KOMYU

8 key DIFFERENCES between

corporate internal communities

AND

general public communities

and how to deal with it

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As a cross-functional leader or corporate community leader, you may look on the Internet for tips and tools to improve your management of your "staff-based community".

Not all tips for managing general public communities (B2C communities on social media for example) can apply to the corporate world, which runs by other rules.

Here is a short guide on differences between communities in a corporate environment and communities in a public B2C environment, and how to make the most of these differences.
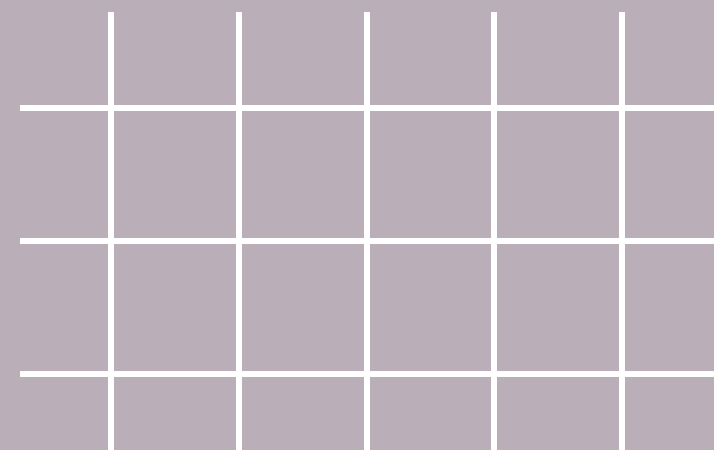
General guidelines for corporate community leaders

UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN CONTEXT.
Knowing what is specifc to your own company, its culture, its demographics, its goals, will give you key information to exploit when starting or running your Community. Take some time with people who know your company well.

OPEN UP TO INSPIRATION FROM OUTSIDE.
Communities for the general public, B2C communities, are a great source for ideas and inspiration. Also, their numbers, diversity and speed provide you a rich view of what could be next for your corporate internal community. Participate to external communities to enrich your ideas.

BUT DO NOT BLINDLY IMITATE.
If you were told to put the exact same furnitures at your home and at your office, you would figure out that not all uses can be transposed from one context to another. The same applies with community techniques.

ACCEPT THAT EACH CONTEXT HAS ITS RELEVANT METHODS.
Do not feel guilty frustrated if you did not reproduce ideas exactly like how you saw them in a general public context. It is like two different pieces of puzzle for two different puzzles. Sometimes it is almost the same shape, but the fitting conditions can be totally different.

ADAPT CONTENT AND IDEAS.
What you practice can be adapted to reach local results instead of just global conformity.

DIFFERENCE 1

Members limited to staff vs Members of the general public

1. *Members limited to staff* vs *Members of the general public*

In communities for the general public, the almost unlimited potential access to anyone (also coupled with higher numbers of members) create some uses that are less likely to generate enough responses in corporate internal communities. For example, posting a well-promoted question to the world can probably generate more responses than posting it to a company.

On the other hand, it is often easier to get information (age, job, etc.) on potential internal members, and align activities with their characteristics.

This difference can change your expectations in terms of numbers and the way you calibrate of your goals, promises and activities.

1. *Members limited to staff* vs *Members of the general public*

Tips for corporate community leaders
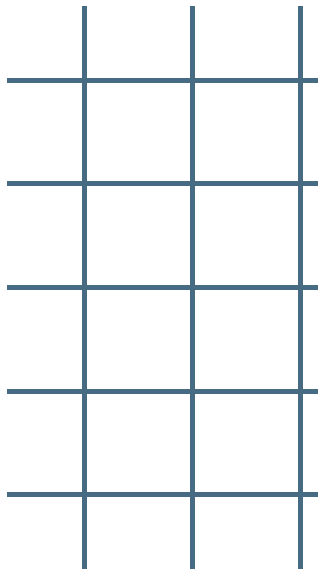
GET LISTS OF POTENTIAL MEMBERS

If you are operating in your company, you may have more chances to get formal or informal lists of potential members. You may even get a list of key difference-making people.

ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND PROMISES TO THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR COMMUNITY

Knowing that you will operate an internal community, consider the limits in terms of numbers and get ready to calibrate activities for these numbers. Also, you can save yourself from promising irrealistic results to your stakeholders (for example, a very fast growth when your maximum reach is low anyway).

