Tips for Creating a Successful Community of Practice

ISDS Webinar

September 27, 2018

Deborah W. Gould, PhD
Division of Health Informatics and Surveillance
Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services
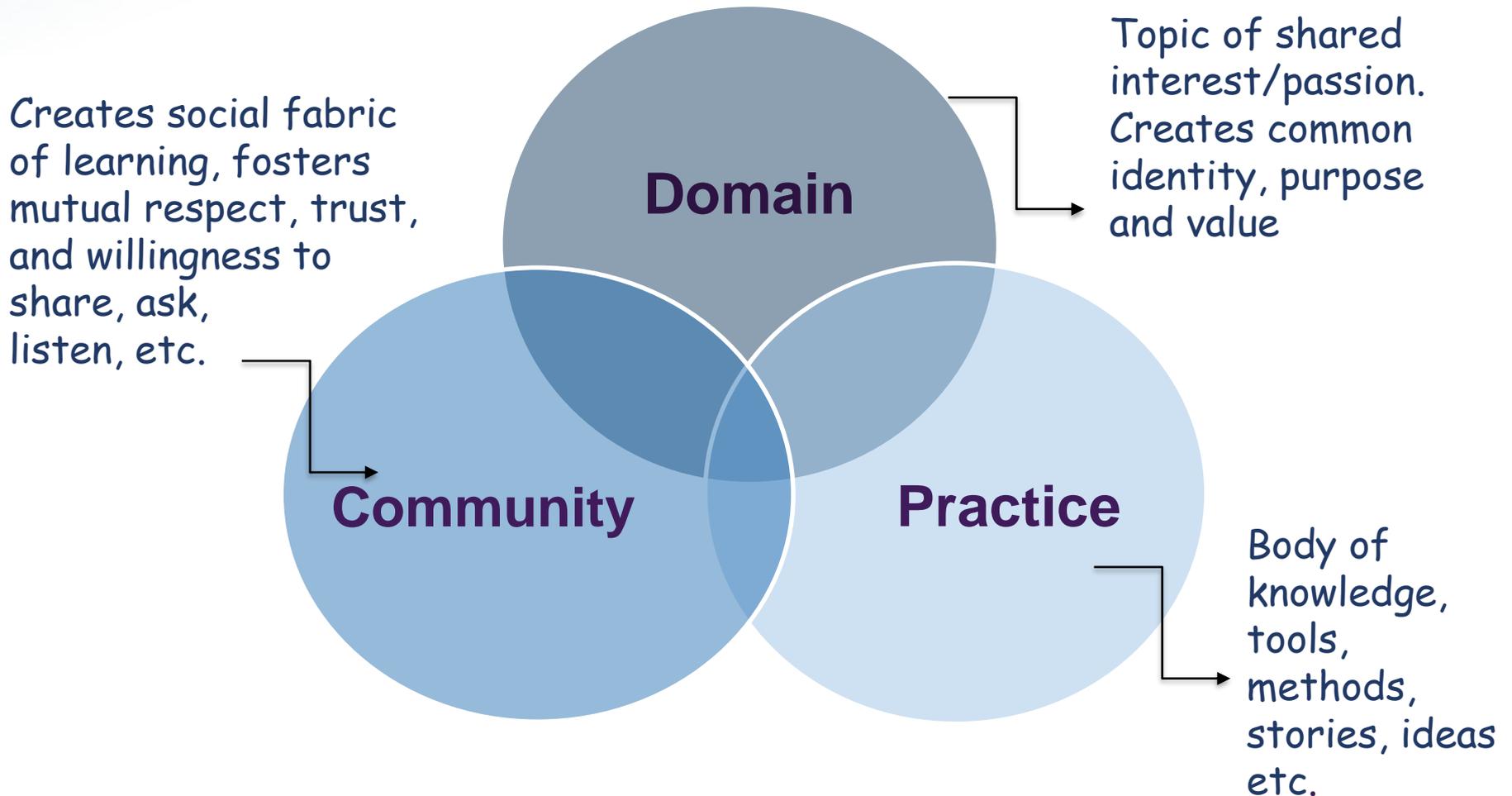Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services**
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

