



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE CO-CREATION TOOLKIT v.2

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 788204

H2020-SwafS-2017-1/ Grant Agreement No 788204

COP SUCCESS FACTORS INFORMING THE TOOLKIT

The existing literature in relation to CoP success factors is diverse in terms of the contexts and CoPs' characteristics. However, there is a trend in the literature pointing to a recurring set of factors needed for successful operation and growth of CoPs. This draft will present the success factors most relevant to the ACT CoPs and will suggest how the toolkit can address these CoPs needs. The most recurring factors in the conducted short literature review have been grouped in Table 2.

SUCCESS FACTOR	AUTHORS	TOOLS
Community interaction	Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari, 2015; Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008; Jagasia, Baul and Mallik, 2015; Martos, 2012; McDermott, 2002 (Cambridge et al., 2005); Probst and Borzillo, 2008; Pyrko; Dörfler and Eden 2017;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2-4-All • Fish Bowl • Five-Minute Favour • Four Quadrants • Future Workshop • Heart, Hand, Mind • Lightning Decision Jam • Mentoring Circles • Nine Whys • Stinky Fish • W3 • What I Need from You • World Café
Sharing best practice	Hong, 2017; Probst and Borzillo, 2008; Retna and Ng, 2011;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2-4-All • Brainstorming • DAKI • Fish Bowl • Five-Minute Favour • Focus Groups • How Now Wow • Infographics • Interviews • Lightning Decision Jam • Mature Your Ideas • Mentoring Circles • Photo Documentation • SWOT and PESTEL • W3 • What I Need from You
Supporting tools and resources	Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari, 2015; Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008; Hong, 2017;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five-Minute Favour • Infographics • Mentoring Circles • Personas • Storyboards • SWOT and PESTEL • What I Need from You
Mutual culture, values, belonging	Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008; Martos, 2012; Pyrko; Dörfler and Eden 2017;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five-Minute Favour • Four Quadrants • Future Workshop

	Retna and Ng, 2011;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart, Hand, Mind • Mentoring Circles • Stinky Fish • What I Need from You
Knowledge production and access to knowledge	Hong, 2017; Martos, 2012; Probst and Borzillo, 2008;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argument Mapping • Focus Groups • Infographics • Interviews • Mentoring Circles • Photo Documentation • Storyboards • World Café
Learning	Hong, 2017; Martos, 2012; Probst and Borzillo, 2008;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAKI • Fish Bowl • Five-Minute Favour • Focus Groups • How Now Wow • Interviews • Lightning Decision Jam • Mentoring Circles • Personas • SWOT and PESTEL
Leadership	Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari, 2015; Martos, 2012; Retna and Ng, 2011;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argument Mapping • Critical Uncertainties • Fish Bowl • Future Workshop • Nine Whys • Plan of Change • SMART Criteria • What I Need from You
Illustrating results and performance	Hong, 2017; Martos, 2012; Probst and Borzillo, 2008;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish Bowl • Infographics • Photo Documentation • Storyboards • W3
Strategy	Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari, 2015; Hong, 2017; Probst and Borzillo, 2008;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argument Mapping • Brainstorming • Critical Uncertainties • DAKI • Future Workshop • How Now Wow • Lightning Decision Jam • Mature Your Ideas • Personas • Plan of Change • SMART Criteria • SWOT and PESTEL • W3

Table 2. CoP Success Factors Review

COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Community support and people factors (Jagasia, Baul and Mallik, 2015), engagement and participation in the community (Martos, 2012), regular interaction and communication (Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008) as well as mutual engagement and regularity of interaction (Pyrko, Dörfler and Eden 2017) are all linked to the success of the social actors engaged within the CoP and their mutual relations.

Community interaction and communication between the CoP members is identified as a crucial element of success of any CoP. Communication is also defined as fundamental for the development of the community and is most easily made possible by face-to-face interaction (Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008). Jagasia, Baul and Mallik (2015) also identify communication as a success factor of CoPs. They recommend supporting the communication between CoP members with the help of a facilitator. They also suggest that successful CoPs facilitate communication by for instance providing communication channels. Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari (2015) identified the optimisation of interaction as a success factor of a CoP. This means that if communication and interaction is being facilitated, knowledge can be shared more easily, and it leads to higher dedication and commitment of the CoP members. Probst and Borzillo (2008) argue similarly to Jagasia, Baul and Mallik (2015) and emphasise the importance of providing communication channels and supporting the interaction between CoP members. If there is a lack of interaction, this will result in less commitment and enthusiasm for the CoP and its objectives.