BE OPENED TO OCCASIONALLY INVITE EXTERNAL PARTICIPANTS OR USE EXTERNAL CONTENT

Not every talent can always be easily found within a same company. While still running a corporate community that is meant to be staff-based only, you can sometimes bring guests from outside (as speakers, etc.). Also, you can put more efforts on curation of external content than in a general public community.
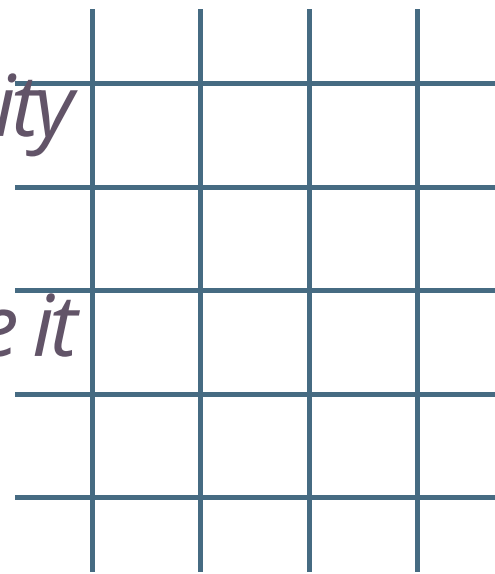
DIFFERENCE 2

Value for the company vs Total Number of members

2. *Value for the company vs Total Number of members*

While in a consumer context, a high number of members can be enough to show that a community is successful, in an internal corporate context, the community success criteria are based on the value it creates for the company and its members.

Thus, the larger and more active the corporate community is, the more pressure it creates on the value for the company.
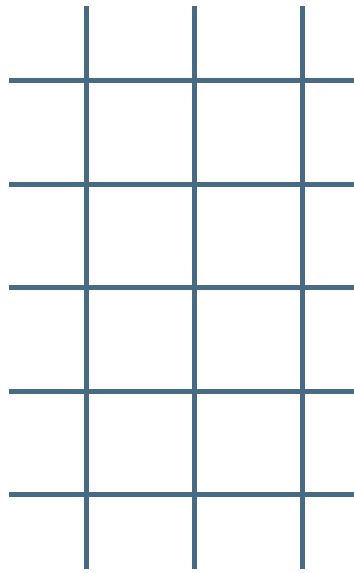
"What value did you end up creating with all these collaborators' time and attention?"
This can be a backlash effect for corporate communities that rushed for numbers only, without emphasis on created value.

2. *Value for the company vs Total Number of members*

Tips for corporate community leaders

CLARIFY WHAT VALUE YOUR COMMUNITY CAN CREATE FOR THE COMPANY

Beyond community activities, what would be the positive impacts of your community for the company ? Which ones would you be able to measure or at least observe ? Which one are you ready to pursue and show ? What are your priorities and what is secondary ?

DO NOT BLINDLY RUSH FOR THE NUMBERS

More members can be positive, but more members will not magically design activities to make the community more useful. Try to figure out how more members would be beneficial, and sometimes how less members could be beneficial.

BE AWARE OF THE RISKS OF GETTING HIGH NUMBERS FOR THE SAKE OF NUMBERS

More members increase exposure of your community in the company, which can be both beneficial and risky if you are not clear on how community brings value to members and company. Also, if you are pumping up the cost (in time and attention) for the company with more members, you have to be confident then in the positive effect you can create with this new size.

2. *Value for the company* vs *Total Number of members*

Tips for corporate community leaders
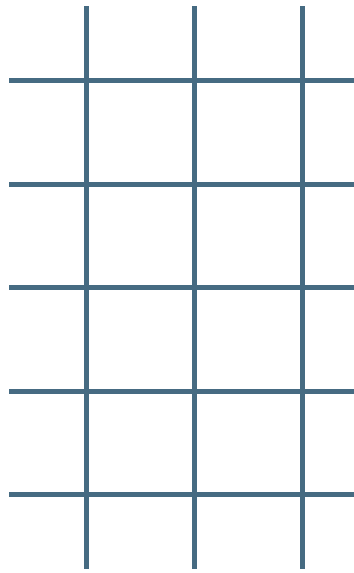
THINK OF WHAT YOU CAN FIRST ACHIEVE WITH LESS MEMBERS

Even if some activities need a critical size (number of members) to be valuable, you can still design activities that are useful for the first happy few who joined your community. It will be probably be easier to **master the creation of a real effect on a small community, which creates retention, and then scale the community up**, than to virtually increase the size of a community without strong retention and with low know-how on creating value for members and company.

