




The Inextricable Link Between Communities and Learning

TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

The highlights of the discussion are noted below:

1. You must introduce learning and change slowly. It is vitally important that community managers do not get too far ahead of the organization, especially since many organizations are still in Stage 1 of TheCR’s Community Maturity Model (CMM). It is far better to slowly create success that guides the organization towards the model without making it all about the strategy or the structure around it. In other words, do not shut it down before it has a chance to succeed.
2. The behaviors of authenticity, transparency and having a coaching/mentoring mindset would serve a leader well as he/she tried to make the leap to the networked environment.
3. The learning journey requires an inquisitive approach. In other words, to ask a question that would help the individual define what it is that they want to learn.

 SNAPSHOT
<p>SPEAKERS Jeff Merrell & Keeley Sorokti (Northwestern MSLOC)</p>
<p>COMPETENCIES Community Management, Strategy, Culture</p>
<p>MATURITY PHASES CMM1, CMM2, CMM3, CMM4</p>

OVERVIEW

Background - Jeff and Keeley

Jeff and Keeley shared their backgrounds to start the call:

Jeff Merrell: Jeff is the Associate Director for the Masters Program in Learning and Organizational Change. The program consists of a community of learners who are eager to experiment with enterprise social networking and social media.

Keeley Sorokti: Keeley is the Assistant Director of the above program. She runs the online learning community, which is powered by Jive software. She also manages their social media.

- Keeley is an alumna of the program.
- Keeley gave an overview of the new Learning and Change Group within TheCR. Its goal is to help TheCR members become better change leaders and learning innovators as they navigate the complexities of creating networked communities. The most difficult challenge in building a community is the people side vs. the technical side. Fortunately, the people side is the expertise that Jeff and Keeley can lend to this group.
- The group is in its early stages. This was the first live call with members and guests. Keeley encouraged members to join the group if they had not done so already.

TheCR's Community Maturity Model

The discussion was grounded in TheCR's Community Maturity Model and framed through the lens of learning and change.

The purpose of the call was to discuss how to superimpose change and learning over the CMM and the changes that need to occur for individuals and organizations to move from a hierarchical model to more of a networked model, whether that be organizationally or in the community. It made an assumption that organizations had the goal to move from one stage to the next stage within the CMM.

OVERVIEW

Work-Related and Learning-Related Activities that Affect Change and Learning

Keeley stressed that at the MSLOC, training is not even in their vocabulary. In fact, they actually think of learning as tied to change in that people learn better when they actually perform what it is that they are trying to learn.

Therefore, their strategy for helping community leaders learn to get ahead of the organization is not by earning a certificate. Instead, they believe true learning and change will be achieved by working with the organization, listening to people and making mistakes.

In thinking about how that plays out when an organization does have the network toolset in place, the challenge is how to focus on some of the activities that might help the stakeholders, leaders, middle managers and practitioners learn how to operate effectively in a networked environment. That means taking a step back to understand those elements that are work-related and those that are related to learning. Work-related activities have a work-related outcome, such as crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing is associated with leveraging the many minds of the crowd to solve a business problem. It is associated more with work than pure learning, although Keeley would make the argument that the organization is learning by doing. They are learning how to operate in a networked environment with all sorts of positive residual learning. The learning side could be things like communities of inquiry and massive open online courses that could be deployed within an organization along this path.

OVERVIEW

Innovations Enabled by Networks

As a further breakdown to the above, Keeley shared that they divide learning and change activities into the following seven innovations enabled by networks:

