



Community: The Organizational Game Changer

 SNAPSHOT
SPEAKERS Céline Schillinger, of Sanofi Pasteur and Change Agents Worldwide LLC, Kelly Schott (TheCR)
COMPETENCIES Culture
MATURITY PHASES CMM4

TAKE AWAYS

1. **Want to know why community programs are not reaching their full potential?** Céline shared 2 possible reasons.
2. **Interested in moving away from leadership focus on ROI questions?** Céline shared what she believes to be the type of community that will help shift that mindset.
3. **Looking for ways to use community to overcome traditional organizational challenges?** Céline shared 5 ways that offer insights into overcoming these obstacles.

OVERVIEW

- **Background – Céline Schillinger.** Céline has worked for Sanofi for 17 years in the vaccine production division. She is has been based in Boston for the last 4 years.
 - Céline’s current role is Head of Innovation and Engagement for Quality.
 - She has worked with various communities over the past 8 years. One community was self-started by internal employees and created for the purpose of diversity. Another experience was an external stakeholder activist community that supported the launch of a product. Currently, she is working with a quality improvement internal community.
 - Céline has learned a great deal from working with communities, most notably that the best way to learn is from other like-minded people and other professions.
- **The State of Community Management (SOCM) Report 2018.** Céline stated that there were a few things that jumped out at her from this year’s Report:

OVERVIEW, CONT.

- The first 2018 SOCM finding: **“Communities are change agents.** *Community programs impact multiple functions, stakeholders and departments in organizations. They have immense potential to be agents of change by efficiently dispersing knowledge and information across organizations and their markets.*” Céline shared her thoughts on this finding.
 - We all want to see ourselves as change agents. However, Céline’s question is whether or not we are really making any significant changes due to a disconnect in self-awareness.
 - In reference to communities dispersing knowledge, Céline believes that to be true. However, she’s not sure communities operate as valued partners because in order to do that, the decision-making power needs to be truly shared.
- Another finding within the Report is **“Community teams are underfunded.”** If a community is created and then undermined through lack of funding, then the community will not come from a position of power and, in turn, will not affect too much change in the organization. Consequently, the traditional, hierarchical, top-down, siloed decision-making practices are permitted to remain.
- **“How the Organization Subverts its Subversives.”** This Report was written by John Atkinson, a colleague of Céline’s. It discusses how an organization digests change in order to stay the same.
 - In this article, there are a few interesting sentences, such as *“They speak about the actions being copied without understanding what makes them work.”* Or *“The language is copied without an essential tone.”* That means that in some organizations, they try to pretend to operate as a community, but the reality is completely different. For instance, there are real communities – like networked, co-created communities – and then there are those communities enforced and/or created by the employee’s boss. In the latter, participation is linked to employee performance. The traditional mechanism of control, power, decision making, etc. is weaved into this sort of fake community. Céline believes that this is a very important point to understand.
- **“Community programs are not reaching their full potential to impact strategic goals and transformation due to a lack of resources from the executive level.”** This Report finding got Céline thinking about how community programs and community leaders can reach their full potential and have a positive impact on strategy goals and transformation. As community leaders, we need to understand what’s standing in front of us. We need to draw upon our unique advantages in order to have a bigger impact.

OVERVIEW, CONT.