GET BUSINESS FEEDBACK FROM A SPONSOR

Do not only think of your sponsor as a budget and time-for-members provider. Your sponsor can also give you key information about alignment between current company priorities and can give you feedback on how much your community is aligned with these priorities. If your community activities are not aligned with company priorities, there are more chances that your members find themselves in tension between different goals and abandon your community. But if company priorities and community activities are aligned, it will be way easier to get support.

# DIFFERENCE 3
Professional time
vs Personal time

3. *Professional time vs Personal time*

Corporate internal communities often run on **professional time (during work hours) which is not regarded as free as personal time** (which totally is under individuals' responsibility).

This can create **tensions** between corporate community activities and the corporate environment (hierarchy, colleagues) of members.

This tension is higher on members especially when it comes to allocated time or budget for these activities, or when members' workload is high.
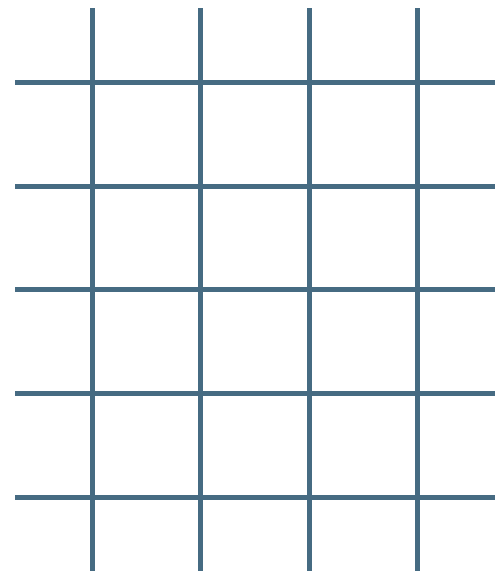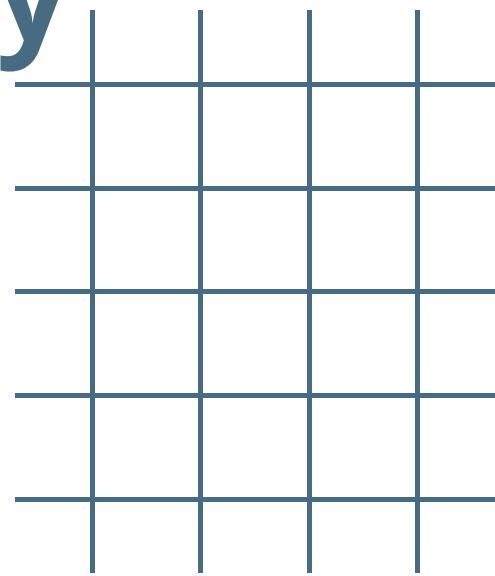
3. *Professional time vs Personal time*

Tips for corporate community leaders

IDENTIFY WHAT TYPE OF TIME IS MAINLY INVESTED BY MEMBERS

If members' participation time is mostly "bonus professional time" (in between meetings for example, or when workload is low), be prepared to less participation when workload increases. If their time to participate to the community is officially allocated within their professional mission, be prepared to prove that the Community is valuable enough to worth spending this time. In all cases, know the details (amounts, frequencies, regularity, etc.) of time invested by members in your community. The better you know, the better you can adjust activities to real on-field conditions.

ADJUST EXPECTATIONS TO THE TYPE OF TIME

Not only can you adjust the activities based on characteristics of your members' invested time, but also you can adjust the promises of results you make to stakeholders. In other words, it is difficult to promise the same results for a community regular sure members and for a community with occasional unsure members. Make sure you calibrate your goals and adjust your promises well.

3. *Professional time* vs *Personal time*

Tips for corporate community leaders

ALIGN ACTIVITIES OR TOPICS WITH CURRENT PROFESSIONAL GOALS OF YOUR MEMBERS

If you spend some time inquiring about professional goals of your members, you have more chances to align activities, topics, and formats to these goals. Thus, your members would not have to choose between the goals of continuing their usual day and the goals of your community activities (goals would be the same), but rather compare which way is more interesting for them to reach their goals.

