Sustainable Communities of Practice

A sustainable Community of Practice (CoP) demonstrates measurable value to both the organization and CoP participants – contributing relevant knowledge, and nourishing lasting and productive relationships.

A sustainable CoP comes together with a shared sense of passion among members, and a sense of volunteerism that extends even beyond members' MBOs and personal development plans. While most COPs fade, they endure:

- CoP working groups generate valued work products that integrate diverse insights and values;

- Leaders sustain energy and coordinate effectively;

- CoPs educate their members and *sponsors*, inform strategic planning, and show up in corporate metrics.

Getting the CoP started is just the tip of the iceberg. CoP processes and topics must have both the fortitude withstand criticism, and flexibility to evolve as the market for the CoP topics changes. If your organization sees CoPs stumbling on the runway or wavering in flight, then **Sustainable CoPs** may be right for you.

Sustainable CoP Methodology

Sustainable CoPs is a proven methodology for CoP initiation and operation. A flexible process, **Sustainable CoPs** results not just in CoP growth, but also in informed action. Sustainable CoPs uses a six-step approach:

Sustainable CoPs Approach

Get Informed → Build a Business Case → Get Organized → Launch → Engage → Improve
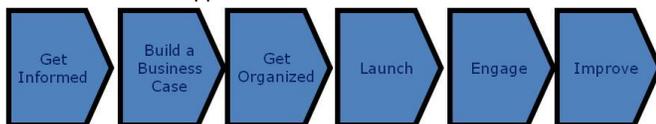
The sustainability dynamic underlying this is simple: *Shared Fate + Critical Success Factors = Shared Faith*

Shared Fate

Sustainable CoP begins with common sense of need. Members believe that the community is essential to their individual effectiveness (e.g., market presence, knowledge currency, sounding board), and that wholeness of the community is essential to the wholeness of the members. A member's departure represents a loss of insight or perspective.

Critical Success Factors

CoP practices propel the positive virtuous (or viral) cycle of the CoP: productive contributions lead to demonstrated value, which lead to member satisfaction, which lead to more contributions, etc. Ten practices are "critical success factors," essential to health of the CoP:

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) for Sustainable CoPs

1. Role/charter clarity
2. Regular real-time meeting
3. Leadership and facilitation
4. Practitioner-led
5. Establish rapport explicitly
6. Ground rules
7. New member on-boarding
8. Measure and continuously improve
9. Use Technology effectively
10. Get / give recognition

During **Sustainable CoP** initiatives, we assess each factor and generate action plans. We use collaboration tools and social media appropriately, keeping the "emergent or serendipitous" components in balance with the "intentional or sculpted" components.

Shared Faith

The CoP virtuous cycle yields a shared commitment that extends beyond charters and metrics. Reaching across organization boundaries, members come to see the CoP as a worthy haven for new ideas and networks. This sense of "faith" is not free. We tune the CSFs to build, sustain, or restore members' CoP commitment.

Results

A shared fate propels the CoP forward, but it is only through the CSFs that the CoP matures and evolves – bound by a faith in the CoP membership, and what the CoP produces and represents. *CoPs are where necessity, creativity, and belonging come together*.

To explore where Sustainable CoPs will help your organization, visit www.alignconsultinginc.com

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Kate has 17 years of consulting and seven years of industry experience in the healthcare, energy, financial services, and nonprofit sectors. Kate held leadership positions with IBM, Fidelity, JPMorgan, and Intel Corporation. Kate has an MS/MBA from the MIT Sloan School of Management, has a BA in Economics from Williams College, and has certificates in project management, facilitation, mediation, and LEAN Six Sigma.
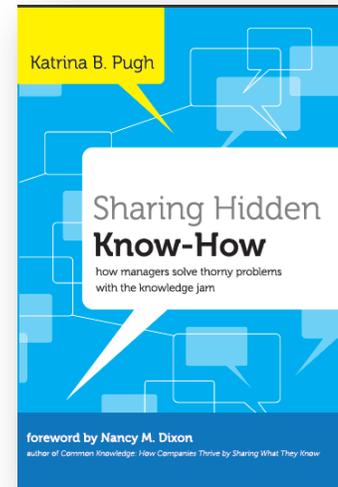
More Reading:

"Beyond Partnerships: Tapping into the Agility of Knowledge Networks and Communities," by Katrina Pugh, Nonprofit Webinar series, November 30, 2011.

"Sustainable Communities: 10 CSFs for Sharing the Faith," by Katrina Pugh, IBM social media blog, July, 2010.

"Knowledge Jam: Three Disciplines to Beat the Merger Performance Odds," by Katrina Pugh, *Ivey Business Journal,* July/August, 2011.

"Channeling Insight into Action," by Katrina Pugh, *KM World 2011* presentation, November, 2011.

"Don't Just Capture Knowledge – Put It to Work," by Katrina Pugh and Nancy M. Dixon, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2008.

"Talk Trumps Text for Sharing Hidden Know-How" by Nancy Settle Murphy and Katrina Pugh in *IT Performance Improvement*, August 16, 2011.