RLCF

REGIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES & FACILITATORS

When We Share, We Win

Concept Paper

Establishing digital and analogue informal communities in the school sector

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1. **Introduction**

Working as a teacher in the school sector is one of the most challenging and at the same time most important professions – a fact that remains constant regardless of developments and trends.

The challenge of teaching young people and equipping them with the tools for a good personal future path is a monumental task. In the process, not only technical knowledge must be imparted, but also personality development and even the assumption of educational tasks are increasingly being delegated to teachers.

1.1.   Current challenges of the teaching profession

Coupled with an ever more rapidly evolving world and an uncertain future due to increasing interconnectedness and major global challenges such as the climate crisis, the highest demands are placed on individuals working in the teaching profession. The term VUCA world became popular in recent years as an accurate description of the reality of today's life. This acronym describes our everyday reality as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.
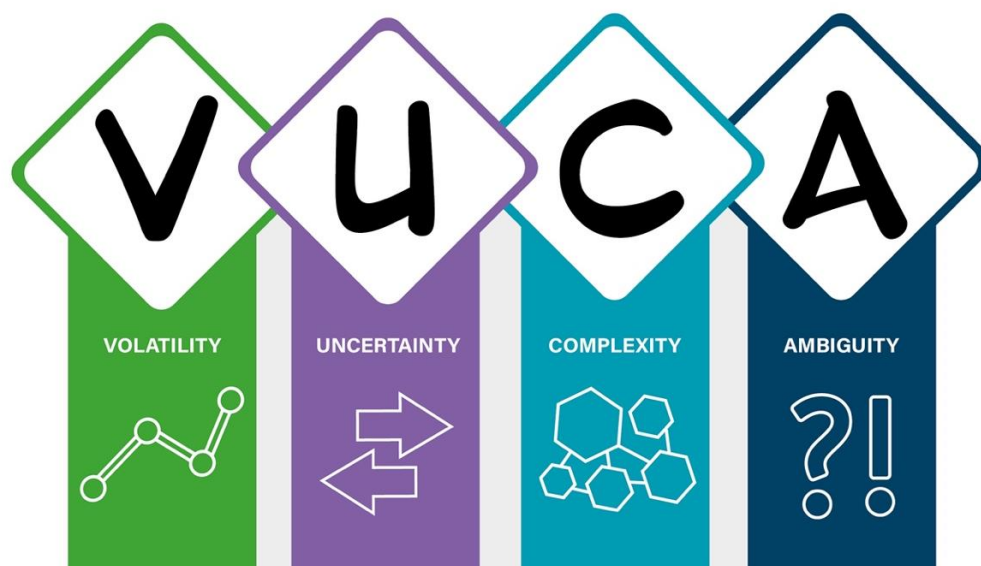
Teachers are on the front line and have to prepare young people for this uncertain world. In addition to a high level of personal commitment, this requires above all a lot of **flexibility, up-to-datedness** and

adaptability in order to be able to reflect current developments in the classroom and react to requirements, even at short notice.

In order to be able to work efficiently and purposefully, needs-oriented, organizational support is necessary on the one hand, and a great deal of mutual exchange and support among teachers is needed on the other.

The reality of teachers' jobs, however, is often quite different. Teachers are usually very involved in their classes and in their daily teaching routine, have little professional exchange with colleagues due to limited time resources, and have to deal with much general administrative framework at meetings, which leaves little time for professional or informal exchange.

The last two decades of the 21st century have presented many challenges and tensions for schools and teachers around the world. These include a new quality of multiculturalism, an expansion of roles beyond the traditional boundaries of the subject, and changes in social institutions themselves. The growing influence of the mass media on education, the coexistence of different educational models, and an increasing bureaucracy and accountability for teachers come along as complicating factors. [1]

In summary, the challenges for teachers include the following:

- Teachers have central qualifying, educational as well as educational tasks.
- Teachers in their work are important for the further development of future generations and thus contribute significantly to the stability of society,
- The profession turned into a cultural, social and societal profession and is characterized by social and interactive emotional work[2].

1.2.   Overloading and the effects on teaching quality

These enormous demands are difficult to cope with. It is not without reason that this occupational group is one of those with the highest risk of being affected by burnout throughout Europe.

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[1] Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century, Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar Wioleta Danilewicz Gracienne Lauwers, Verlag Barbara Budrich Opladen, Berlin & Toronto 2019, S 16 ff

[2] Schaarschmidt U: Halbtagsjobber? Psychische Gesundheit im Lehrerberuf – Analyse eines veränderungsbedürftigen Zustandes. Weinheim, Basel, Berlin: Beltz 2005.

If teachers are burnt out and overworked, this has a significant impact on the quality of teaching[3]. The (over-) stress of teachers negatively influences both the emotional and the professional development of students.[4]

A large-scale study on teacher health, also considered in an international context[5], shows that teachers are disproportionately affected by burnout and/or mental stress disorders or psychosomatic illnesses – often with early retirement as a result.

Significant encumbrances are[6]:

- Time pressure and too little working time
- Student underachievement and lack of motivation
- Problem behaviour of parents and low standing in society
- Working as a single fighter in the bureaucratic sense

These stresses are much more than individual problems of single teachers, as cross-national results and surveys show. The high stress ratios reveal a systemic problem at an institution that is so essential to society.

1.3. Networking as a lever for relief, quality improvement and efficiency gain in school teaching

As numerous studies confirm, teachers are thus very challenged on the one hand and usually act as "single fighters " on the other, which brings with it a great deal of stress and can reduce the quality of teaching.

The question therefore is how a contribution can be made to a sustainable relief and to an increase in quality and efficiency.

[3] Klusmann U, Kunter M, Trautwein U, et al.: Engagement and emotional exhaustion in teachers: does the school context make a difference? Appl Psychol Health Well Being 2008; 57: 127–51

[4] Kunter M, Klusmann U, Baumert J, et al.: Professional competence of teachers: effects on instructional quality and student development. J Educ Psychol 2013; 105: 805–20

[5] Teachers' health, Dtsch Arztebl Int 2015; 112: 347-56; DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2015.0347
Scheuch, Klaus; Haufe, Eva; Seibt, Reingard

[6] Seibt R, Galle M, Dutschke D: Psychische Gesundheit im Lehrerberuf. Präv Gesundheitsförd 2007

An important indication is provided by a result from the literature – there, one of the decisive factors for a burnout or for a burnout risk is a **low ability to obtain social support[7].**

So teachers need incentives and opportunities to share ideas with each other.

This exchange and networking should happen on both a formal and informal level. Thus, both formal networking activities (e.g., through exchange of practice tasks, professional discussions) and informal exchange (e.g., options for action in case of difficulties, exchange of experiences) could be of great value.

In other professional groups or educational settings, exchange among colleagues is often institutionalized. In contrast, in schools, a "single fighter" mentality is disproportionately strong. Networking – if it exists at all – is strongly centered on one's own location and often dependent on sympathies.

Synergy effects remain largely unused. Therefore, the same work and tasks (e.g., updating exercise sheets, creating new exercises on trending topics, preparing lessons in response to current events) have to be done individually by many different teachers over and over again. The exchange of good practices in teaching also hardly takes place. In some cases, very innovative methods are used or projects are realized that require a lot of preparation time and commitment – what a pity if this knowledge cannot be scaled.

The following practical example illustrate the potential that remains largely untapped:

> *This example from the everyday school life of a teacher at a public elementary school shows a small part of the problem. In her function as a third grade elementary school teacher, Ms. Bauer has to introduce the children to current topics and therefore she would like to set a project focus on the topic of "plastic avoidance". Since the topic is also of personal interest to her, she does extensive research, creates exercises and worksheets, and organizes a lecture by an external expert from the Zero Waste association.*
>
> *The additional effort for the teacher was high but the project is going well, children as well as parents are enthusiastic. Ms. Bauer is happy about the success, she will retire next year and therefore the last project was supposed to be very special.*

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[7] Hillert A, Koch S, Lehr D: Das Burnout-Phänomen am Beispiel des Lehrerberufs. Paradigmen, Befunde und Perspektiven berufsbezogener Therapie- und Präventionsansätze. Nervenarzt 2013; 84: 806–12 CrossRef MEDLINE

At the same time, just a few kilometres away, Mr. Maier faces a similar problem. He is also supposed to realize an "environmental project", but has barely any connection to the topic and his time resources are limited anyway. He does some research, but feels overwhelmed by the wealth of information. A project week with exercises and discussions is carried out but the focus of the project is not clearly defined and the students as well as the director are dissatisfied.

If there had been the possibility of exchange and networking, Ms. Bauer's preliminary work would have been useful to the colleague. He could have built on this experience, templates and ideas. It is particularly serious that Ms. Bauer will soon retire and that the knowledge she has gained about the successful implementation of projects on this topic will then be lost.

However, it is not only the exchange of information on a professional level that is essential. Above all, **informal experiences** or an **open ear for the problems and solutions** of colleagues can have a very **relieving effect** and make everyday work much easier.

Once again, here is an example to illustrate the point:

Ms. Kogler is only in her second year at a middle school. She knows her colleagues and has a good relationship with them, but there is little time for mutual exchange in the daily school routine. In addition, Ms. Kogler has the personal feeling that as a young teacher she still has to prove herself to her colleagues. Recently, there have been more and more disruptions in Ms. Kogler's class. Three students have formed a group, repeatedly disrupt the lessons and upset Ms. Kogler with inappropriate comments. Several attempts to solve the problems as well as discussions with the parents remain unsuccessful. Ms. Kogler notices that she needs more and more energy for the daily school routine, she also worries in the evenings and has difficulties to sleep.

Since none of the students behaves in a dramatically conspicuous manner, it is difficult for Ms. Kogler to describe the problem in concrete terms. Ms. Kogler does not want to ask her colleagues or the principal for help – she is afraid of being seen as incompetent.

What is needed here is an unbiased and informal exchange with other teachers who can share their own experiences or give advice, but who do not belong directly to their own environment.

The above-mentioned examples can be found in many schools every day. Teachers have hardly any opportunities to exchange ideas outside their own colleagues, and **synergy effects are rarely used.**

The burden of great responsibility in teaching is mainly borne alone – especially in times of crisis or change, this weighs even more heavily.

The great importance of quality teaching at all levels cannot be overstated, as the following quote from Linda-Darling-Hammond describes very aptly:

"The work of teaching is the work on which this profession and all others depend."[8]

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[8] Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century, Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar Wioleta Danilewicz Gracienne Lauwers, Verlag Barbara Budrich Opladen, Berlin & Toronto 2019, S 17

2. The vision – When we share, we win

The final chapters have addressed the challenges facing teachers today as well as the most significant stressors.

In order to prepare teachers, who are such indispensable and influential factors for social development, for these challenges and to enable them to cope with them, training and continuing education are considered a fundamental means. This is even more true in times of political and socio-economic transformations.