ADJUST PROMISES AND ACTIVITIES TO THE PACE OF YOUR COMPANY

If you know that in specific months in the year, all your company is extremely busy, it would be unwise to place your activities in months when the competition is the highest. If you know when workload is lower, and focus your activity proposals in these timeslots, you increase the chances for participation.
In other words, the better you know what happens in the company, the peaks and valleys of workload, the easier it will be for you to place your activities and control expectations of stakeholders.
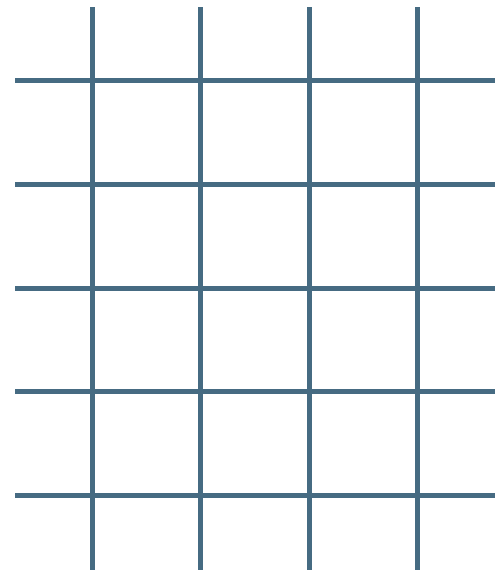
DIFFERENCE 4

Appointed or expected vs Totally free to join

4. *Appointed or expected* vs *Totally free to join*

In the general public context, joining a community is often totally out of a member's freewill. In a corporate context, members can sometimes be appointed, or feel pressure to engage in a community.

This pressure can be direct (from hierarchy or community leader towards would-be member) or self-inflicted ("What if I don't participate ? What could be the consequences on my professional image or career?").

This professional form of social pressure can change how you estimate members' actual level of interest and engagement.

4. Appointed or expected vs Totally free to join

Tips for corporate community leaders
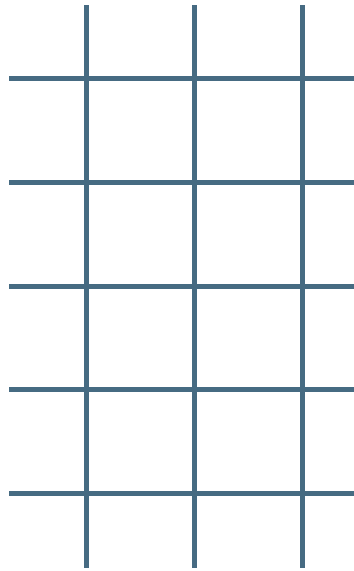
AVOID OVERESTIMATION OF MEMBERS ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

Even if the idea can be pleasant, it can be a mistake to consider that every member of your corporate community is here out of full personal long-term interest in your community theme, especially if many members are appointed, did not ask to be part of the community, or pressured by their management to participate. Being realistic does not mean being negative about the interest you can spark, it is just a way to accept the situation as it is (and also accept people how they are now) and not to consider everything won before starting.
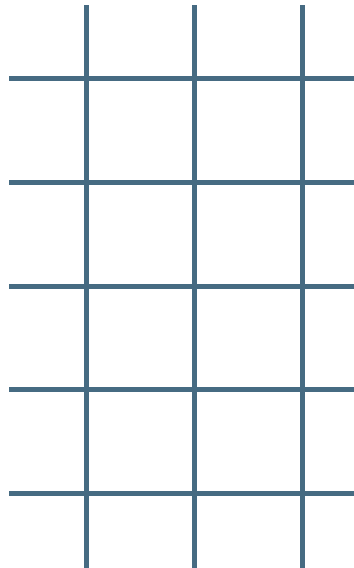
MEASURE EXPECTED ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

If you succeed in getting a honest information about your members real engagement level (for example, by asking how much they expect themselves to engage for the 6 months to come), you can better adjust activities, promises to and expectations of stakeholders. For example, if most members tell you they will be "consumers" and will not participate in community organization, it will lead to another roadmap than if they were declaring that they position themselves as contributors.

4. *Appointed or expected vs Totally free to join*

Tips for corporate community leaders

ADJUST TO EXPECTED ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

Some activities are easier for consumers (for example, webinars or top-down presentation, or pushed content) while other activities are more designed for contributors (for example, workshop about the community goals and projects.). It is up to you to choose which activities you do for which members, and if you split your community into subgroups to find a better fit.

