Topics

- Learning in interaction: learning networks, communities of practice.
  - background, characteristics, potential
- Untapping the potential of communities
  - attracting participants,
  - enabling interaction
  - commitment and continuity
- Enabling practices
  - creating afford ing conditions
  - actions to create and sustain engagement
  - suggestions for moderation.

A Community of Practice

Group of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their understanding and knowledge of this area by interacting on an ongoing basis."

(St Etienne. Wenger et al., 2002)

Communities

- Flavours
- What's in it for Me?
  - Communities of practice
  - Professional Networks
  - Knowledge sharing communities
  - Social communities
  - Communities of experts
  - Communities of learners
  - Shared concern.
    - Connects: helps finding relevant people, information, contacts and learning opportunities

Pitfalls

- Continuity trap: panta rhei, lifecycle change of the community over time.
- Local learning trap: too much attention on local knowledge sharing without addressing the overall concern how USEM as whole can benefit
- ICT-trap: too much optimism ICT information provision, tooling.
- Management trap: too much opportunity driven, too little user problem-driven.
- Self-organization trap: assuming that once kick-started the community will continue on its own.

Considerations: be aware

- The community has to be a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- Some COPs run self organized, but most don’t.
- Moderation is needed: vision, leadership co-ordination.
- Active encouragement is necessary to get a wide range of views
- Connect to daily practices in the “outside world” is needed
- Draw outside resources inside.
- Create conditions for deep engagement, peer trust and help.
- This requires a “safe” space: usually requiring “limited access”/privacy.
- Start simple but interactive. Connect to what people already use
- Approximate (real “in-person”) worthwhile experiences, organize learning events
**Learning network: ad hoc communities**

- **Ad Hoc Transient Community**

**Community enablers**

- Nurture shared concern and passion.
- Enable the person to present him/herself and keep in control.
- Keep going: provide activities, events.
- Support heterogeneity.
- Participants look for contributing and gaining: “giving and getting”

**Conditions for successful community**

- **Boundary dimension:** facilitate cooperation or collaboration in a community. The community needs to have clear boundaries and a clear set of rules that can be monitored and “sanctioned” within the community.
- **Heterogeneity:** to assure liveliness a heterogeneous population of the is community. A variety of perspectives to ignite creative interaction (so both veterans, newbies, lurkers, posters, experts and novices)
- **Accountability:** users need to be recognisability, committed to the community and accountable for their actions, and responsible for their share in the continuity of contact

**Requirements for a learning community**

- Learning networks/communities provide learners with opportunities to collaborate interactively with peers and tutors on specific issues.
- Sustainable online communities should have functionalities for
  1) self-management
  2) self-organization
  3) self-categorization
  4) self-regulation.

**Support self management**

- Creation of profiles including (PEXPI) personal expertise inventory or personal identity and expertise profile
- Including support the creation of contacts
- Including graphical representation of the connections
- Support for awareness, interaction and the exchange of reputational information.

**Support heterogeneity: the personality mix**

- **Central Connectors:** people communicating/ connected to many others in the community, critical to the network.
- **Boundary spanners:** provide critical links between groups of people.
- **Information brokers:** peer to peer linking information between people in the net.
- **Bridgers people linking indirect connections i.e Frans and Wim have no direct connection but each has a relationship with Herbert (so they are connected through her); people such as Herbert play a brokering role that can hold together entire groups.
- **Peripheral specialists:** one/few connections. Not linked to each other. Newcomers: “stuck” in the periphery. Sometimes by “choice (like experts).
Facilitate self organization & interaction.

- Facilitate participants’ interaction with others and support knowledge.
- Help participants to classify and evaluate their own contributions but also those from others.
- Allow participants to control the level of privacy of (their) contributions, as well as to decide whether these are offensive or not.
- Promote the exchange of off-task personal information.

Support self-organization, categorization and regulation

- Enable building of swift trust.
- Show and exchange information on the reputation of participants.
- Show information about presence, activities, and availability of participants to the community.
- Show information about the characteristics of the community.

Provide learning opportunities, interaction and feedback

“For professional development to truly build practitioner knowledge and expertise, a community must provide the opportunity for ongoing learning and access to timely feedback on relevant issues in practice.”

Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000

Moderate: core for interactivity, participation & shared focus

- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- Make sure people are constantly given opportunities to connect to your interest in meaningful ways.
- Always ask who is not at the table and could contribute
- Stay focused on shared concerns
- Engage participants according to their needs and “role”

Create opportunities, organize activities:
Events, webinars, debates.

Translating these guidelines to USEM community

- Characterize USEM community.
- Shared concern, shared a set of problems or passion.
- Need for deep understanding: learning & knowledge.
- Commitment to interact on an ongoing basis.