This statement is supported by studies that indicate that the effectiveness of teachers depends on the quality of their training and further education. However, supporting teachers not only has positive effects on them, but also influences the development of students' learning outcomes and thus has an impact on the intellectual property of future societies and economic development.[9]

At this point, the all-important training of teachers goes unnoticed, and the focus turns to supporting teachers who are actively engaged in the teaching profession.

In this context, the question regarding the type, duration and quality of further training arises. Here, too, numerous research results are available and in most European countries there is already a so-called further training obligation for teachers.

However, in such a busy and challenging time as the 2020–2030 decade, it is important to think about how to scale positive impacts from training and leverage the effects.

What is needed here is a system that must be as agile and hybrid as the demands of our time.

The Regional Learning Communities project consortium identifies enormous potential for how the European education area can benefit in the area of schools through cooperation and networking.

The principles of cooperation and networking must diffuse into the school system and enrich it from the bottom up. Since the problems of lacking synergies and high burdens are a European phenomenon, the European dimension is also considered and a solution approach is designed, which is not only applicable in the countries of the project partners (Austria, Portugal, Sweden), but can easily be transferred to other European countries.

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[9] Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century, Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar Wioleta Danilewicz Gracienne Lauwers, Verlag Barbara Budrich Opladen, Berlin & Toronto 2019, S 16 ff

A **guided, structured cooperation** is to be created that promotes better networking and mutual support. As a result, work and lesson preparations would not have to be done umpteen times, teachers could benefit from the experience of their professional colleagues, and there would be more time for pedagogical work with the students. Emotional relief and a break with the " single fighter mentality"[10] to the "team member" in the team for comprehensive, high-quality education would also be essential.

Greater collaboration among teachers has lasting effects – studies here suggest positive effects in three key areas[11]:

- **Positive effects on teachers**

  Teachers benefit from collaboration in many ways. Studies show that motivation increases, perceived workload decreases, and work morale improves in general.

  In addition, there is greater efficiency, increased communication and improved technological capabilities.

  It was also observed that instructional strategies became more student-centered and the match between the real and hidden curriculum increased.

- **Positive effects on pupils**

  The positive effects on students are mainly indirect and therefore more difficult to measure. Nevertheless, students benefit enormously when teachers are motivated and equip themselves with additional know-how through the network. For example, studies have reported that students improve their understanding and performance.

- **Positive effects on the school system itself**

  At the organizational level, benefits mentioned include a positive impact on the school climate, better adaptability, and more innovation. It also leads to a cultural shift toward more equity and needs-based teaching. Power structures flatten out and intellectual and interdisciplinary research is promoted.

To make these benefits of the networks effective, we need lively local, regional and European learning communities. In order to establish these communities and to sustainably revive and further develop them, committed personalities are needed who support the concept.

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[10] Gajda, R., & Koliba, C. J. (2008). Evaluating and improving the quality of teacher collaboration: A field-tested framework for secondary school leaders. NASSP, Bulletin, 92, 133–153

[11] Teacher collaboration: A systematic review. Vangrieken, Raes, Docky, Kyndt Educational Research Review, April 2015

These so-called "Regional Learning Facilitators" are the backbone of the Learning Communities and form the bridge between the teachers and the structures of the communities as well as providing long-term impulses for the further development of the community.

Although the analog exchange cannot be replaced, digital structures and formats of exchange are also needed due to increasing networking and digitization. The idea here is not to create an either/or solution, but rather a **hybrid system** that flexibly enables analog and digital exchange according to need.

Once these Regional Learning Communities are established, further opportunities can be tapped. The network can be expanded to include people from the educational authorities or political actors, and the challenges of education can be discussed at different system levels. In this way, a long-term input for the constructive, contemporary further development of the school system at the "bottom up" can be realized.

3. Digitalization, Covid Crisis and the Transformation to a Knowledge Society as Development Drivers in the School System

As already explained in the previous chapters, the current lack of networking structures, which result in inefficiency and a high sense of stress among teachers, creates a great need for solutions.

Three major factors can be cited at this point as crucial, which may further push the **need for sustainable approaches to teacher networking and collaboration.**

3.1.   The transformation to a knowledge society

In the development it becomes clear that **values** are generated less and less by plants or machines, but much **more by knowledge**. In addition to the familiar production factors of labor and capital, science now also refers to **knowledge as a production factor** and attaches great importance to it.

The knowledge factor is thus becoming the decisive driver for growth, and economically exploitable knowledge is considered the most important raw material of the future.

In economics, there is a fourth sector of the economy, a knowledge and information sector, in which the employees of all sectors that have an intensive relationship with knowledge and information are represented.

The main characteristics of this knowledge society that are relevant at this point are:

- • Greater importance is attached to knowledge than to experience.
- • Production is increasingly determined by knowledge.
- • Knowledge is used and generated across disciplines and by multiple people.
- • The structure of employment is changing; generating, collecting and processing knowledge and information is coming to the fore.

This structural change has a major impact on the future world of work in which we will operate – and thus also on the education sector, which is responsible for preparing young people for this world of work.

3.2. The digital transformation

The learning and working world of tomorrow will be digital. Digital transformation has accelerated rapidly, especially in 2020, due to the impact of the Covid19 crisis.

The rapid pace of development often makes people forget how young many digitalization technologies actually are. While smartphones have become an indispensable part of everyday life, for example, they were introduced at a time when a good portion of today's teachers were already in the middle of their careers.

The digital transformation is changing the school system and will continue to change it.

Systemic change is a challenge in the large and sluggish school system, as the following example shows:

Friedrich Merz – a German politician – is finally calling for WLAN for all schools and an e-mail address for students, and this in 2020 at a time when e-mail communication for students with each other no longer plays a role and virtually every student has mobile network access via smartphone.

A digital transformation of schools is based on four essential pillars[12]:

- • A functioning infrastructure
- • OER (Open Educational Resources) platforms
- • Intelligent learning software

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[12] Olaf Köller Auswirkungen der Schulschließungen auf die Digitalisierung im Bildungswesen, ifo Bildungsbarometer 2020

- Adequate training and continuing education for teachers

One of these essential pillars relates to teachers and their ability to use digital tools and take advantage of all the possibilities in terms of subject didactics and cross-subject learning.

For a timely and appropriate transformation of the school system, this change must also take place on the shoulders of the teachers. However, this requires a great deal of networking and know-how exchange, because many teachers are overwhelmed by the challenges of digital transformation themselves and need unbureaucratic and uncomplicated exchange in order to learn and benefit from each other.

3.3.   Effects of the Covid-19 crisis in the school system

The school system was and still is significantly influenced by the effects of the Covid19 crisis.

The effects are considered to be well studied and experts from countless studies agree on main key points:

- The digitalization push brings a **significantly increased need for competence** in digital teaching and the creation of digitizable or digitally available teaching materials.
- Teachers must respond to change more **quickly and flexibly** than ever before, and many individuals lack the professional and personal resources.
- The **educational gap** among children is widening. Numerous studies show that especially those children who already had disadvantages or difficulties before the Covid19 crisis are falling even further behind. This group also disproportionately often includes children from socially disadvantaged households or children with a migration background.

The reasons for this include the fact that children from socially disadvantaged families are less likely to have the necessary educational resources. They are less likely to have access to books, to a room of their own, or to computers and other support programs. Children from immigrant households suffer from the language barrier, parents tend to be less connected to school or other parents, and language acquisition suffers due to lack of interaction with classmates and teachers[13].

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[13] Alexander Danzer: „Auswirkungen der Schulschließungen auf Kinder mit Migrationshintergrund." In: ifo Schnelldienst (9/2020; S. 7-10)

So the challenges for teachers are greater than ever. Digital competencies must be built up, and from the perspective of both the user and the teacher. In addition, the educational gap that has been created must be closed again and children who have fallen behind in their academic performance in 2019/2020 must be reintegrated and supported with additional funding.

More than ever, therefore, mutual support networks are needed for greater efficiency, know-how transfer and emotional relief.

4. Organizational concepts for informal communities

4.1. Basic construct and types of communities

The formation of communities is increasingly being thematically taken up and also more actively controlled. But how can communities be defined?

The word originates from the Latin "**communicare**" and has the meanings "to exchange" and "to make common". In everyday language, communities and networks are often used synonymously. The general definition describes communities as **"a long-term, primarily self-organized association of people that is oriented toward private or economic purposes and has a real or virtual character"**[14] .

The topic of learning in communities has been gaining importance in the discourse on teaching and learning theory since the 1990s. This is based on a very old principle that says that people with the same interests and goals can benefit from the exchange of experiences, ideas and knowledge.

Today, there is a variety of community concepts – from learning communities to so-called communities of practice – but for the most part there is no clear and unambiguous definition.

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[14] Communities of Practice. Potenziale des Lernens Erwachsener in professionellen Lerngemeinschaften, Tina Basner

However, some characteristics of a functioning community can be summarized:

- It is an **association of people**
- A **common identity** and **common interests** are present
- There is something like a **common goal**
- Participants **interact, cooperate and learn**
- At least some essential values are shared and there is a **sense of community**

In the following figure, characteristics of a community are summarized somewhat differently but also aptly[15]:
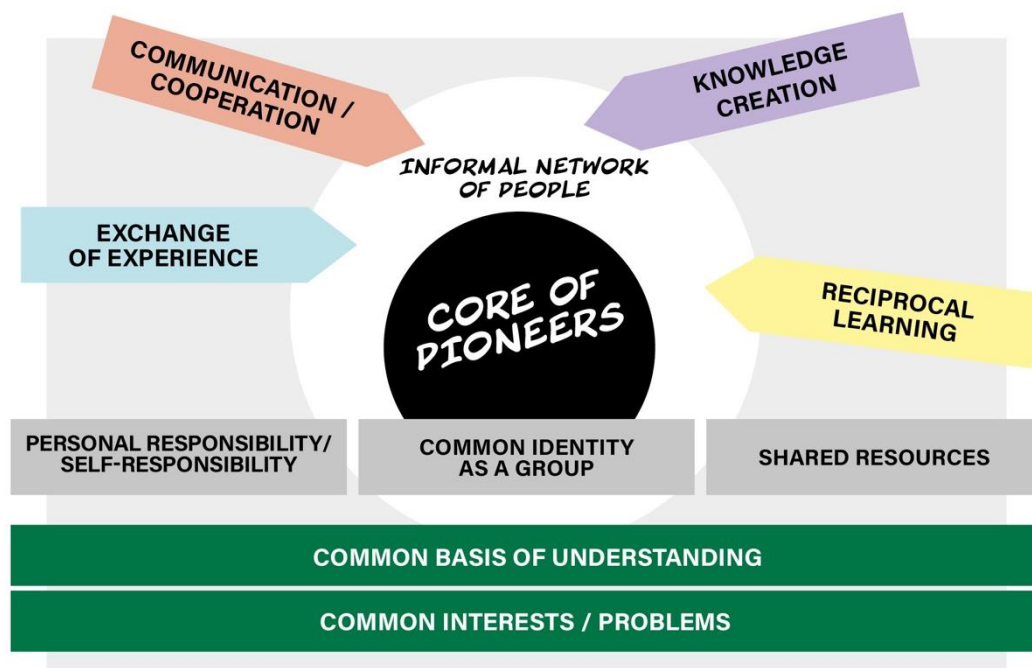
The focus here is also on community and the common interest or problem, where interaction and exchange are essential.