Community of Practice (CoP) Defined

- *"A group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by <u>interacting</u> on an ongoing basis."* Wenger E, McDermott R, Snyder WM. (2002)

- *"Groups of people who <u>come together</u> to share and to learn from one another face-to-face and virtually. They are held together by a common interest in a body of knowledge and are driven by a desire and need to share problems, experiences, insights, templates, tools, and best practices."* APQC (2010)

CoP Structural Elements

Domain

Community

Practice

Topic of shared interest/passion. Creates common identity, purpose and value

Creates social fabric of learning, fosters mutual respect, trust, and willingness to share, ask, listen, etc.

Body of knowledge, tools, methods, stories, ideas etc.

CoPs Aren't Teams or Workgroups

A Snapshot Comparison

Communities of practice, formal work groups, teams, and informal networks are useful in complementary ways. Below is a summary of their characteristics.

	What's the purpose?	Who belongs?	What holds it together?	How long does it last?
Community of practice	To develop members' capabilities; to build and exchange knowledge	Members who select themselves	Passion, commitment, and identification with the group's expertise	As long as there is interest in maintaining the group
Formal work group	To deliver a product or service	Everyone who reports to the group's manager	Job requirements and common goals	Until the next reorganization
Project team	To accomplish a specified task	Employees assigned by senior management	The project's milestones and goals	Until the project has been completed
Informal network	To collect and pass on business information	Friends and business acquaintances	Mutual needs	As long as people have a reason to connect

Source: Wenger E, Snyder WM. Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. Harvard Business Review. Jan –Feb 2000
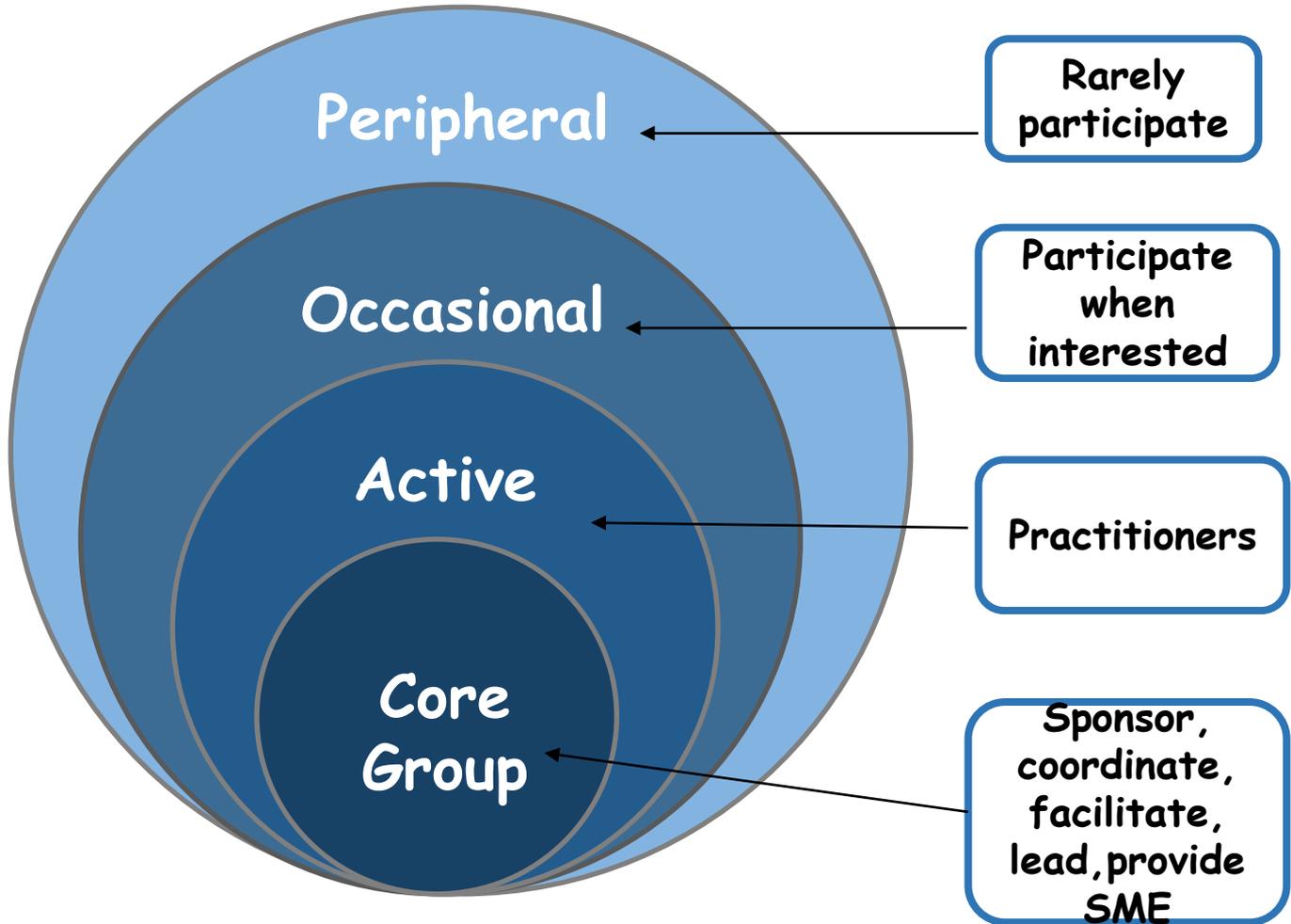
Value of a CoP

