



Building a Community of Practice

Guiding Principles

These are Excella's guiding principles when building Communities of Practice.

- 1** Create alignment through an **aspirational vision and inspirational leadership**; not control and conformity. (See Dan Pink's "[Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose](#)" concept and Generative Culture from [Westrum's culture typology](#).)
- 2** Take an **Agile approach** to building communities that will be iterative, harness feedback loops, and learn continuously. (Use an adaptive strategy. Walk the talk.)
- 3** **Give everyone a voice.** Harness and build off the initiative and interest of team members. This will provide multiple ways for people to engage and foster growth and sustainability.
- 4** Initiate **multiple, parallel efforts**. Don't rely just on a top-down plan. Balance it with bottom-up emergent ideas. Allow Communities of Practice (CoPs) to arise based on different types of interests (e.g., automated testing, Agile principles) and regularly assess progress and value to decide where to make further investments.
- 5** **Limit** the number of change initiatives in progress to prevent "change fatigue."
- 6** Make the community and its work **visible and transparent**.
- 7** **Emphasize learning** as the primary objective of the Community of Practice.
- 8** Develop a "**permeable**" culture. Import ideas, expertise, and experiences and export the same to the external community.
- 9** Construct **networks**. A wide network of weak links will spread information about what's happening and why (e.g., a comprehensive DevSecOps area including everyone interested in DevSecOps with communications, celebratory stories, notifications). Smaller pockets (communities) with strong links will spread behavioral change and accelerate the adoption of new, more effective practices (e.g., communities of interest around diverse subjects, like CI/CD, automated testing, team organization and motivation, prioritization techniques).

Community of Practice Building Tactics



Brand Identity: Create a bold vision captured in a brand identity—worthy of stickers on laptops. An example is [DevOps at Target](#).



Meetup Model: Use the meetup model for starting and growing communities. Enable self-organization and easy ways to publicize meetings and topics.



Issue and Experiment Sourcing: Source issues and potential experiments to address those issues from the communities. Use [Lean Coffee](#) sessions to drive discussions around issues the Community of Practice is facing. Make experiments, who is working on them, and the results visible.



Internal Speaker Series: Hold regular events for employees to present concepts and experiences to the rest of the organization. Include external speakers/thought leaders in the series (as the minority) to bring in outside perspectives and generate buzz.



Internal Conference: Hold an internal day-long conference with a mix of internal and external speakers. Other companies do this using the DevOpsDays format: keynote talks + lightning talks + open spaces. Examples include [Target](#) and [Comcast](#).



Gamification: Introduce an internal competition to gamify practices. Teams accumulate points over a specific timeframe, external (celebrity) judges review, and then award to the winning team. An example of this is [Verizon with its DevOps Cup](#).



Ad Hoc Connections: Use a communication platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams) to connect individuals with shared interests across your organization to enable ad hoc interactions and complement in-person interactions.



External Community Engagement: Host meetups and events open to those outside your organization. Get employees as speakers into meetups and conferences. This will build a reputation in the community and make progress toward the vision established by the CoP.



Enablers



Organizational Change Management: Engage expertise to:

- Gather pain points from the community members and address those through systematic communications.
- Craft and continuously refine communication and messaging strategies.
- Proactively identify and work to resolve apprehension and fear related to organizational changes.
- Create and curate a collection of positive narratives.
- Develop a brand.



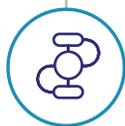
Leadership Support: Engage leadership to demonstrate support for building communities. This could include encouraging their teams to participate, their own participation, and making time and other resources available to support community activities.



Impact Mapping: Conduct impact mapping to identify what kinds of behavioral changes are sought and potential opportunities for creating change.



Budget: Create a budget for the CoP. Allow some of that budget to be spent on emergent groups that reflect the interests of motivated teams and individuals. Don't spend it all on top-down ideas.



Causal Loop Diagramming: Use causal loop diagramming to examine the culture and work system; use the mapping to target leverage points and create the largest potential for change.



Metrics: Metrics are often an output of Impact Mapping but are listed separately because they are important enough to emphasize even if Impact Mapping is not pursued.