At this point, we will also discuss the different types of communities. However, it is not possible to draw clear boundaries here.

In some cases, for example, **classification is based on motives**. Brunold, Merz and Wenger, for example, have differentiated according to the motives "exchange of information, joint activities and buying and selling" and, in addition to community types, have also classified special forms[16] .

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[15] Communities und Wissensmanagement: Wenn hohe Erwartungen und wenig Wissen zusammentreffen, Gabi Reinmann-Rothmeier, S 7

[16] Arten von Community-Systemen nach Brunold, Merz & Wagner (Brunold, Merz & Wagner 2000)

But there are numerous mixed forms and motives cannot always be separated from each other. For example, users may want to inform themselves before making a purchase, or they may want to learn and share knowledge at the same time.

Another distinction is made when distinguishing between "**consumption-oriented communities**" and "**business communities**."

Business communities serve to build business relationships, map and support internal processes, or serve marketing purposes.

Consumption-oriented communities can be classified according to their main focus (such as information sharing or joint activities) – but here, too, the lines are blurred.

CMX Hub's "SPACEI" model (one of the largest hubs for community professionals) provides a catchy overview of the types of communities:

S CUSTOMER SUPPORT/ SUCCESS — Create a space for members to answer questions and solve problems for each other in order to be more successful with the product or service.

P PRODUCT IDEATION, INNOVATION & FEEDBACK — Create a space for members to share ideas and feedback that will be used to drive innovation and product improvements.

A ACQUISITION & ADVOCACY — Build a network of ambassadors and/or advocates who drive awareness and growth (typically, marketing-centric goals) for the business.

C CONTENT & PROGRAMMING — Gather the people who contribute information, goods or services that make up the product or assets within the product.

E EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT — Create a space for people who have a common interest that is related to, or focused on, your brand or product.

I INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT — Deepen internal employee engagement or engagement between suppliers, vendors, or teams that contribute to a company's end product.

Support communities – are often run in forums and sometimes almost completely replace customer support. Large companies use the community to solve problems of other members. A prominent example is the Apple support community.

Product, innovation and feedback communities provide information on what is good about products or services, what could be improved and what ideas there are for new developments. Companies use this information, which would be difficult to obtain through other channels.

Acquisition and Advocacy Communities – here, fans of a product or company are equipped with the tools to acquire further customers for a product or service. This can lead to massive growth and high loyalty to a brand.

Content and Programming Communities – this is about collaborative working and members contributing content and generating value together.

External Engagement Communities – this is the most common type of community. Here, members have a common interest that brings them together, for example, they are all avid cyclists. Passion for the cause is characteristic of this type of community.

Internal Engagement Communities – are formed within a company; to manage knowledge, network employees or exploit synergies through cross-cutting collaboration.

4.2. Informal communities in for-profit companies – and what you can learn from them

The formation of informal communities has long been encouraged in for-profit companies – and there's a good reason for this.

Through community building, companies can leverage values that would not be achievable in this way, even with a high investment of resources. A real and sustainable connection is created, and the company gains access to information that would otherwise hardly be shared.

In doing so, companies differentiate whether it is a matter of employee community building, whether other target groups are included or whether community building is even focused on the customers.

Regardless of this, communities are considered a model for success in companies. Functioning communities create growth, generate value and promote reinvestment. Companies that use communities have seen above-average profits. As a result of this success, investments in communities are increased in order to magnify their impact.

It can be stated: **Advanced Communities DO create generative value.**

4.2.1. Internal Communities – Structure and Effectiveness

Internal employee communities are predominantly about:

- Knowledge transfer
- innovation support
- Commitment to the company and shared values
- Increase motivation

Employee communities are not an end in themselves but should serve the employees as well as the company. At the beginning, therefore, the question arises which outcome is hoped for. Because employee communities in companies are also completely different. For example, there may be subject-specific communities, communities that focus on specific topics, or communities for employees in certain phases of their lives, such as parents.

Communities are not static either, they change, form themselves anew or even disappear altogether. The possibilities of sustainable community management will be discussed later, but the following characteristics apply to successful employee community building:

- Within the community there are similar interests, fields of work or even lifestyles
- The community is open and accessible regardless of position in the company
- Communication takes place over short distances and both online and offline
- The values of the company are shared and community members act as reinforcers of the same
- Through the networking of the members, knowledge, inspiration and experience is exchanged and also brought into the company from outside[17].

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[17] Employee Communities – Teil 1: So arbeiten Fachkräfte mit digitalem Mindset, https://www.tandemploy.com/de/blog/employee-communities-teil-1-so-arbeiten-fachkraefte-mit-digitalem-mindset/

Networking has a variety of effects on operations. For example, innovations emerge through networking, knowledge transfer remains alive, and networked learning and working create good conditions for creative solutions. All these attributes are of great advantage in a world of complex problems.

An active internal community also has a significant impact on the recruiting process. As job profiles become more dynamic and changeable, companies are often more concerned with who fits into the team, into the community, and who has certain skills at the same time. HR professionals should be very interested in the opinion of the community on the necessary qualifications of new team members, after all, the internal information about the skills still missing in the team is invaluable.

Studies have long shown the benefits of internal communities in companies. Even if this is often difficult to measure in terms of key figures, there is already reliable data material that speaks a clear language.[18]

Communities are therefore efficient, capable of finding creative solutions and bind employees to the company. What remains? The question of the **success factors of internal communities in companies.**

They can be summarized as follows:

- **The question of meaning is answered** – What is the community hoping for and what kind of networking is needed?
- **A good tool and a good coffee** – this is about the space and the possibilities to communicate with each other
- **Visibility and continuity** – networking success stories need to be communicated and the community needs to be nurtured
- **Community Manager** – often in the person of HR, actively promotes connection and community

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[18] THE STATE OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT 2020, S 38 ff https://communityroundtable.com/

4.2.2. External Communities – the marketing machine

In external communities, other target groups – very often customers – are included in the community. The effects are sometimes dramatic and can hardly be achieved with traditional marketing means.

A successful community with a company's target group provides access to information that is difficult to obtain via surveys or opinion panels.

This promotes direct exchange with the target group and the company receives unfiltered information about desired further developments to products or services. Customers do not perceive the interaction in the community as a marketing measure, but rather feel that they are being addressed, that **their needs are being seen, and that they identify more strongly** with a brand or a company.

The interaction promotes long-term customer loyalty and gives the company the security to develop developments and offers precisely adapted to the needs of the clientele.

Costs for customer support, opinion polls or advertising measures can be drastically reduced.

In some cases, this community-driven interaction goes so far that the further development of companies is transferred directly to the community. The example of Lego also shows an extremely successful – even if accidentally created – customer community.

> *It was 1998 when Lego Mindstorms conquered the market. This was a series of controllable and customizable robots. The software was quickly cracked by adult fans of the series, who began to customize the robots according to their own wishes and present their results on the web. Lego decided against legal action and invited the hackers to work together on the product.[19]*

The company Lego from the example above was considered traditional and was always keen to protect its products and intellectual property as best as possible. After many years of experience and some ups and downs in community management, the company has filtered out some principles for successful interaction. These can also be understood as success factors for communities involving customers. These are:

- Be clear about rules and expectations
- Ensure a win-win
- Recognize, that outsiders are not insiders
- Be as open as possible
- Don't expect one size to fit all – different approaches might be needed for different audiences[20]

4.3.   Situated learning at the heart of the community

Cooperation among people always has positive effects, whether it takes place in its direct, face-to-face form or the indirect, in virtual reality.

Cooperation is highly valued in many fields such as social and economic problem solving. In this context, cooperative learning is an important determinant of human development with a strong theoretical background that helps to describe, understand and predict the processes and problems that arise.[21]

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[19] Collaborating With Customer Communities: Lessons From the LEGO Group, Yun Mi Antorini, Albert M. Muñiz, Jr.and Tormod Askildsen

[20] Collaborating With Customer Communities: Lessons From the LEGO Group, Yun Mi Antorini, Albert M. Muñiz, Jr.and Tormod Askildsen

[21] Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century, Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar Wioleta Danilewicz Gracienne Lauwers, Verlag Barbara Budrich Opladen, Berlin & Toronto 2019, S 300 ff

4.3.1. Learning in adult education as a constructivist process

Learning from each other and with each other, as well as the exchange of experiences and joint further development, is one of the most essential core elements of a community. Learning and teaching is increasingly understood as a constructivist process, especially in adult education / continuing education.

In the process, traditional, linear knowledge transfer takes a back seat. What and how a person learns depends on prior knowledge and the learning situation. The pure imparting of specialized knowledge recedes into the background; rather, the ability to establish knowledge networks is considered decisive.

Learning in adult education or continuing education formulated from a constructivist perspective includes the following characteristics:

- Knowledge is acquired on the basis of existing knowledge structures, which are considered the basis for interpreting new knowledge.
- The acquisition of knowledge is an active process that requires participation.
- Positive feelings are important for success.
- The process of learning is self-directed (control, monitoring and reflection of the own learning process).
- Learning is a social process and happens in interaction with the environment.
- The learning environment is highly relevant for the acquisition of competencies.

4.3.2. The importance of the learning environment for adult professionals

The learning processes of adults must therefore be **supported and optimized**. The question of **learning environments** is particularly essential, especially for learners who already have a high level of knowledge in their professional context and want to innovate or exchange professional expertise.

Especially when adults have already exhausted formal educational pathways, non-formal education and informal learning environments gain importance.[22]

Particularly for so-called "professionals", i.e. experts in their field, there can be assumed to be special requirements for the learning environment. These people have not only built up specialist expertise,

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[22] Communities of Practice. Potenziale des Lernens Erwachsener in professionellen Lerngemeinschaften, https://www.grin.com/document/340392

they have usually also learned to think independently, to ask focused questions and to consider statements critically, as well as to link information together.

Especially for this group of "professionals", learning theory concepts based on collaborative and social approaches are very appropriate.

In communities, adults find that exchange at eye level that motivates and makes the path to knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer and creativity and innovation effortless.

4.4.   Communities of Practice

The so-called "communities of practice" are considered a relatively new concept, although the basic issue to which they refer is an age-old one. More and more organizations from different sectors are now discovering the Communities of Practice as a key to performance improvement.

4.4.1.   Core elements of Community of Practice

Very succinctly defined, communities of practice are groups of people who share a passion or pursue a common cause. Through regular interaction, they learn how to do something better or how to get closer to a goal together.[23]

The learning itself does not have to be present as a basic intention, as long as it becomes readable in the result.[24]

Three key characteristics define the community of practice and distinguish it from other communities such as circles of friends or neighbourhoods.