1. **Communities of Practice:** Keeley places the communities of practice on the work side, even though they started out as recognition that all learning is social. Communities of practice are a way for people in a single area of a work function to learn from each other and develop the practice. Idea management, open design and crowdsourcing all have similarities.
2. **Idea Management/Open Design:** OpenIDEO is a great example of open design. They publically set out social challenges for the public to solve. They use the crowd to walk through their design process to create prototypes. It is a great case study for how to use the crowd with an overlay of the design process to move towards a real outcome.
3. **Crowdsourcing:** As described above, this is another tactic with a work-related outcome.
4. **Working Out Loud:** This consists of making the work visible in the network to seek feedback for changes that could help the job be more effective and productive.
5. **Communities of Inquiry:** These are very similar to communities of practices, but it emerges from the higher education world. It is focused on formal online courses that seek to create courses that are highly collaborative, that solve a problem and use the tools available online to solve that problem. The one difference between communities of inquiry and communities of practice is that a community of inquiry has a teaching presence, i.e. an expert or facilitator.
6. **Networked Learning/MOOCs:** Massive, open, online courses (MOOC) fall under this category. They began outside of organizations and come in many different models. It consists of tens of thousands of people taking a course at the same time. There are designed insights for scaling a course through a really large group of people using Web-type tools in order to facilitate that course.
7. **Personal Learning Networks:** This is relatively new, but consists of an individual creating their own network of people to learn from, such as Twitter. It involves using the tool to build a personal learning network.

BEST PRACTICES

The following is a summary of best practices as shared by participants within the discussion:

Foster Leadership Development in Small Increments

Jeff discussed an example of how one individual at a large insurance organization slowly chipped away at integrating a social enterprise network within leadership development. This organization is on the cusp of a culture shift. The organization has implemented a new leadership competency model. All of the top leaders are talking about how to be an effective leader and how to move the organization forward. Part of that is being a good network leader.

To capitalize on that thinking, this individual focused on how to help leaders within the organization become more actively engaged using enterprise social tools. This individual started by asking the leaders in charge of this movement to define what it means to be a new leader. Interestingly, his first request was to have someone blog about it.

Of course, he was faced with blank stares and a resounding “no”. Therefore, he re-framed the question and instead asked them to write an article about this movement, adding their respective opinions to their writing. They are essentially blogging, but it was re-framed as reflection articles. This worked and is a great example of how not to get ahead of the leadership team.

Once these leaders were reflectively sharing, this individual then moved them into performing this activity routinely in a private community where, between those reflections, he asked them to also develop conversations in that community about what it means to be an authentic leader.

Once these leaders became comfortable in this environment, he encouraged the braver leaders to do the exact same thing publically. He has moved them up the ladder slowly and, in the meantime, helped them to gain confidence and skills incrementally. Next, this individual brought forth the idea of a MOOC. This meant having two or three of these leaders create five topical articles (blog posts) that would allow them to become the anchor point for what could be a massive online course about defining what it means to be an authentic leader online at this insurance company.

This best practice was successful because it slowly helped the executive to feel comfortable with each step. As well, it was presented in a way that resonated.

BEST PRACTICES

Keeley built off of this example to share what is happening in the MSLOC Community. As mentioned, their community platform is Jive. It is an online learning community.

It is important to step back and think about the more formal learning that is happening within your own organization. If the mentality is “butts in class seats”, then think about any online spaces that are connected to those classes. If there are connections, think about how to make the line between those private, safer spaces – either classroom or online – a little more transparent.

For example, at MSLOC students pay for classes, but participate in private groups as a way to reflect and learn together as a private learning community. Now they have an enterprise social network and have moved off the learning management system, which was much more siloed. They now have the ability to go outside of those private spaces in an intentional way.

While most of the blogging and discussions occur in those class groups, there are some assignments that ask the students to share their reflections or their research topic in a public blog in the Jive community or, if they are really brave, more publically on the Web. It is a way to surface what they are learning with the larger community so that people who are not in that class can begin interacting with them.

An example of a positive outcome was a student who blogged in their internal community. Blogs are visible to all the internal alumni, faculty, staff and students. As a result of this blog, this student came into contact with a previous student. They connected and this brand new student was able to learn from someone who took Jeff’s class four years ago.

Keeley’s advice is to talk to your learning and development people and ask them how you can wrap around activities that extend outside of the learning management system.

