



Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research & Development for Southern Africa
Centre De Coordination De La Recherche Et Du Développement Agricole De L'Afrique Australe
Centro para a Coordenação da Investigação e Desenvolvimento Agrário na África Austral



Center for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa

What is a Community of Practice?

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Aim of Presentation

- What is a community of Practice?
- Key characteristics of a CoP
- Cultivating a CoP



What is a Community of Practice?

- New phrase for an age-old phenomenon
- Place where good ideas come from
- People who engage in process of collective learning for shared endeavour
- People working on similar problems



Key Characteristics of CoP



Domain

- Not a club of friends or a random collection of people
- Identity defined by a shared domain (area) of interest
- Collective competence and learn from each other
- Shared competence that distinguishes members from other people

Community

- Members engage in joint activities
- Discuss, help and share information in their field
- Members interact and learn together



Practice

- Members are practitioners not just the interested
- Shared repertoire of resources:
 - Experiences
 - Stories
 - Tools
 - Ways of addressing reoccurring problems
- This takes time and sustained interaction



What are the aims of CoPs?

No	Aims	Application
1	Problem solving	Can we work on this and brainstorm some ideas?
2	Requests for information	Where can I find reports on CSA?
3	Seeking experience	Has anyone dealt with a similar situation?
4	Reusing assets	I have information on this subject you are working on would you like to have access?

What do CoPs Look Like?

No	Aims	Application
5	Building an argument	How do people in other countries do this?
6	Growing confidence	Before I do it, I'll run through it with my community first to see what they think
7	Coordination and strategy	I am working on this topic, is anyone else and do they want to collaborate
8	Discussing developments	What do you think of this new farming system? Does it really work?

What do CoPs Look Like?

No	Aims	Application
9	Documenting projects	We have faced this problem, let us write it down and share it
10	Visits/Engagement	I will be in Malawi, can we meet?
11	Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	Who knows what and what are we missing? What other groups should we connect with?

Myths about CoPs

- CoPs are always self-organizing
- There are no leaders
- The role of CoPs is to share existing knowledge
- It is too difficult to measure the impact of CoPs
- Good facilitation is all it takes to get members to participate
- CoPs are harmonious places
- CoPs are the solution to everything

MYTHS
BUSTED



Question

Do you currently belong to any other Communities of Practice? Provide examples

How do you keep them going? What is the driving force?