- **The Domain:**
  A community of practice has an identity that is based on a common area of interest. Membership in the community obligates and there is a shared expertise or expertise that differentiates the members from others. It is not essential that others outside the community recognize this expertise; what is critical is whether members of the community value the collective expertise and learn from each other.

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[23] Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated Learning. Legitimate Peripheral Participation. New York: Cambridge University Press.
[24] Communities of practice a brief introduction, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf

- **The community:**

  Members of a Community of Practice (subsequently also referred to as CoP) help each other and share information. Relationships are built that enable mutual learning from each other. A common area of interest is therefore not sufficient; interaction and shared learning are essential for a CoP. The frequency or physical location of the interaction is irrelevant, as long as this interaction takes place regularly.

- **The practice:**

  People who form a community of practice are practitioners. They have a shared repertoire of tools, ways and experiences to solve problems together. In the process, these experiences, and proven ways of solving problems from practice are shared regularly and interactively.

The three elements mentioned above essentially make up a community of practice. If such a community is to be cultivated, these three elements must be developed and promoted in parallel.

4.4.2. Types of Communities of Practice

Knowledge represents an increasingly important competitive advantage and has also become the key to success and sustainable further development for non-profit organizations.

In order to better tap and manage the capital of knowledge, the focus has shifted to communities of practice for a wide variety of application areas. Experts are increasingly concerned with so-called "hidden knowledge" and the question of how and by what means knowledge can be made "productive".

Communities of Practice are often initiated with an intention to actively shape knowledge management. But not only that – many of the CoP's arise without an initial spark and also often without the members being aware that they belong to a CoP.

> *An example of this is the regular meeting of intensive care nurses in the canteen of a hospital.*
>
> *They meet to exchange experiences in nursing or in dealing with relatives. All three characteristics of a CoP are fulfilled – there is a domain (common area of interest, common identity and goals), a practice and expertise (each person is knowledgeable), and a lively exchange with the will to share experiences and tools.*

Today, CoP s occur in a wide variety of ways. Some examples are[25]:

- **Business communities** – here, customer loyalty is to be strengthened and there is intensive interaction and communication with customers in order to develop new business areas.
- **Hobby or self-help communities** – focus on problems from leisure time and are very strongly oriented towards communication and exchange.
- **Learning Communities** – are predominantly found in the education sector and rely on communication and cooperation for skills development

CoP s can emerge within an organization or operate across organizations – there is no limitation as long as regular interaction is maintained. It is also possible to focus on different target perspectives.

The Internet is increasingly supplementing presence communities and, in some cases, even replacing them altogether.

Different sectors and organizations have recognized the potential of CoP's. Thus, these have found a number of practical applications[26].

- **In companies**
  As already explained, companies benefit from communities – either internally or with the involvement of other stakeholders. Business has embraced this concept because of the recognition that knowledge is a critical asset that must also be managed strategically. CoP's in business are now no longer marginal, but state of the art.

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[25] Communities of Practice – Ein Zugang zu sozialer Wissensgenerierung, Friederike R. Bliss, Anja Johanning, Hildegard Schicke, S 7 ff
[26] Communities of practice a brief introduction, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner,
https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf

- **In government organizations**

    These face similar challenges as large companies, knowledge challenges are becoming more complex and existing knowledge is growing rapidly. Major issues such as health, education or security require knowledge sharing across different levels. Bureaucracy and formality prove to be challenges in these organizations, which can be overcome by means of the CoP s.

- **In the education sector**

    The challenges in this area are enormous – after all, it's not just about developing knowledge further but also about passing it on. Learning is not only a means to an end, but also the "end product" in this sector, so to speak. CoP's can address the complexity and provide essential support for processes of transformation and further development.

- **Associations**

    The concept of associations enjoys great popularity. They are completely different in purpose, size or effectiveness. Vibrant associations benefit from mutual exchange and quality learning activities. CoP's are an alternative concept to traditional courses or educational initiatives.

- **Social sector and development work**

    In development work, it is increasingly recognized that the challenge of equitable distribution is a knowledge challenge in addition to the financial aspect. Funding for projects is becoming increasingly complex and a CoP approach enables knowledge transfer and knowledge building across organizational boundaries.

4.4.3. Participation in a Community of Practice

The essence of a community of practice is the participation of its members and how those members participate.

Different types of participation can be identified, and membership can be based on different motivations.[27]

- **A thematic request**

  This motivation describes the participation in the CoP because a concrete problem or a specific topic is to be worked on. These members want to focus the exchange strongly on the topic or work area.

- **Exchange and participation**

  For some people, the added value of participating in a CoP lies more in the exchange and the feeling of "being involved". The community and the social aspect are in the foreground.

- **Be part of it**

  Some members have less of a desire to actively participate. They are more passive than others and participation is more oriented towards "being part of it".

Accordingly, different needs and interests also give rise to different types and intensities of participation. However, the roles of the members are not clearly assignable, not limited and not fixed, but can change again and again.
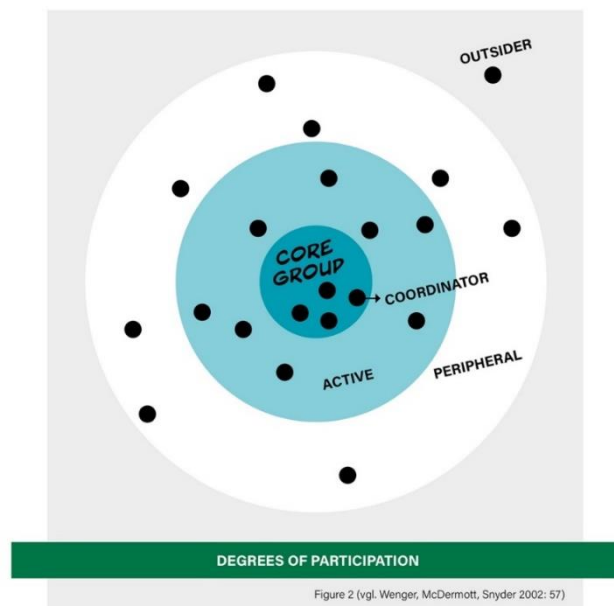
Figure 2 (vgl. Wenger, McDermott, Snyder 2002: 57) [28]

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[27] Wenger, E.; McDermott, R. Snyder, W. S. (2002). Cultivating Communities of Practice. A Guide to Managing Knowledge. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press

[28] Wenger, E.; McDermott, R. Snyder, W. S. (2002). Cultivating Communities of Practice. A Guide to Managing Knowledge. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press

The graphic on the page before shows **different degrees of participation**. But these are **not static**, if you look at the graph you can imagine the **dots as moving and interacting individuals**.

The CoP is a dynamic, changing organization. Participation and relationships are subject to constant change. In this context, there is also talk of "legitimate peripheral participation". This means that participation in CoP's often has to evolve. This can hardly be planned or controlled.

Active and coordinating members accompany processes of rapprochement and invite people who have previously taken a passive role to participate. If they feel they belong more and contribute new aspects, they become increasingly anchored in the community and become active members.

This can result in an effect that is due to the relationship within the community. In most cases, individuals who are more peripherally involved have a stronger personal network of relationships with individuals who are also more on the periphery or outside the CoP. If individuals move from the periphery toward the inner circle, this movement is often followed by other people who interact with the moving individual.

4.4.4. How do communities of practice really work? Misconceptions and myths

As the previous chapters make clear, communities of practice vary widely, occur in different sectors, and have different sizes, goals, and characteristics.

Accordingly, there is no "patent remedy" for CoP's – nevertheless, some myths or misconceptions exist, which sometimes do not apply or apply only partially and some of which are touched upon here:

- **CoP´s are self-organizing:**
  This is a myth from earlier literature. Some CoP's are indeed self-organizing and effective, but most require some cultivation to be sustainably effective.

- **CoP´s do not need leaders:**
  Strategies also need to be set and decisions made in CoP's. Some kind of leadership, coordination or management is necessary for a successful CoP.

- **Sharing existing knowledge is in the foreground:**
  This is clearly one of the core tasks of a CoP – but not only. CoP's are also very focused on innovation, generating new practices and solving problems.

- **Successful moderation is needed to encourage members to participate**

  This statement is partially true. Good and reliable moderation is very important, but for many people the main reason to participate is rather the relevance and value of participation itself. The results of participation must be visible and tangible. Moderation can help to make these results visible, but it is not the main reason for participation.

- **The effect of CoP's is not measurable**

  This statement is a refutable prejudice. Of course, it can be difficult to accurately measure the effects of a CoP or attribute them to a specific outcome. Nevertheless, with the help of qualitative and quantitative data, it is quite possible to track various effects and make them measurable.

- **There is a technology to be preferred for CoP's**

  Countless different tools can be found on the web and there are many portals or sites that are called CoP. But if there is no or little interactivity there, this has no value. A tool for CoP s is as good as it is practical for its members. Since these CoP s are extremely diverse, there is also no one right tool but the community and the preferences of the members are decisive.

- **In a CoP's it has to be very harmonious**

  A certain consensus on basic values usually prevails. Beyond that, however, it is important that things are discussed controversially, and that people are allowed to argue. Creativity and innovation thrive on discourse and diversity – if a community is completely free of conflict, the question arises as to whether it is still really alive.

5. Establishing and sustainably reviving informal communities

As explained in the previous chapters, communities are a promising concept for sharing knowledge, learning, promoting innovation and channelling social exchange.

As lifestyles and workplaces become more complex, **a dynamic approach to continuous education, knowledge management and development** is needed, and communities have proven their effectiveness in different contexts.

This chapter explores the question of how communities can be sustained and developed in the long term. What parameters are necessary for this and to what extent can "success factors" of communities be derived?

5.1.   A strategy for communities

The question arises whether communities need a strategy. The answer is not clear – some communities are extremely successful and stable without a strategy.

In literature, however, it is assumed that a strategy **makes the impacts of the community more measurable** and the interaction easier for the members.

When communities have a strategy, they are on average more mature, have more members and are more effective. These communities are usually found within companies or are at least supported by them. Financial commitment is also indispensable for these so-called "advanced communities"[29].

