Agile/collaboration/community-of-practice

< Agile

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A Short Guide to Communities of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is meant to be a safe and collaborative space where people interested in the topic area are invited in to improve the practice area.

Definitions

Safe

Safe, meaning respectful and no blame space where ideas and questions can be aired without concerns or fear.

Collaborative

All those who attend own the agendas, the outcomes, the running of the meetings, facilitation, creating a backlog, and doing the work.

Space

A place where people can gather. A space can be a room, a table in a cafeteria, a conference call, a video, etc.

Invited

People are invited into the space. There is no requirement to attend. Whoever shows up are the right people with whatever energy they bring to contribute. The invite is open to anyone interested in the topic area and is generally not restricted to "select" people. The people that come do not need to be practicing or knowledgeable about the topic.

There may be occasion for certain topics the the attendance must be restricted. For example if a set of managers needed a safe space to talk about sensitive issues (such a reviews or compensation) then perhaps the attendance to the CoP meeting would be restricted. Restricted attendance should be the exception and not the rule.

Improve the practice area

A Community of Practice is themed around a topic area. People who attend have interest/passion to improve the organization understanding and use of that practice. Many CoPs will have a charter that states their purpose and intended goals. A charter can help keep a CoP focused on the topic area.

Example Communities of Practice

- Leadership in Agile CoP
- ScrumMaster CoP
- Technology CoP

Running a Community of Practice

There should be an agenda. It could be a status update on work that people are doing in the area. It could be a deep dive into a topic the CoP members have decided is important to them.

A regular schedule may prove useful. Having a cadence to focus on the topic area can help keep the focus on the topic area. However, some topics don't have the inertia to keep a regular schedule. That's OK.

Having a backlog of topics is an idea that may help keeping the CoP active.

Example Topic Themes

- Talk about how we can improve collaboration
- Work together to improve upon an organizational impediment. Since attendees of a CoP most often come from multiple parts of the organization the ability to influence across a wider part of the organization exists. Working together on an organizational impediment has the ability to bring together parts of the organization that often work in silos.
- Discuss something published such as a book, blog, or article. Talk about what is liked or disliked about the article. Determine if there are practices or ideas that could be tried in the organization.
- Show some work in progress. A presentation, a document, a system, etc.
- Share practices that work for you team. Avoid "best practices" thinking. Think practices that are best for me or my context.

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