	Short-term Value	Long-term Value
Members	• Means to share experiences • Access to SMEs • Access to tools, resources • Peer-to-peer mentoring • Technical assistance	• Enhanced network of colleagues • Published documents/tools from collaborative efforts • Sense of professional identity • Professional development
Organization	• Arena for problem solving and knowledge sharing • Enhanced coordination & standardization • Shared tools, resources • Enhanced technical assistance	• Strategic capabilities • Improved communications • Well trained workforce • Efficient use of resources • Innovation

CoP Levels of Participation

CoP Interactions can be:

Formal

Informal

Virtual

Face-to-Face

Peripheral

Occasional

Active

Core Group

Rarely participate

Participate when interested

Practitioners

Sponsor, coordinate, facilitate, lead, provide SME

CoP Key Roles and Responsibilities

*Champion or Sponsor:
- Provides resources and high-level oversight. Evaluates & monitors the CoP

*Coordinator or Facilitator
- Plans, schedules & facilitates community activities

*Chair(s)
- Provides overall leadership, establishes charter

*Knowledge Manager
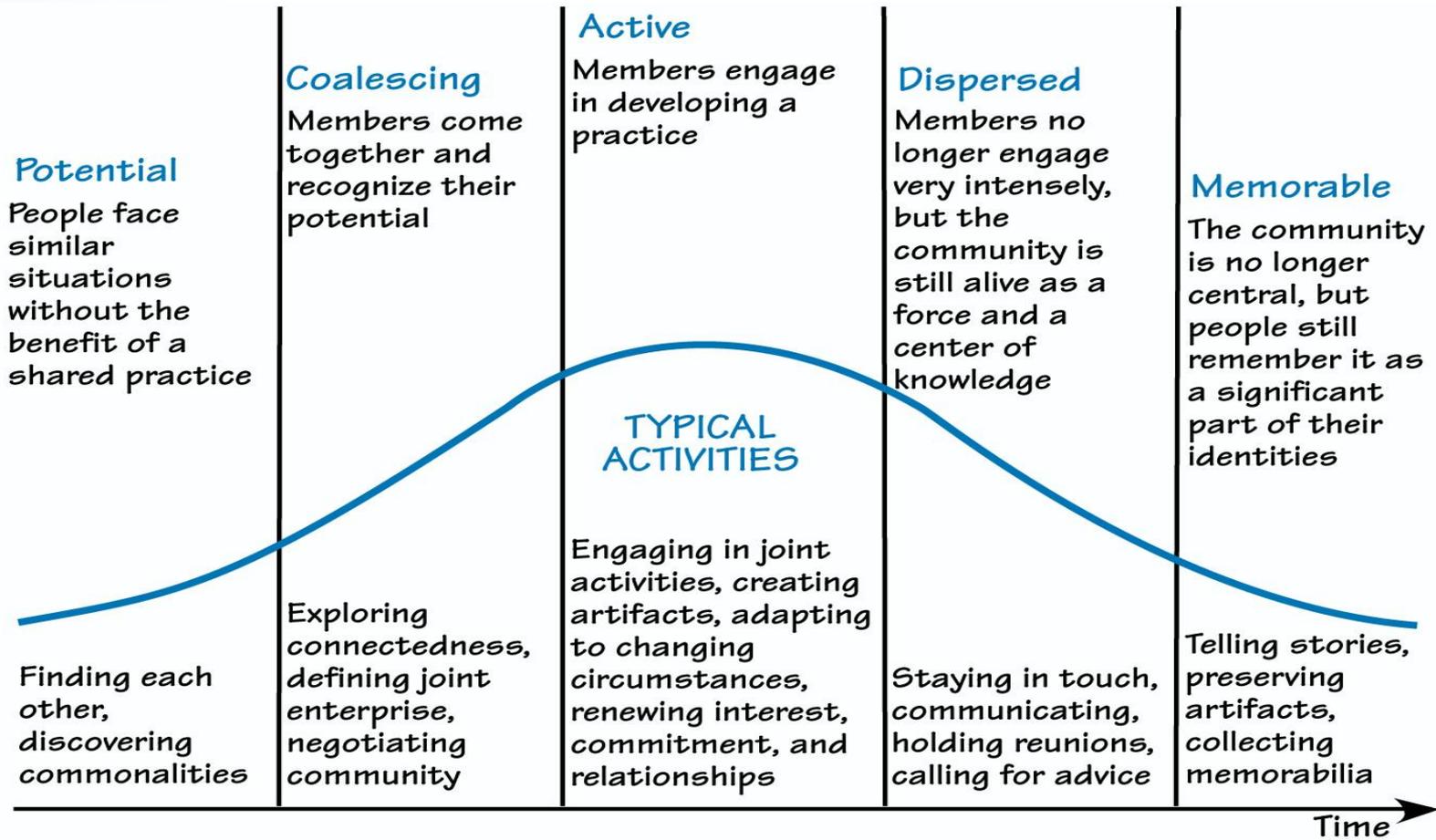- Manages repository of tools & resources

*SMEs
- Provide domain specific expertise –ongoing or ad hoc

General Members
- Share knowledge, participate in CoP activities, provide input

* Part of the CoP Core group

CoP Life Cycle

Source: Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Steps for Establishing a CoP: Things to Consider

❑ **Identify the audience, purpose, goals, and vision**

- Who is this community for?
- What are the interest, concerns, and needs of the community?
- What are the benefits to all stakeholders (members, sponsors, the community as a whole)?

❑ **Define the activities, technologies, group processes, and roles that will support the community**