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[29] THE STATE OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT 2020, https://communityroundtable.com/ , S 12

ADVANCED STRATEGY: AN APPROVED, OPERATIONAL AND MEASURABLE STRATEGY

NO DOCUMENTED STRATEGY

A DRAFT STRATEGY

AN APPROVED, OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

AN APPROVED STRATEGY

22% 22% 24% 14% 17%

STRATEGIC MATURITY OF ALL COMMUNITIES
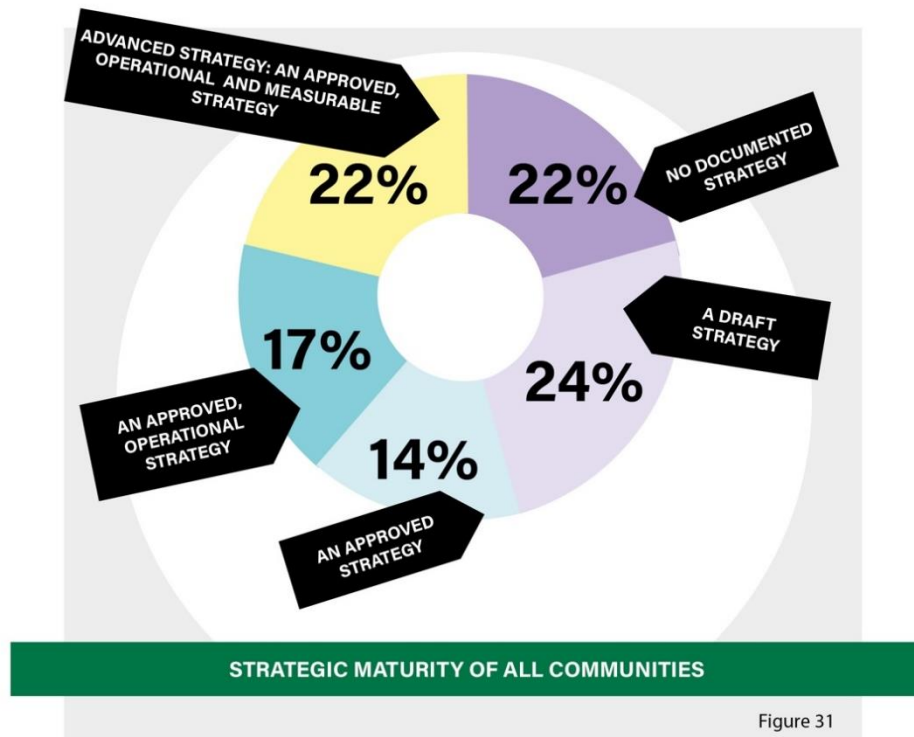
Figure 31

As the figure[30] shows, not all communities have a strategy, and it is not necessarily beneficial for all types of communities.

Think of the community of practice and the example of intensive care nurses. This CoP has emerged unnoticed and still fulfils all the criteria. If this exchange was formalised and possibly sponsored by the hospital management, the question arises if this would be beneficial to the CoP. It is conceivable that the exchange would then become less carefree, more controlled and more formal and that this could have a negative impact on the exchange.

5.2.   Initiate and build communities

If a community is to be initiated and built up consciously, there is always an intention and an expectation behind it.

People or organisations involved in community building have very different objectives.

Should a community create social benefits, promote a product, serve intellectual exchange or joint research? Is the community planned to be local or global and online?

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[30] THE STATE OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT 2020, https://communityroundtable.com/ , S 12

These questions show how difficult it is to draw general conclusions. In a simplified form, however, some key parameters with which the development of a community is more likely to succeed do exist:

- **Idea and purpose of the community**

  Initiators of a community should be very precise about why and for whom they want to build one. When determining the goals, it is advisable to define them SMART. The purpose plays an essential role here. In any case, this perspective should also be considered from the point of view of the target group.

  Initiators should therefore not only ask themselves what they want to achieve with a community, but especially also why the target group of members absolutely needs this community.

- **Unique selling point**

  A community will only be successful if it offers added value. Therefore, it is an advantage to look at similar communities or to occupy a niche. The rule here is quality before quantity – a larger community or a very broad topic is not always an advantage.

- **The type of community**

  There are countless kinds of communities that are strongly linked to their purpose. Even at the initiation stage, it is important to think about what kind of community it should be.

- **The strategy**

  Especially in the case of deliberately initiated communities that are supposed to grow quickly or lead to a specific goal, a strategy is important. This involves questions of organisation, financing, the experience of members, leadership within the community and measurable success.

- **Moderation within the community**

  Even in a community, rules are needed – in a community that has been consciously created, it makes sense to think about them from the beginning. The role of moderation is a factor that should not be underestimated.

- **Responsibility and leadership**

  Who is responsible for the management of the community? How is a potential community team set up and who has which tasks? The question of responsibility if the community does not develop as desired or when problems arise is also very relevant and should be clarified from the beginning.

5.3. Roles in Communities

In each community, different roles exist. They are usually differentiated according to the length of membership, experience and expertise or frequency of interaction.

But the allocation of roles is just as different as the communities themselves. Particularly in informal, rather randomly created communities, there is sometimes no formal role allocation at all.

In contrast, actively managed communities, which are often initiated and financed by companies, often have very detailed role concepts. Especially in online communities, such role management is indispensable, as it is usually directly linked to authorisations.

As different as the structure of the communities is depending on the type of community, as different are the role allocations and the exact definition of the respective roles.

There is not one right answer as to which roles in communities must be filled in a certain way in order for them to function.

Nevertheless, some central roles have emerged that can be found independently in every community. Depending on the type, purpose and structure of the community, these are then extended, more detailed or more precisely defined.

Especially in hybrid communities, which come together analogue and digital, and in purely online communities, the management of roles is more important.

Basically, the following roles can be found regardless of the type of community, although only the first two role models are necessarily represented in every community:

- **Coordinators / core group members**

  Each community needs an initial spark and people who take care of the community management. This contribution may even be unconscious, but communities still need a minimum of coordination and committed people who animate the community or keep it alive.

  In very informal communities, these roles are variable – some members reduce their involvement and then no longer belong to the core group, while other members move up to that position.

  The so-called "innermost circle" therefore usually consists of the person(s) who initiated the community, people who are involved as coordinators and very active members with great influence in the community. In the course of time, initiators can also withdraw from this inner circle, if there are committed people who take over their tasks.

- **Active members**

  A group of active members is the basis of the community. They contribute regularly and enrich the community through exchange. The degree of activity varies and is again strongly dependent on the usual frequency in the community.

  Particularly active members who are characterized either by a great deal of content-related input or above-average commitment move into the inner circle, the so-called "core group". The boundaries are fluid.

- **Periphery / fewer active members**

  Members from the periphery tend to be moderately active and are often passive beneficiaries of activities. How many of these members a community can have and what degree of passivity is tolerated is again highly variable.

  There are communities that do not tolerate passive behaviour over a long period of time, while other communities' function perfectly well with immensely high proportions of inactive members. If one recalls the breadth of existing communities, this discrepancy becomes quite logical – a marketing community initiated by a company with potential customers in the target group of members has a completely different tolerance here than a research community with high demands on a result.

- **Outsider**

  The extent to which the community includes so-called "outsiders" – inactive persons or persons from other areas or communities – varies greatly. Often outsiders also participate indirectly, for example because individual community members exchange information with outsiders about the community and subsequently bring their input into the community.

  Depending on the purpose and design of the community, the involvement of other organisations can also be useful in certain cases.

5.4.   Strengthening communities and keeping them alive

Communities live on continuity and the commitment of their members.

The main question – once a community has a relevant number of participants to be functional – is how to motivate as many members as possible to become permanently involved in the community.

In the first step, the motivation for participation is analysed and in the second step it is shown **what community management can do to motivate participants.**

5.4.1. Motives for active participation in communities

So, what are the motives that motivate active participation?

- **Connection and conviviality**

  This motive is fundamental for cooperation and collaboration. Interaction with like-minded people, at least in some areas, stimulates participation. The desire to form relationships, build friendships and be in connection with other people is an essential intrinsic motivation for participation.

- **Enthusiasm for the topic**

  If people have a passion or great interest for a certain topic, they want to deal with it. The community makes it possible to work together with others on the preferred topic and thus receive interesting input or share one's own views.

  This motivation also has a lot to do with relaxation or passing the time; if people participate in communities primarily because they enjoy a topic, they would also like to be entertained in the community.

- **Learning / competence development**

  The focus is on the desire for personal development. Participants in communities see this community as an added value for personal development and a place where they can exchange ideas with others on a common interest and work on it.

They want to increase their knowledge or find solutions. Members for whom learning is in the focus appreciate above all the professional input, which is particularly helpful if many other competent users are active in the community.

- **Status / need for recognition**

    People have a basic need for status and recognition in systems. They want to influence or even guide others, seek confirmation and tend to be dominance oriented.

- **Support**

    This motivation focuses on sharing and helping others. Members who derive satisfaction from helping are eager to assist other members and to provide them with professional support as well as social closeness. They willingly fulfil requests and are very enthusiastic about sharing their experience and knowledge or helping to solve problems.

- **Safety and security**

    People naturally strive for safety and security. Members value the community as a secure framework in which they can exchange ideas and feel comfortable. They look for affection, confirmation, protection and expressions of sympathy.[31]

It should be noted that most members of communities are motivated by several of the above-mentioned factors – but in different ways.

5.4.2. Motivation through specific community management

However, knowledge of the motivating factors for participation behaviour is not enough for successful community management. It is important to also take the right measures to ignite and maintain these basic intrinsic motivations.

In the following, some of the well-known factors are mentioned to stimulate a desired behaviour of the community members.

- **Meaning and purpose of the community**

    This has to be clearly communicated at all stages of the development of a community and the members have to be aware of it. If members no longer recognise the purpose, they

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[31] Online Communities, Leitfaden und Toolbox. Schaffer, Mohr Federspiel, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts

will reduce their involvement, or the community will become a social event without a deeper meaning.

- **Clear rules and responsibilities**

  Even informal structures need rules and people who try to ensure that they are adhered to. This can be done very formally – e.g., through a set of rules – or informally. However, the rules and responsibilities must be known and supported by the community.

- **Structures**

  Every social association needs a certain structure. The larger the community, the more structure is needed. The key question is when and how which activities take place and how they are controlled. Structures can vary depending on the type of community. For online or hybrid communities, it is advisable to look for suitable tools.

  If cliques or clusters of members form that isolate themselves from the community, intervention and moderation are necessary – this is also part of the design of a structure.

- **Communication of successes**

  How much knowledge has been passed on, what ideas have been generated, how many contributions have been posted or how many members does the community now have? Successes or realised objectives should be shared with the community.

- **Promoting diversity and empathy**

  Creative processes benefit from diversity and community members with different profiles or interests enrich the network – as long as there is a common focus. Empathy is very much in demand, on the one hand among the members and on the other hand on the part of the community management, which should always be close to the community with an open ear.

- **Liveliness and interaction**

  Promoting dialogue and keeping the community alive is one of the biggest and at the same time most difficult tasks. But nothing is worse than a party and no one attends – it is the same with communities. If they are not lively, they quickly become hollow and inactive shells.

- **Participation**

  A community is not a company where a boss decides the direction. The community at least has a voice in the decision-making process and should be involved in key strategic issues.

- **Critical ability**

  Community management must be able to take criticism and communicate crises in an open manner in order to solve them together. Community members should have the feeling that they are understood and taken seriously.