The central argument of the paper written by Pyrko, Dörfler and Eden (2017) about the success factors of CoPs is “thinking together” which is, according to the authors, one of the key elements of the success of a CoP. Hong (2017) argues in a similar way that building regular contacts is a very important aspect for a CoP to be successful. Communication, interaction and thinking together can be summarised into one concluding recommendation: All of the aspects mentioned above are essential for the success of a CoP because they enable commitment, knowledge sharing and a sense of belonging. Nonetheless, communication and interaction need support from time to time.

SHARING BEST PRACTICE

Sharing best practice leads not only to the development of a successful CoP but foster economic benefits. Probst and Borzillo (2008) state that sharing best practices between CoP members will result in saving resources like time and money. In consequence, this results in a more active participation of the CoP members, as they notice and experience the benefits of using best practices. Retna and Ng (2011) discuss that CoPs consist of different domains of knowledge. The success of a CoP is based on the fact that those domains are dynamic and strategic which means that they exchange and share their knowledge among each other. This exchange leads to better effectiveness than one single domain could achieve. Furthermore, Hong (2017) determines that sharing of knowledge results in personal learning and identifying experts, as well as developing best practices.

SUPPORTING TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Supporting tools and resources are identified as a factor of success of CoPs by various researchers and authors. Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari (2015) found that the provision of infrastructure and supporting tools for knowledge creation, communication and forming a CoP is an important part of the success in sharing knowledge in a CoP. The provision of technology and the ability of the CoP members to use it is also one central aspect in the paper written by Fontainha and Gannon-Leary (2008). They explain that (especially for virtual CoPs) technology facilitates communication. This again is one factor without a CoP cannot succeed over time (Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008). Hong also points out the importance of providing the necessary infrastructure and support (Hong, 2017). This could be IT support, communication tools, but also just having the infrastructure to get together, meet and interact. Hong is hereby referring to McDermott (2002, cited in Cambridge et al., 2005) who points out that communication tools can be used to share knowledge (Hong, 2017). Hong continues to emphasise the importance of strategic support of IT. The use of communication tools and other IT support is especially helpful if it is not possible for the CoP members to meet regularly or in case of virtual CoPs (Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008). In this case communication (e.g. online meetings) can be facilitated by those communication tools.

MUTUAL CULTURE, VALUES, BELONGING

Mutual culture, values, belonging, as obvious as it might seem, form a big part of the success or failure of a CoP. Retna and Ng (2011) state that a shared culture or a shared vision leads to deeper interest and commitment to the domain and CoP. Pyrko, Dörfler and Eden (2017), who suggest the most important aspect of a CoP is thinking together, explain that it is a necessity to have mutual engagement. Mutual engagement again stimulates “belonging” which is essential for CoP members to commit and participate in general. Furthermore, they discuss the role of mutual identification which is also a result of thinking together and working towards the same objective. Trust, common values, shared understanding, sense of belonging and cultural awareness are all success factors named by Fontainha and Gannon-Leary. All of those factors determine and influence the level of commitment and how much one invests in the CoP (Fontainha and Gannon-Leary, 2008). Sanz Martos (2012) leans toward a very similar direction as she states that a CoP needs to create a new and own culture as well as its own values.

She furthermore explains the importance of building a sense of belonging in the members of the community. As explained before those aspects ultimately lead to a higher commitment of the CoP members as well as a deepened identification of them with their CoP. Those aspects are also part of Fontainha and Gannon-Leary’s (2008) argumentation. Besides common values and a shared understanding, they argue that trust between the CoP members is also an important aspect for a CoP being successful. They also suggest that a sense of belonging is beneficial for the success and health of a CoP.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge production and access to knowledge are discussed by Probst and Borzillo (2008). Their research showed that it is helpful for CoPs to import knowledge from experts outside the CoP. They can be from different institutions, organisations as well as various positions (e.g. researchers or practitioners). If experts are invited to CoP meetings, they share ideas, experience, knowledge best practices and insights. This means that CoP members get access to knowledge and can produce knowledge as well as they get access to new approaches and can advance their existing best practices. Furthermore, they point out the role of promoting access to other networks. By stepping over their boundaries, CoP members get access to other people working on the same problem and experts. Contact with people outside the CoP and in other networks have the same effects as mentioned above: Not only does this open access to knowledge but by sharing and exchanging knowledge, ideas and experiences new knowledge is being produced (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). Hong also emphasises the role of knowledge and identifies knowledge and understanding the value of knowledge as a success factor for CoPs (Hong, 2017).