LESSONS LEARNED

- An observation of another participant is that many people do not understand that the CMM is an evolution. Some of it is also measurement that includes anecdotal and basic activities. People, especially those in IT, want to measure it according to page views, as an example. They are trying to make numbers go up and to the right rather than thinking more deeply about the outcomes of what those numbers mean. For this participant, it is a mind shift away from those basic numbers towards thinking deeply about the goal.
- Rachel agreed with all the above comments. She cited research in which TheCR interviewed about 40 or 50 social executives. These executives were all at the C-level and were actually engaged socially. Not just supportive, but engaged. That yielded an interesting map for getting executives on board. Yes, pushing too hard is a mistake because if someone has not emotionally bought in yet, they will not be open to what is being presented to them, no matter how strong the data
- Therefore, an inquisitive stance is a better way to begin. That requires hard work to find out what is relevant to them so that an emotional reaction can be triggered. Once that emotional reaction is triggered, they will be more open to learning. This makes sense when you think about the executive's successful behavior being reinforced emotionally within him/her. In other words, if an executive is already successful, a significant disruption would need to occur to make him/her pay attention to a new way of behaving. to make him/her pay attention to a new way of behaving.
- Keeley made an observation as to the behaviors that are seen in the more hierarchical organizations, particularly since learning is about changing behaviors. Any lasting change in behavior or performance requires the learner to interact with the world as he/she goes through that change. That is why learning and change are tied together at MSLOC. An interesting exercise is to break this down into very concrete behaviors, i.e. what these behaviors look like in a hierarchical organization and what they look like in a networked organization. Then, start to tackle those small behavior changes to close the gap.
- One participant felt that this was an internal question. The behaviors that make someone successful in a community and/or a networked organization are similar to those behaviors that have been entrenched in management leadership training for the last 40 years. It would be an interesting pitch to parallel the behaviors of authenticity, transparency and accountability with community management, but with the added twist of increased success. If management could integrate community and social into the way they manage, they could have far greater success than what any type of leadership training could offer. This participant advocates helping the leader visualize themselves modeling these behaviors as it will go a lot further than any type of abstract situational leadership training.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Jeff summarized by stating that the behaviors of authenticity, transparency and having a coaching/mentoring mindset would serve a leader well as he/she tried to make the leap to the networked environment.
- One participant started a discussion by asking participants if they could only pick only one of the eight pillars within the CMM to focus their efforts, which pillar would get the most votes. Leadership was the resounding winner.
- Rachel explained that TheCR is essentially a community of practice. The goal is not to change community management as much as it is to document it and demonstrate its value, which is a change for the market today. One of the ways that Rachel thinks about the learning journey – and she does not believe that organizations necessarily think of their service or product chain as a learning journey – is to use an inquisitive approach. In other words, to ask a question that would help the individual define what it is that they want to learn. For example, at the very beginning, it might be: “What is a community” or “What is community management?” They might not even be articulating it as such.
- Rachel said she does not know anyone who sits down at their desk each morning and makes a conscious effort to learn or collaborate or innovate. However, they do sit down and ponder various questions. So, it is a matter of mapping these together.
- Rachel further added that when she thinks about content or programming, she always makes sure that it answers a question because that is the trigger for the learner. If you can answer the question that the learner has articulated for themselves and build out content and programming from there, you are much more likely to engage them.
- Jeff agreed 100% that using questions as the driving force around the motivation to learn is incredibly powerful.

RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the discussion: <http://tinyurl.com/the-cr-learningandchange>
- As mentioned in the discussion:
<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/masters-learning-and-organizational-change/>
- As mentioned in the discussion: <https://openideo.com/>
- As mentioned in the chat:
<http://forrester.typepad.com/groundswell/2010/01/conversationalists-get-onto-the-ladder.html>
- As mentioned in the chat:
<http://www.communityroundtable.com/research/the-social-executive/>
- As mentioned in the chat: <http://jeffdmerrell.com/>
- As mentioned in the chat:
http://www.amazon.com/Organizations-Dont-Tweet-People-Do/dp/1119950554/ref=asap_bc?ie=UTF8
- As mentioned in the chat:
<http://euansemples.com/theobvious/2015/5/11/blogging-and-leadership>
- <http://thumbs.dreamstime.com/x/flaming-cocktail-9354586.jpg>