- **Up-to-datedness**

  Topics and contents must be kept up to date. For this purpose, current happenings can be taken up, actions can be planned, or current priorities can be set.

If members of a community are motivated, they will show typical behaviour that enriches the community.[32] The following table summarises how community members react to certain situations:

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[32] Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge. By Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Besides motivating factors, there are also ones that demotivate and discourage community members. These include, for example, unfair allocation of work or one-sided distribution of benefits in the community, too little sense of community or structures that are too complicated and very formal.

5.5.   Supporting informal communities with formal structures

Self-organising communities are able to do a lot and make valuable contributions to knowledge management and know-how building – they can even solve interdisciplinary problems and therefore communities are always in the focus of companies. They have recognised the potential of communities as valuable instrument.

Especially in the case of communities of practice – i.e., networks of experts – there are often ground-breaking outputs.

The example of the rise and fall of an informal group of experts dealing with water management should, however, show at this point that informal communities also benefit from a certain degree of formal structures.

> *The members of a CoP on water management were experts from a company who met weekly to discuss the development of new systems. These meetings were so successful and informative that they began to attract uninvolved people and interested parties. The community initially flourished, many insights were shared, and lively discussions took place. The pool of knowledge and experience became increasingly larger.*
>
> *The management of this farm did not want to disturb the productivity and collaboration in the CoP and left it to its own devices.*
>
> *Due to rapid growth, members got better tools, shifted many activities to the web and the amount of data quickly became unmanageable. The feeling of community decreased, the administrative burden for results increased and the members of the inner core of the community were overloaded with requests and withdrew - this was the beginning of the dissolution of the community.*

Like in the example above, many CoP's have failed for such or similar reasons.

A study that examined 192 such communities from different sectors shows that they last longer and work more successfully if they are organised and led to some extent like a regular team.[33] This also requires some kind of organisation or background that can provide this leadership.

The study identified some core elements that are needed to sustain expert networks. Some of these are highlighted here:

- **Taking complexity into account**

  External factors such as globalisation and, above all, rapid technical development and digitalisation quickly make communities and the available data and resources very complex.

  To ensure that data and knowledge can be used and shared in a meaningful way, this complexity must be managed in good and functional structures, or the size of the community must be limited.

- **Planning and goal definition**

  The difference between regular teams and CoPs lies, among other things, in the longer-term goals of the community. In order to achieve these, it is necessary to focus on a specific area, and goals must be clearly defined. Requirements for the community should be communicated and meet a professional standard.

- **Training of community managers**

  The role of leaders in the community must be clear and strengthened. Both time resources for training and time resources for carrying out the tasks must be provided on the part of the supporting organisation.

- **Regular meetings – online and offline**

  Many communities work exclusively virtually and are successful with this. It is important for the meetings to be regular and to have a sense of commitment. Nevertheless, real exchange is important for the functionality of many communities, creates personal closeness and increases the degree of commitment.

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[33] Die Kraft informeller Netzwerke, Mc Dermott, Archiblad, Harvard Business manager 8/2010

5.6.   The Canvas Model

The Community Canvas model can help to build a community or to analyse and develop an existing community.

It considers basic community issues that are relevant, and that community management should address.

The model has three areas, which in turn are subdivided into 17 topics.
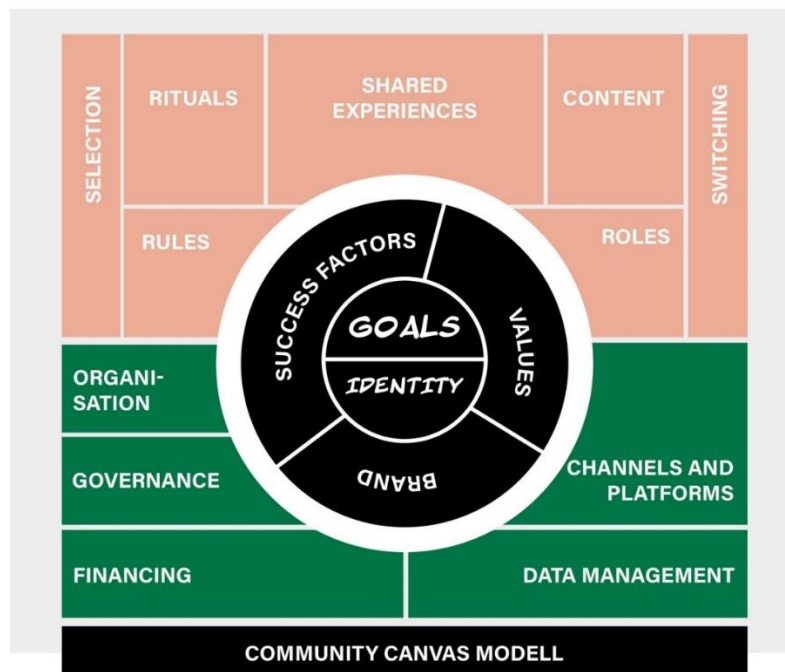
The innermost area is concerned with the community's identity. This is essential for the success of the community but also difficult to measure. Questions about WHY or HOW characterise this area. If a community succeeds in developing a strong identity and culture, this is a strong parameter for success.

Core issues are:

- **Goals** – why does the community exist?
- **Identity** – who is the community interesting for
- **Values** – what is important for the community
- **Success factors** – what does success mean for the community?
- **Brand** – is there a brand of the community and how is it expressed?

The upper section describes what happens within the community and how it develops added value for its members. What content is there, how do people contribute, what are the experiences of the members and what are the rules?

Key issues in this area are:

- **Selection** – how people can join a community?
- **Switching** – what is the exit process from the community?
- **Shared experiences** – what are the experiences that members share?
- **Content** – what is the content and how does it add value to members?
- **Roles and rules** – what roles can be taken and what are the community rules?
- **Rituals** – do they take place regularly and in which form?

The lower section focuses on the structure of the community and thus on the operational elements. Communities usually become more valuable the longer they exist. At the same time, only a few communities survive in the long term. Therefore, a constant preoccupation with structures is important for sustainable success.

Essential topics in this area are:

- **Organisation** – who is the operator of the community?
- **Financing** – how can financial sustainability be ensured?
- **Governance** – what are the decision-making channels and who is responsible for executing them?
- **Channels and platforms** – how do the community communicate; how does it meet and which monitoring tools are available?
- **Data management** – how can the community's data be managed in a meaningful way?

The Canvas model does not in itself solve any problems. No community can reduce financial difficulties or acquire more members with this model by itself.

However, community managers get a structured view of the important questions and can thus deal with them step by step, bringing together as many factors as possible for a successful community.

6. Online communities – structure and characteristics

A lot of what has already been mentioned in previous chapters also applies to purely online communities. Nevertheless, some special characteristics should be mentioned that are typical for communities that are exclusively virtually active.

6.1. Participation in online communities

The average participation and activity in online communities differs significantly from that of analogue or hybrid communities.

This is well illustrated by the so-called 90-9-1 rule described by Jacob Nielsen.[34]

He assumes that:

- 90% of the users of a community only watch and consume, but do not contribute anything
- 9% of the members show activity from time to time, but do not take the community very seriously
- 1% of the members are very engaged and contribute a lot to what is going on in the community

This very sobering rule quickly puts the incredibly large number of members in online communities into perspective. Looking at it more closely, often only a few participants are really active, while the majority make only a small contribution to the community due to their usage behaviour.

6.2. Roles in online communities

The roles in online communities are usually more differentiated due to the general conditions. The rights of each person must be formally defined in an online community so that the corresponding authorisations can be assigned in the community tool.

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[34] Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute, Jacob Nielsen, 2006

The following table gives an overview of the distribution of roles in online communities.[35] In practice, this is often differentiated in even more detail.

LEADER	ACTIVE	NOVICE
DESCRIPTION **Very active contributor,** strong personal network, opinion leadership, trend setter **CHARACTERISTICS** high degree/closeness/ betweenness centrality, short periods between logins	**DESCRIPTION** **"Heart" of the community,** information consumer and producer, active participation **CHARACTERISTICS** average degree centrality, average periods between logins	**DESCRIPTION** **Wants to get introduced** to people, rules and topics. **Mainly information consumer,** partly producer **CHARACTERISTICS** Short time since sign up
PASSIVE	**VISITOR**	**TROLL**
DESCRIPTION **Low level of activity,** friend of the community, **mainly information consumer** **CHARACTERISTICS** varying centralities (depending on previous roles), long periods between logins	**DESCRIPTION** **Interested in topics and/or members,** information consumer **CHARACTERISTICS** anonymous, did not sign up	**DESCRIPTION** **Wants to disturb the community,** very active in a short time period, **mainly information producer** **CHARACTERISTICS** high outdegree of relations, not many dyadic relations, activity peaks

As it becomes clear, the usual spectrum of roles is expanded here by an essential role that should not be underestimated – the role of the troll. In the broadest sense, a troll is a person who deliberately causes discord, disturbs or wants to annoy people on the net. For example, irrelevant or insulting messages in communities can indicate a troll.

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[35] A Community Membership Life Cycle Model, Andreas C. Sonnenbichler Information Services and Electronic Markets Institute of Information Systems and Management, https://arxiv.org/pdf/1006.4271.pdf

The definition is not clear, and it is difficult to draw a line between trolling and other anti-social behaviour on the net.[36]

6.3.   Management of online communities

When managing online communities, the same general recommendations apply as for all types of communities. In addition, some points that are frequently found in the literature are mentioned here.

Jacob Nielsen, founder of the 90-9-1 theory, makes the following recommendations to encourage participants to be more active:[37]

- Participation should be **as easy as possible**; it can be an advantage to also work with voting instead of just free text.
- **Editing** should be allowed; some members find it easier to adapt existing content than to create new content.
- **Reward systems**, if used judiciously, can sometimes be helpful.
- **High-quality contributions** should be brought to the front, e.g., via ratings or rankings.

In a virtual dialogue with the community, the following behaviours are beneficial for active and high-quality communication:

- **Ongoing monitoring**:
  Online communities are dynamic and very fast-moving; monitoring (possibly supported by an adequate tool) is necessary. Only then disputes can be settled quickly and discussions can be moderated.

- **Short reaction times**
  Members of virtual networks and communities are often impatient and expect a quick response. Users on Twitter, for example, expect feedback within an hour.

- **Use of community management tools**
  Keeping track of interactions is a big challenge, a tool that allows structured work makes management easier. Examples of such tools are Facelift Cloud, Hootsuite or SocialHub.

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[36] Trolling in online communities: A practice-based theoretical perspective, Angela Cruz, Yuri Seo, 2018, The Information Society
[37] Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute, Jacob Nielsen, 2006

- **Setting rules with netiquette**

  Respectful interaction is essential, incidents such as discrimination or abuse must not be tolerated. Rules in an online community are defined in the so-called "netiquette".

A major challenge in online communities is dealing with anonymity. Each community must decide for itself how to deal with this and to which extent anonymous users are tolerated at all.