- How will members communicate and interact (face-to-face, virtual, etc.)?
- What are the external resources (people, publications, guidance documents, etc.) that will support knowledge sharing among members?
- How will community roles be defined (steering committee/core leaders, facilitators, contributors, workgroup leaders, etc.) and who will fill these roles?
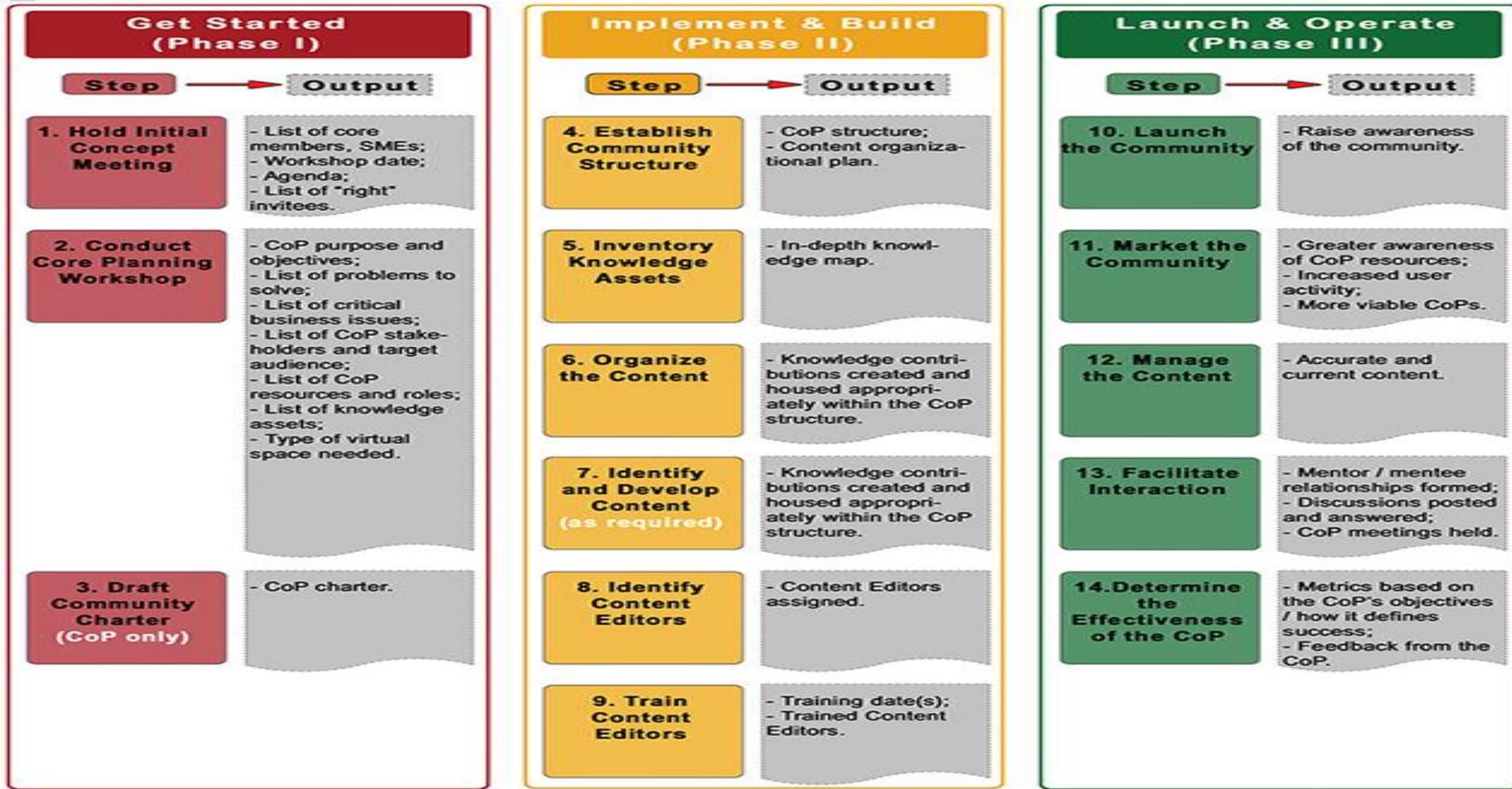
Establishing a CoP: Things to Consider

❑ **Launch the CoP**

- How will new members learn about the community?
- How do new members become oriented to the community environment?
- What kinds of activities will generate interest and engagement of members?
- What will the community's 'rhythm" be?
- How will success be measured?

❑ **Grow and sustain the community**

- What is working/not working?
- What are the emerging technical needs (e.g. web platform, social media, etc.) to support the evolving community?
- How can members get recognized for their contributions?
- How should the products and knowledge created by the community be shared beyond the community?
- To what extent is the community serving its intended purpose?
- How are new community leaders going to be developed, identified, chosen?

