversation took place. Do make sure you ask those involved if they are happy for you to do so to ensure everyone feels their CoP conversation space is safe.

What measures can we use?

Attendees

- Number of attendees at events in quarter
- Number of events in quarter

Communication (MailChimp)

- Number of people on mailing list
- Number of organisations on mailing list
- Change since last quarter
- Number of emails sent
- % of emails opened
- % of links clicked

Curated by Nathalie Delaney, Improvement Lead, Patient Safety, 14 December 2017