Similarly, there are competing needs for security on the one hand and functionality on the other. Weighing this up also varies from community to community – but it is important that community management deals with these questions.

7. Communities in the context of school

Teachers and school systems are facing immense challenges due to the digital transformation, the ever-widening education gap and the change in social context and expectations on teachers.

At the same time, the work of teachers today is crucial for the future of tomorrow.

In the last chapters, these circumstances have been referred to several times and in detail.

Therefore, at this point we will look at **how the concept of communities, with all its challenges, but especially with its opportunities, can be integrated in the school environment.**

The goal is a sustained success and continuous development of the communities with positive effects on teachers, students and the school system itself.

Studies show that the level of didactic cooperation in each element is important for the quality of teaching.

The possibilities for improving the quality of teaching, which are linked to didactic cooperation, are not yet fully exploited. It is necessary to develop concepts that allow to better exploit the values of this non-economic factor.[38]

Even within the best of circumstances, developing a successful teacher community is difficult and requires a thorough and continually evolving organisational and leadership strategy. It must be emphasised that:

- a **basic structure** must be in place to facilitate the emergence of a community.
- **continuity and commitment** are critical to the growth and persistence of the community.

7.1. Bureaucracy and inert systems – challenges in the setting of schools

The educational mission is considered as one of the most important social responsibilities with a huge target group.

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[38] Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century, Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar Wioleta Danilewicz Gracienne Lauwers, Verlag Barbara Budrich Opladen, Berlin & Toronto 2019, S 314

In industrialised countries, the school system has more members than any other institution - especially if you add to the school system not only the teaching and administrative staff, but also the many students who spend an average of a decade in this institution.

An educational scientist writes about this very appropriately:

The school system is the relatively largest, most complicated organisation with the most qualified personnel.[39]

Schools are therefore not comparable with other organisations.

Since most schools are centrally organised, the "school system" is often seen as a unit and discussed as a whole system. Although public schools are to be considered separately, they are nevertheless very much integrated into the system and have to fulfil numerous requirements, so this circumstance will not be differentiated in more detail here.

This school system has to deal with three prejudices in particular, which in simple terms are: Too sluggish, too bureaucratic, too little pedagogical quality time.

If one considers the enormous difficulties associated with educational reforms in many European countries and how many attempts it takes to implement even the beginnings of a reform, this prejudice may seem logical at first glance.

The mindset of excessive bureaucracy and little time is also shared by many.

Innovation research in schools emphasises the following points of view:

- Schools do not simply adopt prepared concepts and approaches, but rather try to adapt solutions for their own school situation and adapt them to the specific conditions. This requires knowledge about local conditions and an adapted strategy.
- If innovations are to be implemented "from above" and technocratically, this often creates resistance because schools have their own development dynamics and often understand innovation on the basis differently.
- The conditions at schools are very diverse, which is why standardised models often fail.
- Motivating stakeholders in practice and creating a willingness to engage in innovation is considered to be a key factor for successful innovation implementation.[40]

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[39] Innovation in Schulen, Identifizierung implementationsfördernder und hemmender Bedingungen des Einsatzes neuer Medien, Waxmann Verlag Heike Hunneshagen, 2005

[40] Innovationen im Bildungswesen: Analytische Zugänge und empirische Befunde, Matthias Rürup, Inka Bormann, Springer Verlag 2013

These points of view show that although schools are embedded in an overall concept, they perceive themselves as **individual organisations with very specific framework conditions**. This is even more relevant when research surveys among teachers and school headmasters are put into relation to this.

For example, the very extensive Forsa survey of the VBE (Association for Education and Training in Germany)[41], which can be understood as a good example of the mood in Central Europe, has some shocking survey results.

According to the survey, 90% of school headmasters complain about increased expectations and too many administrative tasks. Furthermore, there is too little time for the actual pedagogical work and too much effort for special support, which is a reason why the call for support from social workers, psychologists or youth workers is growing.

7.2. Impact of the community on pedagogical practices

Schools – as already explained – are not like other organisations. In education, learning is not a means to an end, but rather the final product, so to say.

Changing learning and learning theories means profound transformation. This is a process that will take time.[42]

Communities influence educational practice in three dimensions:

- **Extending the teachers' personal knowledge and wealth of experience**
  Through the community, experience and knowledge is exchanged. This can concern completely different subject areas and range from specialised knowledge to practical tips and tricks for dealing with certain problems.
  This point is solely about the competence of the teacher per se.

- **Integration of acquired practices and knowledge into the classroom**
  Even if teachers are involved in the community, this does not mean that the teaching system will change or that they will implement acquired knowledge in the classroom. Some

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[41] https://www.vbe.de/service/meinungsumfragen
[42] Communities of practice a brief introduction, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf

studies from practice show that teachers in communities are definitely committed and innovation-oriented, but continue to teach in the classroom as usual.[43]

A real added value of the community only arises when the acquired knowledge and the shared experiences also have effects on the quality of teaching.

- **Further development of the learning environment**

  Communities are a good basis for innovation and creativity. Especially in the school sector, where young people are prepared for the living and working world of tomorrow, it therefore makes sense for experts working on the front lines to deal with visions of the future.

In this context, the future is much closer than it often appears from the curricula. Due to a sluggish, bureaucratic system, requirements of the time usually only experience delayed integration into the curricula.

For example, the Pisa Study 2021[44] showed that many children and young people are unable to distinguish facts from opinions and falsehoods when reading.

All the more important would be an innovative approach in which teachers exchange ideas and promote further development in the sense of sustainable further development of schools, learning and teaching methods as well as the priorities to be set.

Educational researchers explain the effects of cooperation in schools from different perspectives. Many point out that cooperation can have very positive effects, but that the expectations are sometimes oversized.[45]

- Mentioned advantages of cooperation among teachers are:
- Improvements in the performance of pupils
- Increased collegiality and breaking up of teacher isolation
- Avoiding burn-out and increasing motivation
- Stimulating new ideas, promoting cohesion

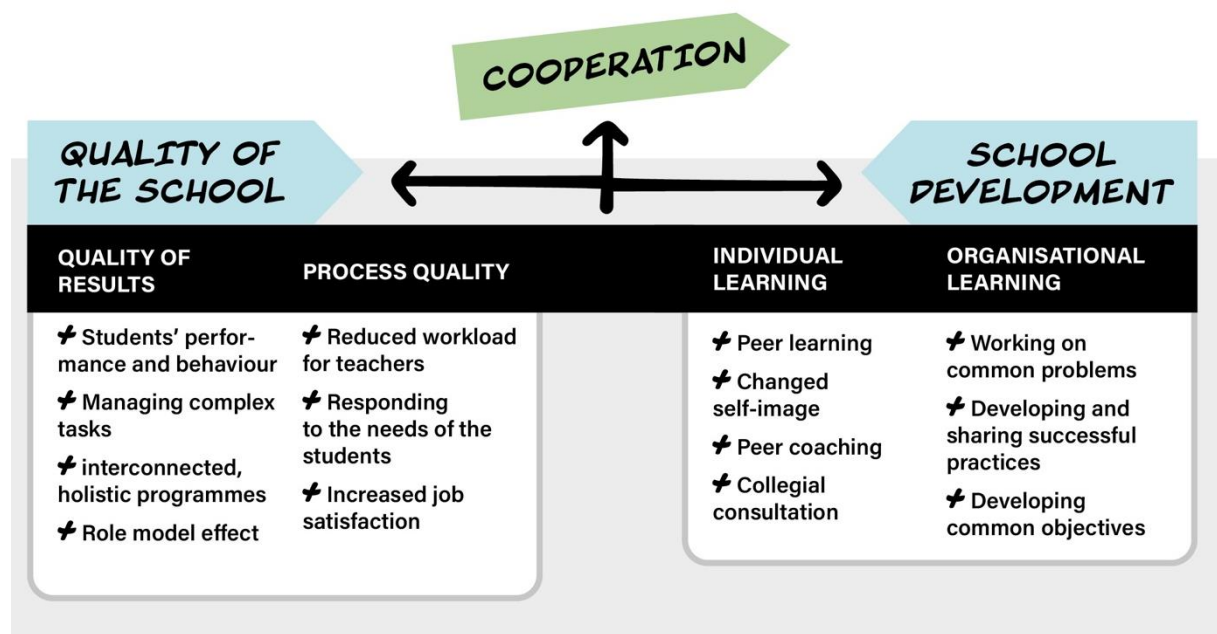[43] Parry Graham (2007) Improving Teacher Effectiveness through Structured Collaboration: A Case Study of a Professional Learning Community, RMLE Online, 31:1, 1-17,

[44] OECD (2021), 21st-Century Readers: Developing Literacy Skills in a Digital World, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a83d84cb-en.

[45] „Für mich persönlich hat sich wahnsinnig viel geändert" Untersuchungen zur Kooperation in Schulen, Frederick Ahlgrimm, 2010, S 42

- Exploiting teachers' resources[46]

- Generating moral support

- Eliminating redundancy and increasing efficiency

- Improving effectiveness

- Encouraging reflection and helping teachers to rethink their own teaching practices

- Promoting further development of teachers[47]

Cooperation becomes visible on several levels. When teachers work together, this has an impact on the quality in schools and influences the development of the whole organisation in terms of individual and organisational learning.

An overview of the effects is shown in the following graphic:

COOPERATION

QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL		SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT	
QUALITY OF RESULTS	**PROCESS QUALITY**	**INDIVIDUAL LEARNING**	**ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING**
✦ Students' performance and behaviour ✦ Managing complex tasks ✦ interconnected, holistic programmes ✦ Role model effect	✦ Reduced workload for teachers ✦ Responding to the needs of the students ✦ Increased job satisfaction	✦ Peer learning ✦ Changed self-image ✦ Peer coaching ✦ Collegial consultation	✦ Working on common problems ✦ Developing and sharing successful practices ✦ Developing common objectives

Figure[48]

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[46] Inger, M.(1993).Teacherm Collaboration in Secondary Schools. centerfocus 2. National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California at Berkeley 1–4., S 1

[47] Stegmann, S. (2008). Einzelkämpfer oder Teamplayer? Soziale Arbeitsbedingungen an Schulen. In A. Krause, H. Schüpbach, E. Ulich & M. Wülser (Hrsg.), Arbeitsort Schule. Wiesbaden: Gabler, S. 365–386.

[48] Für mich persönlich hat sich wahnsinnig viel geändert" Untersuchungen zur Kooperation in Schulen, Frederick Ahlgrimm, 2010

Quality of the school

Cooperation results in increased efficiency and pooling of competences and resources. For example, work motivation and job satisfaction can be increased, and expertise can be enhanced through cooperation. Cooperation also has advantages for complex or dynamic tasks or when social support is needed.

On the other hand, there are additional time requirements, possible conflicts within the group or possible isolation from non-members of the community.