An Example: Defense Acquisition University (DAU)

Get Started (Phase I)

Step	Output
1. Hold Initial Concept Meeting	- List of core members, SMEs; - Workshop date; - Agenda; - List of "right" invitees.
2. Conduct Core Planning Workshop	- CoP purpose and objectives; - List of problems to solve; - List of critical business issues; - List of CoP stakeholders and target audience; - List of CoP resources and roles; - List of knowledge assets; - Type of virtual space needed.
3. Draft Community Charter (CoP only)	- CoP charter.

Implement & Build (Phase II)

Step	Output
4. Establish Community Structure	- CoP structure; - Content organizational plan.
5. Inventory Knowledge Assets	- In-depth knowledge map.
6. Organize the Content	- Knowledge contributions created and housed appropriately within the CoP structure.
7. Identify and Develop Content (as required)	- Knowledge contributions created and housed appropriately within the CoP structure.
8. Identify Content Editors	- Content Editors assigned.
9. Train Content Editors	- Training date(s); - Trained Content Editors.

Launch & Operate (Phase III)

Step	Output
10. Launch the Community	- Raise awareness of the community.
11. Market the Community	- Greater awareness of CoP resources; - Increased user activity; - More viable CoPs.
12. Manage the Content	- Accurate and current content.
13. Facilitate Interaction	- Mentor / mentee relationships formed; - Discussions posted and answered; - CoP meetings held.
14. Determine the Effectiveness of the CoP	- Metrics based on the CoP's objectives / how it defines success; - Feedback from the CoP.

CoP Critical Success Factors

Leadership and Sponsorship

Clear business case

Resources and defined roles

Engaged members

Clear deliverables & activities

Development of trusted relationships

Sharing of lessons learned

Easy to use technology

Recognition and rewards

Evaluation

Top Reasons CoPs Fail

- Anti-learning culture

- Lack of a core group

- Little opportunity for member interactions

- "Death by presentation"

- Members don't identify with CoPs purpose

- IT related issues

- High turnover

- Unwillingness to learn from mistakes

- Lack of resources

Key Takeaways

1	Align CoP with business needs and set clear objectives
2	Establish clear roles and spread support across a core team
3	Incorporate multiple approaches to enable members to contribute and interact
4	Be creative in engaging members
5	Measure the progress of the community. Capture and share lessons learned

Resources

- American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC). (2010). KM essentials: Introduction to communities of practice (collection). Available at https://www.apqc.org/knowledge-base/collections/km-essentials-introduction-communities-practice-collection.

- Cambridge, G. & Suter, V. (2005). Community of Practice Design Guide: A Step-by-Step Guide for Designing & Cultivating Communities of Practice in Higher Education. EDUCAUSE. Available from www.educause.edu/ELI/CommunityofPracticeDesignGuide/160068

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Public Health Information Network Communities of Practice resource kit. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/phcommunities/index.html.

- Defense Acquisition University. Guide to communities of practice. Available from. https://www.dau.mil/sites/governance-and-training/SitePages/Guide%20to%20Establishing%20Communities.aspx.

- Probst, G. & Borzillo, S. (2008). Why communities of practice succeed and why they fail. European Mgmt Journal 26, 335-347.

Resources

- Saint-Onge, H., Wallace, D. (2003). Leveraging communities of practice for strategic advantage. Routledge, Boston, USA

- Stepanek, J., Abel, J., Gates, C. & Parsley, D. (2013), "Facilitating Online Communities of Practice", Lessons Learned, Education Northwest, Vol. 3, No. 1., January.

- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Wenger, E., & Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. Harvard Business Review, 78(1), 139-145.

- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

- Wenger, E., Trayner, B., de Laat, M. (2011). Promoting and assessing value ceation in communities and networks: a conceptual framework. Available from http://wenger-trayner.com/documents/Wenger_Trayner_DeLaat_Value_creation.pdf.

QUESTIONS?
Deborah W. Gould

dgould@cdc.gov

The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- 1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333
- Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/TTY: 1-888-232-6348
- Visit: http://www.cdc.gov | Contact CDC at: 1-800-CDC-INFO or http://www.cdc.gov/info