LEARNING

One important aspect for a successful CoP is to keep on learning and include new knowledge, findings and perspectives. One way to make sure to gain new perspectives and knowledge is to always open up to and include external expertise. By joining regular meetings or ad hoc meetings CoPs share ideas, experience, insights and knowledge which keep the learning process going, as the input from external experts trigger new ways of thinking or looking at a problem. To get access to new knowledge and therefore keep on learning does not mean that only external experts can set new courses. Learning can also happen when knowledge is exchanged in the same organisation. If access to intra-organisational networks is promoted and facilitated, CoP members can learn from other colleagues and experts (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). This success factor is intimately connected with the success factor of “knowledge production and access to knowledge”. It is often being discussed that successful CoPs need a culture for sharing and creating knowledge (Lave and Wenger, 1991). A strategy to achieve this is to construct a learning organisation. This aspect implies the importance of learning for the success of a CoP. Knowledge sharing leads not only to learning processes on a CoP level, but also on an individual level and thus to identifying new experts (Hong, 2013).

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is an aspect of CoPs closely connected to other success factors such as mutual culture and supporting tools and resources. According to Retna and Ng (2011) leadership contributes to creating and maintaining a culture or values. It is also part of the responsibilities of a leader to provide the infrastructure and support needed e.g. premises. It is also fruitful seeing that the leader (e.g. CEO of a company) is committed to the CoP as well. This can inspire the employees to follow their example.

Furthermore, if the CEO or the leader is invested in the CoP, they are more willing to provide resources and give the employees the time needed to invest in the CoP. Leaders are a very important part of facilitating a culture of learning and sharing (Retna and Ng, 2011). Interaction as another success factor is connected to leadership, too. Similar to the arguments of Retna and Ng, Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari (2015) recognise the importance of leadership support. They argue that a supportive leadership leads to optimised interactions. This shows that the different success factors are often interlinked. Hong (2017) also argues that if the CEO or leader advocates and supports the cultivation of CoPs, they are more likely to be fruitful and successful. This leads to another aspect of leadership that Hong (2017) discusses: When leaders cultivate CoPs as an integral part of the company, they contribute to the success of the company.

ILLUSTRATING RESULTS AND PERFORMANCE

Illustrating results and performance aims to have an impact on the motivation of the CoP members (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). The idea is that CoP members can post their experiences in a reporting system and talk about the process, implementation and results. This should not only have an impact on the motivation of CoP members as such but to motivate them to participate by showing that their efforts do have a real impact on their organisation or company (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). In addition, Probst and Borzillo argue that another way to illustrate results is to subdivide the overall goal or objective into smaller goals and sub-objectives. That allows to see what has been achieved already (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). In this context, it can also be helpful to evaluate the performance of CoPs. Such evaluations lead to better effectiveness and motivation by showing the strengths and weaknesses of the performance. This leads to an increased effort to improve if the performance has weaknesses, or serves as a push and further motivation if the performance is already strong (Hong, 2017).

STRATEGY

Strategy and long-term goals are discussed as further success factors by Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari (2015). By providing programmes and policies, organisations or institutions can support the motivation and willingness to create and share knowledge. Strategies have to be clear and understandable to motivate people to participate in a CoP. According to the research conducted by Akhavan, Marzieh and Mirjafari (2015), having a strategy and specific goals has the highest impact on CoPs.

Probst and Borzillo (2008) state that it helps CoPs if there is a clear and concrete direction to follow. This direction is given by the definition of clear and measurable goals and objectives. They furthermore explain that as part of a strategy it is helpful to divide the objectives into smaller topics and sub-goals that the CoP or its members need to achieve (Probst and Borzillo, 2008).

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