Quality of results

It is difficult to prove a direct correlation between teacher collaboration and student performance. There are different studies with divergent research results.[49]

For example, the following parameters of collaboration can contribute to improved student learning:

- **Promotion of networking and coordination of rules** – through cooperation, teaching concepts become more coherent, topics can be dealt with more comprehensively and students are exposed to standardised rules.
- **Richer offerings** – through cooperation, more complex projects such as performances or activities become possible.
- **Improved diagnostics** – if pupils have special needs or special circumstances, this can be better diagnosed if different teachers work together.

These are only a few examples of the possible effects. Ultimately, cooperation leads to a better educational programme from which the pupils can benefit.

Process quality

Collaboration changes working processes. The positive influence of "social relief" on the teachers seems to be particularly significant. Cooperative work can also be stressful, but in many cases the teachers feel that they are benefiting from it. The confirmation on a personal and professional level is an essential supporting element and the exchange can influence the processes of one's own work.

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[49] Vescio, V., Ross, D. & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning on teaching practice and student learning. Teaching and Teacher Education, 24(1), 80–91.

School development

The quality and intensity of cooperation also influence the development of the organisation - in this case the development of the school. In many studies (Söll, 2002 or Heinrich 2007 and 2009) the isolation of teachers is described as an obstacle. Cooperation, on the other hand, can positively influence processes and routines by reflecting, experimenting, learning from each other and interacting. Thus, development actions for schools can emerge from internal impulses, which then benefit from broad support in implementation.

7.3. Community building in the context of schools

Promoting collaboration among teachers has been an element of many initiatives for some time now.

If this collaboration should be promoted by building a community, there are **different organisational models** for this. Examples of such models are:

1) **Interdisciplinary teams at a school** – teachers have the same pupils. This mainly involves student-related meetings, team activities, meetings with parents or cross-curricular activities.

2) **Critical Friends Groups** – this is a group of 5–12 teachers who meet at least once a month to share professional issues. The focus is on student performance, primarily in interdisciplinary testing.

3) **Communities of Practice** – this community model has already been covered. Experts work across communities to exchange ideas, learn from each other and develop innovations.

Depending on the community model, they may also have different focuses. For example, some communities may promote the learning of teachers, others address context-specific problems, or they promote collegiality and reduce isolation.[50]

The steps that have been worked out for community building in general can also be applied to teacher communities. Nevertheless, some particularly important parameters should be highlighted here and explained in the context of schools.

- An important first point in community building for teachers is therefore the development of a clear **vision** supported by several people. On the one hand, the main initiators or

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[50] Building Teacher Collaboration School-wide, Micki M. Caskey, Jan Carpenter, AMLE Magazine 2014

promoters (RLC facilitators) **must agree with the vision** and, on the other hand, they must **take responsibility for shaping it.**

•   **Concrete, measurable goals** and a strong connection between the vision and the goals have a meaningful effect and thus promote commitment.

•   Developing a **community feeling** and a connection on a personal level is essential. Through shared values, mutual respect and accepted responsibilities, trust and a relationship develop between group members. Celebrating successes or establishing traditions also strengthens the bond.

•   School headmasters should promote a **culture of collaboration** - and allocate **time resources** to it. Successful communities thrive on continuous contributions and longer-term collaboration. This is only possible and can only have a relieving effect if the organisation is willing to support it in the first step.

To summarise for community building in the school context:

1)   The organisational form and purpose of the community must be clearly defined.

2)   A vision and measurable goals must exist and provide added value that can be easily communicated to the target group.

3)   The development of a feeling of community is important for sustainable success.

4)   Managers must support the concept and also provide time resources.

7.4. Community management in the context of schools

The general requirements for community management also apply to the management of communities in the context of schools. Therefore, only those points which differ from general community management, or which should be particularly emphasised will be dealt with in this section.

7.4.1. Technology

In modern community management, the use of technologies plays a major role. These are increasingly used in a differentiated way and are not in the focus but are a tool for efficient communication and sharing of common or shared resources.

In the context of schools, the following challenges have to be managed:

- Different levels of **digital knowledge** – there are very different levels of knowledge of digital tools among teachers.
- Different levels of **acceptance of digital tools** – the willingness to engage with digital tools or to see them as helpful is also very different. Discussions about which tools provide appropriate added value are to be expected.
- Existing **regionally established learning management systems** should be included in the considerations.

7.4.2. Overcoming discrepancies

In the Global State of Digital Learning study, more than 30% of teachers and nearly 50% of headmasters said that teacher collaboration is a high priority for them. At the same time, however, around 30% of the headmasters surveyed believe that persuading teachers to collaborate is one of the biggest challenges.

Therefore, the question arises as to where this discrepancy stems from and how it can be broken down or which obstacles to collaboration may exist.[51]

The discrepancy within the teaching community must also be taken into account. There are completely different approaches and philosophies. A spirit of mutual acceptance, respect and awareness that a community benefits from a certain degree of diversity are helpful.

The various effects of cooperation on human behaviour must also be considered.

The following have a demotivating effect:

- Social loafing – when people make less effort because they are no longer working alone.
- Free riding – when group members reduce their own efforts at the expense of others.
- Sucker effect – when members of the group reduce their own contributions because they do not want to feel exploited.

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[51] Teacher Collaboration: How to Approach It In 2020, Lauren Davis, schoology Exchange

On the other hand, motivating effects can be mentioned as:

- Social compensation – when stronger members of the group compensate for the performance of weaker ones.
- Social competition – when the comparison with other community members acts as an incentive.
- Köhler effect – when weaker members try to improve their own performance in order to not let the whole group fail.[52]

7.4.3. Networking paths – between clear arrangements and over-regulation

It is also important to consider along which paths teachers should network with each other. The following distinctions give examples of possible paths:

- **Depending on the subject / subject area** (e.g. mathematics, languages, natural sciences, etc.).
- **Depending on the type of school** (e.g. primary schools, middle schools, secondary schools, vocational schools)
- **Depending on the region** (e.g. in the immediate vicinity for analogue exchanges)
- **Depending on the main focus** of the difficulty (e.g. rural area, high percentage of migration, structurally weak area)
- **Across schools according to thematic focus** (e.g. challenge of digitalisation in teaching, future visions of teaching)

Community management should find a suitable way so that the community can act in a meaningful way.

Clarity is important - but over-regulation does not make sense. Community members must have the possibility to choose why and with which colleagues they want to interact.

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[52] Für mich persönlich hat sich wahnsinnig viel geändert" Untersuchungen zur Kooperation in Schulen, Frederick Ahlgrimm, 2010, S 46–47

At first it may seem questionable what an upper secondary school mathematics teacher has in common with a primary school mathematics teacher, but on closer inspection it is nevertheless quite a lot. For example, important feedback can be given regarding basic knowledge and an exchange on how to create a good basis for further mathematical knowledge or how to reduce inhibitions regarding this subject is certainly relevant for both sides.

Therefore, it is a challenge to provide possibilities for "filtering" within the community - but on the other hand not to "overregulate" the communication channels.

7.4.4. Confidence and Safety

Interaction within communities requires a certain level of trust on the side of the community members.

Trust is necessary on several levels:

- **Trust on a personal level** – e.g. will I be attacked for my opinion on a particular issue? Can I rely on being treated with respect by community members?
- **Trust on a professional level** – e.g. will I find high-quality professional input here? Are the documents shared with me up to date?
- **Trust in the infrastructure** – e.g. are the files really accessible only to the community? Are communication channels secure or will my comments become public somewhere?
- **Trust in the additional value of participation** – e.g. will the time I invest pay off? Will I receive enough interesting information and have exciting conversations?

Community management **must build trust at all levels**. This is achieved through clear rules within the community, through communication of general conditions, but above all through continuous development work and moderation. Criticism or fears must be taken seriously.

Crises, leaks or points of contention must also be tackled proactively by the community management.

However, it is important to ensure the **constructive participation of community members**. If there are so-called "troublemakers" who are not interested in constructive dialogue, an endless argument would be more demoralising and disruptive for the community.

Conclusion

The challenges for teachers are as high as the profession is important. A successful tomorrow requires the best teachers today, who are committed to preparing young people for a dynamic and uncertain future.

In reality, however, teachers are heavily stressed, often isolated and suffer from time pressure and ever-increasing demands. A significant contribution to these increased demands is made by the advancing digitalisation, the change to a knowledge society and also the Covid crisis as a driver of digitalisation and amplifier of the educational gap between the different student groups.

A network of teachers can bring relief and the project consortium of Regional Learning Communities sees enormous potentials how the European education area can benefit in the area of schools through cooperation and networking.

Cooperation has a positive influence on several levels. The teachers themselves expand their competence and wealth of experience and can gain relief and motivation from the community. The acquired practices and knowledge can enrich their own teaching and thus raise the quality of teaching. In addition, innovations and creative solutions can emerge and thus further develop the learning world itself and provide important impulses from the bottom up, which are then already supported in their implementation by the basis.

For the establishment of communities, the frame conditions of schools as very special organisations must be taken into account.

The education expert Dagmar Killius states:

Successful networking requires common goals, good relationships, productive forms of communication and cooperation, a school leadership with vision and the willingness to reflect on one's own practices and to learn.

In order to establish a strong and effective community in the school sector, the general basic rules of successful community building, and community management must be considered.

In addition, the special framework conditions in schools must be taken into account and included in the considerations.

The most important points are summarised again here:

- **Sustainable commitment and a minimum of formal structures** are absolutely necessary to fill the community with life in the long term. Therefore, there is a need for people who take care of the development and ongoing support of the community and who do not act decisively but in a guiding role.
- The community needs a **clear vision and a strategy** that is not only supported by many potential community members, but also shared out of conviction.
- The community must take into account the **complexity** and the big differences between the schools.
- The desire for exchange, learning from each other and innovation development must come from the educators themselves and not be "imposed".
- **Communication about the purpose** of the community is crucial. Educators will only invest resources if they recognise the added value that is important to them personally.
- **Building trust** is the key to successful community management. Community members need to trust in the infrastructure and integrity of the community, but most importantly they need to recognise the added value of the community on a personal and professional level. A set of rules and ongoing monitoring are important components of building trust.

It becomes clear that a strong community will only emerge if it is given the importance it deserves.

This includes supporting the community with formal structures, ongoing and consistent management of the community by trained and committed people, and acceptance and promotion of the community by the school administration.

The Project

Our project vision is to create vibrant local, regional and European learning communities, fueled by Regional Learning Facilitators. We need new organizational concepts and ownership of issues and concerns from the crowd. Our approach lies in analogue and digital networking and support structures that take into account the value of informal networks. The key message of the project is:

"When we share, we win"

Results

1	**2**	**3**	**4**
REPORT AND POLICY PAPER on the future vision on European cooperation in school education	An INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM for learning community facilitators	LEARNING MATERIALS for learning community facilitators	A UNIQUE MATCHING and COLLABORATION PLATFORM for regional learning peers

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