ALLOW YOURSELF TO FILTER OUT MEMBERS OR AT LEAST TO FOCUS ON SOME OF THEM

Sometimes, it can become difficult to try to take care of every member at their current engagement level, with their current demands and expectations. Also, scattering yourself as a leader on too many various activities can create inconsistency or fatigue in animation. Sometimes, just even asking for engagement level information is already energy-consuming and time-consuming. As the goal of a corporate community is not always to "serve all the members at once" but rather to create value for the company, it might be interesting to focus your efforts on some members and allow yourself to filter out (or deprioritize at least) some other members.
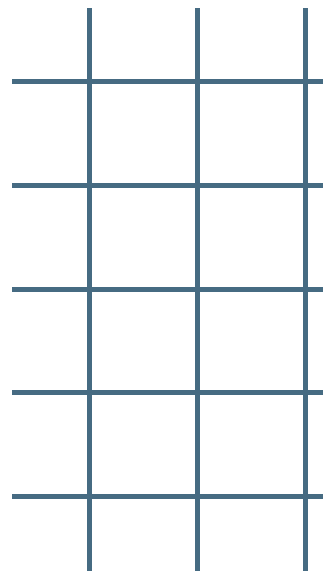
DIFFERENCE 5

Professional confidentiality vs General public confidentiality

NDA

5. *Professional confidentiality vs General public confidentiality*

Some topics, for example company internal issues or company next innovative ideas, can be shared within corporate internal communities and not outside of the company (risk of breaching of non disclosure agreements).

Of course, it does not mean that corporate internal communities are limited to internal information only, as they can also organize activities around publicly accessible information.

This difference opens unique possibilities for discussions and sharing that cannot be found elsewhere than in corporate internal communities.

NDA

5. *Professional confidentiality vs General public confidentiality*

Tips for corporate community leaders
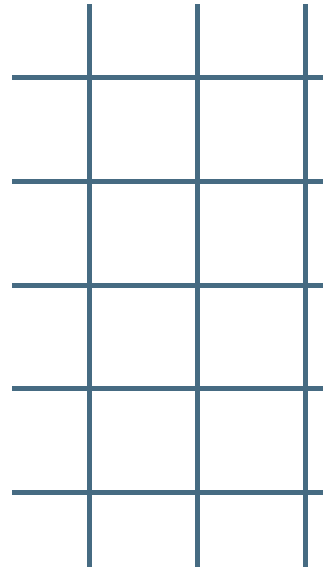
CLARIFY THE TOPICS AND LEVELS OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Not all topics have the same level of confidentiality. If you want to solve cybersecurity issues of your company as a community, there are less chances that you share details all over the world than if you were working on a company charity project. List all the topics you want to address as a community and simply rank them in terms of confidentiality.

CLARIFY CONFIDENTIALITY RULES AND PRACTICES THAT ARE APPLIED IN THE COMMUNITY

If you share confidential information within your corporate internal community, you may want to ensure that no leaks happen by mistake, for example by a member thinking "everything can be shared with no limits since it happened in the (internal) community". While not breaking the mindset of sharing and advancing together, you can set up rules and levels of confidentiality about the content you share in the community. Also, these levels and rules can make members feel safer to post content by themselves.

# 5. *Professional confidentiality vs General public confidentiality*

Tips for corporate community leaders

BALANCE OPEN AND CONFIDENTIAL TOPICS TO YOUR NEEDS

Being careful on professional confidentiality does not always mean all topics in your community have to be confidential. Depending on your goals and on the needs of your members, you may want to have some part of the community content that is "totally open" (for example, world news about your topic or sector) while some other part of community content remains confidential up to company level (for example, upcoming products and innovations of your company). Find the right balance.

PROMOTE THE POSSIBILITY TO DISCUSS PROFESSIONALLY CONFIDENTIAL TOPICS WITH PEERS

Being able to share, discuss, and engage in activities about confidential information (up to company level) is an opportunity that can be worth mentioning. For example, if you organize a corporate community hackathon and work on company next innovative ideas, it is a unique chance for members to be active on confidential topics : this aspect can also be promoted to increase participation.
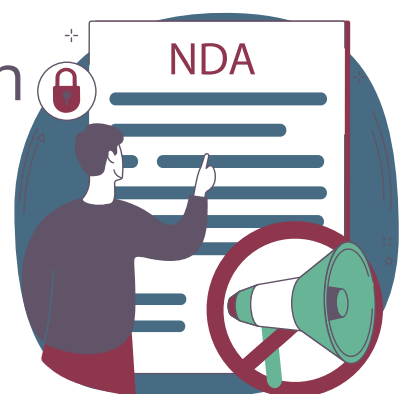
DIFFERENCE 6
Corporate tools
vs Consumer tools

6. *Corporate tools* vs *Consumer tools*

Corporate tools for Community management are not always the same as B2C tools for Community management. Some corporate tools functionalities (for example, accessing members' agenda) are rare to be found in B2C tools and vice versa.

