Communities of practice

The art of learning together

Etienne Wenger
Learning for a small planet
P.O. Box 810
North San Juan, CA 95960, U.S.A.
Phone  (530) 292-9222
E-mail  etienne@ewenger.com
Website: www.ewenger.com

© 2006, Etienne Wenger
Purple in the nose ...
Learning in practice

A social perspective

- Where do we belong
- Where do we belong
- practice
- community
- learning
- identity
- meaning
- What are we doing?
- Who are we becoming?
- What is our experience?
Myeloproliferative disorders

practice and voice

- From support to practice
- Gaining a voice in research and policy
... a group of people, who

- share similar challenges
- interact regularly
- learn from and with each other

improve their ability to address their challenges
Quantitative biologists develop a community of practice after an acquisition. They create a common identity, build trust, and develop a shared practice.

They learn to collaborate, avoid repeated tests, pool supply purchases, share equipment—saving frustration, time and money.
Model 1: social discipline of learning

Key dimensions

Sponsorship

Participation

Domain

Learning together

Community

Practice

Support

Nurturing

© 2006, Etienne Wenger
Community profiles as patterns of togetherness

Community activities oriented to...

- ... meetings
- ... projects
- ... access to expertise
- ... relationships
- ... context
- ... community cultivation
- ... individual participation
- ... content publishing
- ... open-ended conversation

In collaboration with Nancy White and John Smith
Model 3: Learning activities

Informal
- Stories
- Tips
- Document sharing
- Project reviews
- Broadcast inquiry
- Exploring ideas

Each other
- Case clinics
- News
- Pointers to resources

Formal
- Formal practice transfer
- Help desk
- Systematic scan
- External benchmark
- Warranting
- Models of practice
- Learning projects
- Problem solving
- Collections
- Documenting practice

With
- Joint response
- Joint events
- Boundary collaboration
- Reading group
- Hot topic discussions

Outside sources
- Joint response
- Joint events
- Boundary collaboration
- Reading group
- Hot topic discussions

1. Exchanges
2. Productive inquiries
3. Building shared understanding
4. Producing assets
5. Creating standards
6. Formal access to knowledge
7. Visits

1. Exchanges
2. Productive inquiries
3. Building shared understanding
4. Producing assets
5. Creating standards
6. Formal access to knowledge
7. Visits

1. Exchanges
2. Productive inquiries
3. Building shared understanding
4. Producing assets
5. Creating standards
6. Formal access to knowledge
7. Visits
Model 4: forms of participation

- outsiders
- lurkers
- alumni
- occasional
- active
- core group
- coordinator
- leaders
- experts
- beginners
- sponsors
- transactional
- peripheral
Match needs and structures

Needs
- task
- single problem
- connection
- knowledge domain
- knowledge service

Structures
- team
- task force
- network
- community of practice
- center of excellence

© 2006, Etienne Wenger
Communities in the 21st century
Two major trends shaping 21st-century organizations

1. The strategic importance of knowledge

2. The emergence of mass collaboration
First wave: technology knowledge as information

- Knowledge is information:
- Useless databases with outdated information
- Put the knowledge of the organization in a database
- Difficult to motivate people to use a database
Knowledge lives in communities:

The key to managing knowledge is connecting practitioners

Managing knowledge is in the hands of practitioners

Technology is used to support the work of communities
Third wave: strategic capabilities

knowledge as strategy
A strategic conversation involving the organization and the communities of practice

**Key issues**

- How to make knowledge a strategy?
- How to connect communities and organization?
- How to invest in strategic domains?
A social discipline of learning

- **Strategic capabilities:** portfolio of domains
  - engaging
  - investing
  - sponsoring

- **Constellation of communities of practice**

- **Learning citizenship:** multimembership
  - contributor
  - broker
  - convener
The end

For more information, go to www.ewenger.com

Etienne Wenger
Learning for a small planet
P.O. Box 810
North San Juan, CA 95960, U.S.A.
Phone (530) 292-9222
E-mail etienne@ewenger.com
Website: www.ewenger.com