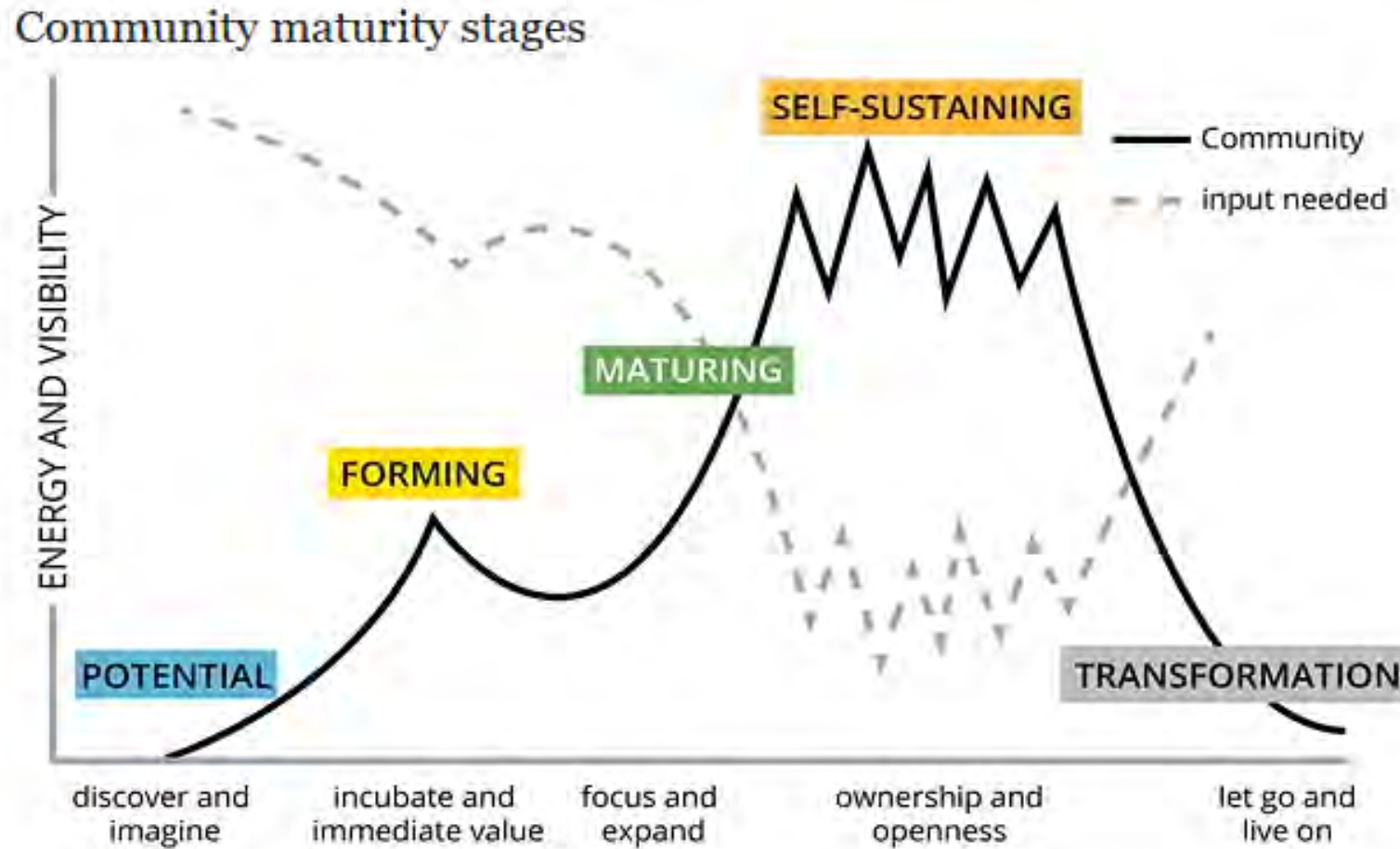


Principles for Cultivating a Community of Practice

‘Because CoPs are voluntary, what makes them successful over time is their ability to generate enough excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members. Although many factors, such as management support or an urgent problem, can inspire a community, nothing can substitute for this sense of *aliveness*.’

Source: Wengner, McDermott and Snyder (2002).

Cultivating CoPs



© adapted from Cultivating Communities of Practice: Wenger, McDermott and Snyde (2002)

Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution



Design for evolution

Communities grow and include individuals that bring different interests and ideas and can pull the community in different directions

- Introduce other sources of information
- Link to other communities

Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution
2. **Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives**



Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives

Good communities require an understanding of the community's potential to develop and steward knowledge, but it takes outside perspectives to help members see the possibilities.



Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution
2. Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
- 3. Invite different levels of participation**



Invite Different levels of participation

- Each community has:
 - **Coordinator** - organises events and connects the community
 - **Core Group** - actively participate in discussions in the public community forum – heart of the community
 - **Active Group** – actively follow discussions and participate occasionally (15-20%)
 - **Peripheral Group** – keep to the side-lines and watch the interactions of the core and active members

Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution
2. Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3. Invite Different levels of participation
4. **Develop a public and private community space**

Develop a public and private community space

- Public and Private space allows for formal and non-formal exchanges.
- Private space can keep core members engaged and explore problems that may not be addressed in public forums.



Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution
2. Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3. Invite Different levels of participation
4. Develop a public and private community space
5. **Focus on value**

Focus on value

- Communities thrive when they deliver value to the community members.
- It is through events, activities, and relationships that community value is realised.
- Many of the most valuable community activities are the small every day interactions – information discussion to solve a problem, or one-on-one exchanges of information.

Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution
2. Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3. Invite Different levels of participation
4. Develop a public and private community space
5. Focus on value
6. **Combine familiarity and excitement**

Combine familiarity and excitement

- As communities mature they become familiar and comfortable - places where relationships are developed.
- Must offer some level of excitement for members to stay engaged.



Seven Principles for CoPs to become Alive!

1. Design for evolution
2. Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3. Invite Different levels of participation
4. Develop a public and private community space
5. Focus on value
6. Combine familiarity and excitement
7. **Create a rhythm for the community**

Create a rhythm to the community

Tempo of interactions is regular and familiar including website activities – if there is a standard rhythm to interaction than members do not become overwhelmed but are familiar with the flow of information.



Questions

How can we make the CCARDESA ICKM Community of Practice thrive?

What would incentivize you to continue to be engaged?

What is the best way for this CoP to be 'alive'?



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