As tools are different, experiences and skills in corporate and consumer community management tools can sometimes be difficult to re-use directly.

Also, tools used for management of corporate internal communities can often fall into corporate tools policies (in terms of security, of cost mutualization, of partnerships, of integration...). These policies can be limiting for you as a corporate community leader.

Tips for corporate community leaders
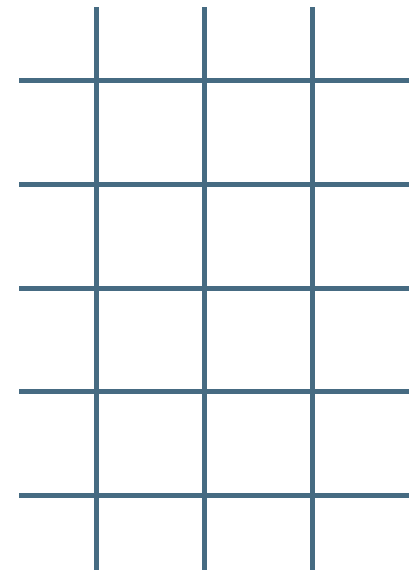
GET TO KNOW WHAT ARE THE COMMUNITY TOOLS AND TOOLS POLICIES

If your company has chosen to use specific tools or apply specific policies for tools (for example, tools from a given country only, or free tools only), it can be interesting to inquire about it before launching your community on a tool and be forced to migrate (or delete) your activity when breach of policy is discovered.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN CULTURE ABOUT CORPORATE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT TOOLS

The world of corporate community management tools is constantly evolving, with new possibilities, new paradigms, new interfaces and integration. Being aware of how it evolves can make you aware of interesting opportunities for your community.

ADVOCATE FOR THE TOOLS YOU WANT TO USE, POTENTIALLY USING IT AS A PILOT

If you want to use a new specific tool for the management of your corporate community, you can defend the case with your sponsor, and spend time in identifying why this tool would be more valuable than others in creating positive impact for the company. If accepted, you may be the pilot community that will drive new uses in your company for other communities as well.

DIFFERENCE 7

Opportunities and risks with colleagues vs Opportunities and risks outside of work

7. *Opportunities and risks with colleagues* vs *Opportunities and risks outside of work*

All topics do not have the same easiness to expose when you are exposed to the view of colleagues and to the view of the world. For example, discussion about disgruntlement about one's employer is more likely to happen anonymously in a general public community than in an internal community. Talking about one's professional issues within a community of colleagues can have direct professional effects on career and either openness or self-censorship.

On the other hand, possibilities to shine within one's own company can have a different difficulty and bring different opportunities than shining outside.

This difference can change the topics you choose and the management of psychological safety for your corporate community

7. *Opportunities and risks with colleagues* vs *Opportunities and risks outside of work*

Tips for corporate community leaders

ACCEPT THAT NOT EVERYONE FEELS SAFE IN ALL TOPICS

It is not always easy for every member at every moment to share on every topic with the same level of psychological safety. For example, someone may not feel safe in sharing with other employees that he/she is in difficulty in his job, or that the project he works for is failing. He might fear rumors and distortions, especially in case of internal competition (for budget) in the company. Even if you consider your community as open, caring, respectful of confidentiality, every member builds trusts at his/her own pace and it is difficult to force that point.

UNDERSTAND WHAT CAN BUILD MUTUAL TRUST OR BE DAMAGEABLE TO MUTUAL TRUST

Some conditions can increase mutual trust in a Community, for example the respect of confidentiality of discussions while some other conditions can be damageable to mutual trust, for example low mutual acquaintance between members (which can happen when a community grows very fast).
The better you inquire and understand the reasons for mutual trust to vary, the better conditions you can create for psychological safety in your corporate community.

