WHO MAKES UP A COMMUNITY?

Champion

A champion helps to establish a thorough understanding of what a community is, its purpose and intended use. He or she actively promotes the value communities bring for the organization and partners, and encourages people to actively make use of communities.

Champions serve as role models in using the platform effectively and promoting good practices. They raise the profile of communities and their collective knowledge, thus further energizing them and expanding their value. They also help people overcome any barriers to promoting their efforts and ideas.

+ *The qualities of effective champions include:*

+ *Courage and the ability to take risks*

+ *Strong leadership skills; ability to earn trust by influencing and motivating people*

+ *Engaging interpersonal and communication skills*

+ *Being well-connected, enthusiastic, engaging professionals who deeply understand an organization's structure and culture*

+ *Ability to see the context and larger picture for their community, determining the best ways to engage and interact*

+ *Savvy with technology and social media*

+ *Multi-disciplinary and capable of motivating/influencing various stakeholder groups, including executives*

Sponsor

A sponsor's role is to make the community and its collective knowledge more visible, thus further energizing it and expanding its value. In this way, a sponsor plays an important part in sustaining the community and helping it to thrive.

+ *The roles of a sponsor include:*

+ *Mobilizing resources*

+ *Appearing in public and online events to speak about community results*

+ *Encouraging outreach through networking*

+ *Helping align community efforts to broader goals, both inside and outside the organization*

THE 90-DAY PLAN+

Successful online communities start by developing a **90-day plan**, which they adapt and modify as needed. **90-day plans** help to map out community activities to ensure that they align with short and long term strategic objectives.

A plan might include member outreach tasks, core group participation expectations, methods for creating content, and topics for discussion, as well as the resources and actions required to build a vibrant community.

Plans should be specific, yet flexible and lightweight, and should include contributions from community members.

Establish a core group

A community will need the support of a leader, a facilitator and members. The presence of a sponsor and/or a champion will give additional support. Ideally, sponsors, leaders and facilitators should all be engaged in the development and review of 90 day-plans to ensure that they support specific goals, themes and strategies.

This kind of light governance has a positive impact on communities, as it provides an opportunity for inter-community sharing and management recognition of community contributors. The facilitator will spend the most time managing the community.

Know the membership

It's critical to understand who the community members are. Current colleagues and partners are a great place to start. Facilitators can conduct interviews to find out more about the members, what they care about, and how they would get the most value from the community.

The **90-day plan** should reflect insights from this process.

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+ *A 90-day plan should specify:*

+ *The processes and activities members will engage in*

+ *Methods for identifying, recruiting, and incorporating new members*

+ *Methods for engaging members in the community (welcome messages, meeting in person, personalized emails, etc.)*

+ *Key products of the community and how they will be created*

+ *Community resources, including financial resources*

KEY STEPS TO BUILD A COMMUNITY

Identify and recruit members

Identify and recruit a core group of about 20 members who will be active participants in the community. Some of them are likely to be colleagues and partners who care about the theme of the community

Seed Activity

Seed activity in the community, drive participation and engagement with posts, questions, organized discussions, webinars and other forms of content every day

Engage early members

When possible, talk with them in person. Otherwise, use personalized emails, Skype, and phone calls to let people know of key discussions taking place in the community and invite them to join. Organize online training session during the onboarding.

Encourage members to share feedback

Qualitative feedback from some members can be very helpful, especially when focused on specific areas of community work, like areas for innovation and improving shared practices

Review results after 90 days. Key questions:

Has community membership grown?

Is there real participation and engagement?

Is there enough and quality and relevant content being generated?

If the answer to these questions is yes, it's time to expand the membership and recruit more people. At this stage it's important to promote the community to a wider audience.

KEY STEPS TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

BUILD
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Seed new and recent content

Always seed new and recent content (e.g. posts, articles and curated content).

Gamification

Introduce gamification to encourage fresh and relevant content. Award points for new posts and new comments, or create a "facilitator" or "member" of the month award. Orchestrate community competitions with awards to drive and increase engagement, especially during contest time.

Integrate visual content

Integrate visual content: research shows that the brain processes images far more quickly than text. Info-graphics, photographs, illustrations and cartoons are effective ways to simplify content and increase uptake.

New and fresh content

Encourage members to post new and fresh content and updates (e.g. discussions, videos, activity feed updates, and articles).

Topics for discussion

Define the scope of a discussion precisely.

Frame up thought-provoking questions for discussion to help members think.

Acknowledge contributions

Add positive comments to members' status updates or posts, and acknowledge that their contributions are valued.

Focus on quality and relevance

Keep a sharp focus on relevant content and promote organic generation of content.

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Promote content

Draw attention to interesting and noteworthy content. Promote the same content more than once—there is always a need to remind members that this valuable content exists.

Keep it simple

Simplify a process or help members solve a particular challenge. Provide useful resources and tools that will help members make the most practically relevant use of the community.

Listen to and communicate with members as much as possible

Communicate any changes to the community, such as a new community facilitator, a new event, the launch of a discussion, or a new feature added to the platform.