- Communities that don't matter don't exist. Communities gather people through an internalized "why." They want to do something together. What members have in common – a commonality that is not imposed by organizational design or by a boss – is that members have joined a community because of something that has appealed to them.
 - The "what" also has the potential to be a profound game changer because communities tend to work on those areas in which the organization does not generally perform well. For example, relational topics or transversal topics or engagement. Communities offer a viable model through value-creation that replaces or at least compliments the traditional hierarchy, which is no longer fit for the challenges of innovation, improvement, speed, etc. It's not easy because working in a community model requires a new form of leadership, a leadership style for which traditional leaders are not always comfortable. This is important for community leaders to understand in order to overcome it.
- **Céline's community as a case study reference point.** Céline's community was created 4 years ago and is very consistent with the findings in the SOCM 2018 Report.
- It impacts all aspects of the organization, as is written in the SOCM Report.
 - It supports cross-functional integration.
 - It has become a key enabler of the organization.
 - Community is a very strong pillar in the strategy. It impacts all parts of the business. It's not specific to one area or function.
 - It absolutely delivers value to the business.
 - Yammer has been a critical component in the success of the community.
 - They have multiple quality indicators that have made improvements that were otherwise flat.
 - Most importantly, the community has a roadmap and a purpose. It is connected to a pressing business problem. The Report states that 70% of communities surveyed don't have a business problem defining their strategy. Community professionals can't expect to be taken seriously as a business partner if they can't connect to a clear business problem. Communities absolutely need a clear purpose and clear business problem to solve.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Consider the advantages of an activist community.** A purely technical or SME community lacks transformational power. They do a great job and are very useful, but they will change very little or nothing at all. It's not enough to just change information flows. You will still be subject to the same old decision mechanisms and mindset. It's because of this mindset that there is such ROI pressure. To move away from the ROI type questions, we need to change the way leadership thinks. It goes back to the question of change agents for "what"? The hope is to be a change agent for the system. An activist community might be the right avenue.
- **Understand the value of corporate activism to help overcome traditional challenges.** There are many challenges that organizations are not well-equipped for with traditional operations:
 - **Diversity and Unity.** Activism grows through diversity. Usually organizations try to align people, but to align means to put them into boxes. Communities offer a different model where people are connected and yet, because they believe in the same thing, their differences are not suppressed. Communities offer the possibility to co-create and generate value through diversity.
 - **Agency and Action.** Activism *propels* people, organizations and ecosystems into motion. Organizations tend to overwork their staff, causing burnout. Communities gather people who are passionate and who are not willing to let businesses win over them. They win over business because they are driven. Community members have a sense of agency and action. They propel.
 - **Emotion and Empathy.** Activism stems from emotion. Emotion helps to *move* goals forward. It creates space for ownership by people contrary to traditional organizational work.
 - **Outreach and Diffusion.** Activism *spreads* organically from peer-to-peer. Traditional organizations spread information through heavy, costly, slow communication processes and mechanisms. It doesn't reach everybody. Very often executives believe that once they've said something, everybody in the organization is aware of it and will execute it. It's far from reality. However, communities have a viral effect. People are interested and join of their own volition. The outreach and diffusion of information is much stronger and faster, especially since collaborative tools are used and, therefore, don't address a passive audience. It encourages interaction and that's how the spread of knowledge is improved.
 - **Value and Impact.** Communities *engage* change. Activism engages through role-modeling. People take a stand for something and act. Role-modeling definitely makes engagement more sustainable than a leadership title, for example.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Rachel asked participants if they thought they had a community that changes mindsets.
 - One participant felt that it was a difficult balance between communities that are empowered and are making change and getting support from the company for the community. Céline believes that asking for support reproduces a behavior that should be minimized. Extending an invitation to create comes from a more powerful stance. Since leadership will be co-owners of the community, they will not see it as foreign or different anymore.
 - Rachel added an additional perspective from her experience. She doesn't believe that there is an answer to this question right now because executives are highly stressed. They are pushed to produce results and their patience for the long-term view will be low. This, along with inherent control issues, makes them quick to look for solutions vs. slowing down. Instead, they are more likely to revert to their old style of leadership.
- One participant shared that she is using a WordPress plate to figure out community engagement, but is struggling to connect that with leadership. Céline suggested taking a step back to figure out what the community is fighting for and how that can help to solve executive problems. Align the community service to fix those problems. Relate community activity to a tangible business problem.
 - Rachel countered that she shies away from the deep conversations around meaning because it's hard to get executives to step back. If they do have this conversation, executives need to know that it will not always solve a problem, but will still be an extremely meaningful conversation.
 - Hillary added that larger organizations are told they have to work faster to keep up, but these organizations are innately slow-moving. A huge community benefit is the ability to help processes move faster. The part to help them understand is that it's necessary to slow down at the beginning to make it work. This is the very reason that Rachel uses her Trojan horse strategy. She never goes into this type of conversation with the end game.
 - Céline also believes that there is an engagement benefit to slowing down. It's imperative to engage people in the design stage vs. the implementation process, which is too late. Again, as she stated earlier, create ownership.
- Hillary referenced a previous change management call in which community managers were asked about how they dealt with change. There were a number of surprising answers pointing to the fact that everyone handles change differently. The lesson learned is that when facilitating change, take time to focus on self-awareness. It helps cultivate compassion and helps add a dose of reality to the conversation because change is hard for most people.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- Kelly asked participants to share whether or not they have seen community empower their members. If yes, what have they noticed and if not, their thoughts on why it didn't.
 - Five people replied that they have seen their community empower members in the following ways:
 - Have gone from being reporters in the employee communication department to curators. Members have become very confident about sharing their stories and opinions.
 - One member shared that another member was recognized for her work in water engineering expertise, which led to opportunities to work on projects in Australia.
 - Another member shared that her community has enabled and empowered many associates and consulting staff to build their network and surface their expertise to a larger network. As a result, they get staffed for client work and/or making other contributions in a meaningful and impactful way to the business.
 - Hillary added that a member caught an executive's attention in a discussion about strategy. She landed herself a meeting with that executive to explain the value that the community program was bringing to the organization.
 - Another member noted that she has seen the community empower users to share their feelings and their feedback more publicly. The community has definitely made the organization more transparent.
 - Others who replied are in the middle of an Intranet overhaul and/or just getting started on helping their community to empower their members.

RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the discussion: <https://www.heartoftheheart.org/?p=6233>
- As mentioned in the discussion: Transition Model by William Bridges - <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/bridges-transition-model.htm>