7. *Opportunities and risks with colleagues* *vs Opportunities and risks outside of work*

Tips for corporate community leaders

IDENTIFY AND PUT FORWARD OPPORTUNITIES OF PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS

Not all opportunities of professional benefits can be proactively fostered, some just happen out of serendipity. For example, if two Community members figure out they used to work on the same topic and they could share about it, you may not have foreseen this.

However, many community activities can be organized to increase the chances for some professional opportunities to happen, for example :

- To increase chances of knowledge transfer, organize a "share what you learn and what you can teach" workshop like #OpenSeriousHub
- To increase chances of internal job mobility, create a community job board where members can post job openings for each other.
- To increase chances to get specific live help and support from most expert members, organize "clinic timeslots" in which experts members are sure to be available for less experimented members to ask live questions.
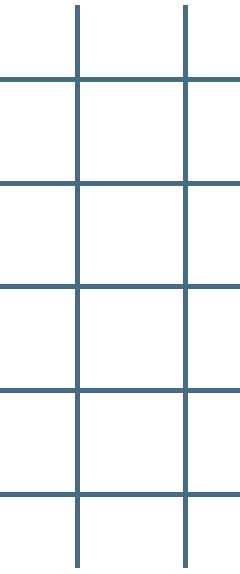
DIFFERENCE 8

Internal Synergy vs Market Competition

8. *Internal Synergy vs Market Competition*

In a community for the general public, if a community function is redundant with another community or with an existing organization, competition naturally happens and it is easier to declare "Let the best win".

In a corporate internal environment, if a community does the same job as another internal community or even as an internal team, there is a risk of the company investing twice for the same function. On the long run, this internal cannibalization is often eliminated.

This difference can change your inquiry efforts before starting or enriching a community with new services, and the level of adjustment with other parts of the company.

8. *Internal Synergy vs Market Competition*

Tips for corporate community leaders

### GET TO KNOW WHAT IS ALREADY DONE IN YOUR COMPANY

What is already done for a given topic in your company can be hard to find (for example, all initiatives related to Green IT are not always in one place or in one existing listing). Yet, it can be an interesting inquiry to do before launching your Community, not in a mindset of defiance, but rather for complementarity, re-use of experience, and also for finding potential members.

ADJUST SCOPE OF YOUR COMMUNITY

If one function is already ensured by an official person, team, or even community in the company, and that this particular function is not launched yet by your community, you can just avoid this work and focus your community on what does not exist rather than being redundant.

SET UP PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN YOUR COMMUNITY AND OTHER PARTS OF THE ORGANIZATION

As your corporate community and other parts of the company are not meant to compete, but rather to serve the company together, you can organize partnerships with other parts of the company that work on the same topic as your community. Partnerships can be shared events, links to other company digital spaces, or even official community roles given to key members.
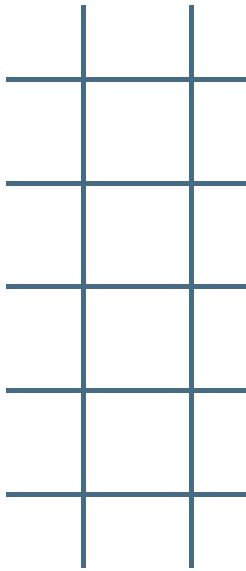
Summary : Remember the differences with this memory trick

Here is a way to remember the 8 big differences between **corporate internal communities** and **communities for the general public**.

Call it the **MoVemenT ACTORS** (**MVTACTORS**) memory trick, easy to remember because **corporate community leaders are often acting to create a movement in their company**.

1. **M**EMBERS
2. **V**ALUE
3. **T**IME
4. **A**PPOINTMENT
5. **C**ONFIDENTIALITY
6. **T**OOLS
7. **O**PPORTUNITIES AND **R**ISKS
8. **S**YNERGY

Other differences that could not make it to this paper

There are of course plenty of other differences than what has been mentioned in this short Komyupaper. Here is a short list of other differences you might want to explore for further knowledge :

- Usual professional profiles of corporate community leaders vs usual professional profiles of general public community managers.
- Fairness in the workplace vs fairness in a general public context
- Motivations of contributors in the workplace and motivations of contributors in a general public context
- Lifecycle of a topic (and its community) in a specific company context and lifecycle of a topic for the general public

Practice makes perfect

Now it is your turn to apply these tips, invent new ones, and share wisdom with your colleagues, friends, and community members !

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