



How Do We Prioritize Culture?

 **SNAPSHOT**

SPEAKERS
Kelly Schott, TheCR

COMPETENCIES
Culture

MATURITY PHASES
CMM1, CMM2, CMM3

HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Interested in how to discipline your community for breach of guidelines?** Two members shared their processes.
2. **Want to know how one member regained his community from the brink of disaster?** This case study outlined how this organization was able to steer the community back from one of toxicity to being a supportive community.
3. **Wondering how to align culture with the community?** One participant shared a strong lesson learned that increased engagement when she aligned the culture of the organization with the community.

OVERVIEW

- **Background.** Kelly opened up the call by setting the stage for prioritizing the culture of communities, i.e. why is culture worth it? What is the value of community culture? Is it in terms of metrics and measurements, ROI and/or softer values?
 - Kelly likes the term “power skills” to describe soft skills.
 - How do we take what we know about culture and leverage it?
- **The culture and community connection.** Culture speaks to engagement. How does that translate into behavior? How is it tracked and what does it connect to? How does the culture of an organization feed community and vice versa?
 - TheCR is a very collaborative, work-out-loud community that supports each other’s projects. That feeds and cross pollinates the culture with TheCR Network.
 - One participant explained that in her organization, they are in a transformation. The culture is very up and down. People are confused and unsure of the future. As it relates to the community and members, this participant sees a lot of similar nuances. People within the community tend to have animated, sometimes heated discussions. This is affected by the cultures of different member countries in how they react to these discussions. It can both hinder and favor the community culture.

OVERVIEW, CONT.

- One member has only been with her company a few months. What she is noticing is a huge push for people to gain new digital skills, i.e. artificial intelligence, machine learning, etc. What this translates into is a very comfortable culture for knowledge sharing. This shows up in the community. For this participant, she feels that if you don't have a knowledge sharing culture already, it's going to be very difficult to create one for community. This participant came from a culture of information hoarding, which was very difficult. So, culture very much reflects how people will participate in the community.
 - Adding to this, another participant from the same company shared that when new managers join the company, they ask how the organization deals with inappropriate behavior in the community. This is not an issue for this company's communities. They are internal and there is as a behavior expectation in the culture. People are not antagonistic. So, the culture in the community is respectful, supportive and encouraging, as is the culture of the organization. They don't have to work hard to engage people and get questions answered in the community.
 - The flip side is that people do use the community to further their own brand, as well. While that shouldn't be discouraged, it is the one thing that should be kept in check because they can become an overwhelming voice in the community, which may discourage others from participating.
 - External communities are a different breed. One participant stated that they deal with errant behaviors through strict moderation of discussions, chats, blogs, etc. In particular, they watch for self-promotion of personal books, links, etc., which is highly discouraged.

LESSONS LEARNED

- One participant was asked to describe how her organization disciplines members who breach the rules and guidelines of the community.
 - They are given 3 warnings.
 - If they don't adhere to the warnings, their first offence is a 90 day suspension.
 - If they come back after 90 days and break the rules again, they are given restricted access to the site.
 - For this participant, the moderating program they use is ColdFusion. Daily, it pulls in a tracking system of moderation. They have an algorithm that catches certain phrases or links within a discussion forum that will hold that until someone releases it to the community.
 - The company culture is very supportive. Members of the community report on this type of behavior. These people are their SMEs (subject matter experts).
- One member described a case study from his previous organization. This participant's intent for the community was much different than what it eventually turned into. The case study highlighted where the community started, where it went wrong and how they brought it back. This was an external community that was, at times, very toxic. Unfortunately, the way that the bulk of the community members were acquired was through a bad experience in another one of the company's customer support channels. For instance, if they had a bad experience with the 1-800 number or chat, they found their way to the community. The community was responsive and that's where these people chose to stay. This was good and bad. It necessitated highly defined guidelines and a strong push to adhere to these guidelines through moderation. When someone got out of line, they were told what they were doing wrong and given a warning. A third strike meant they were out of the community and not allowed back.
 - As the community grew in members, they began to advocate for the guidelines and callout the inappropriate behavior.
 - They were able to turn around the community by showing that they could help people. Over a period of time, they steered it back to a mostly supportive community. With that empathetic ear and an understanding of where these members were coming from and the bad experience they endured, they were able to create a more positive environment.
- Kelly stated that a key part of the culture of TheCR is that members are so willing to help each other; it is an incredibly supportive community.

- A lesson learned for one participant was to listen to and reflect the culture of the organization in the community. For example, when the community was first launched, they tried to keep it very business-like and serious in an effort to ensure that it didn't appear like a Facebook type of platform. However, it stifled the community. When they allowed people to behave in the community more like they behaved in the organization (with the values of kindness, mentoring, etc.), as well as allowing people to talk about their interests and what made them who they are as individuals, it made for a more interesting place for people to come and talk business. It created more of a safe space and reflected more of the company culture.
 - Interestingly, when the community first began, there was a member who posted blogs and videos and pictures, etc. HR told her to cease and desist. Now, after they realized that the overly business-like stance didn't work in the community, ironically this is the type of behavior that they now encourage. It has taken some unlearning, but it's the preferred behavior for the community. This has made it more successful in terms of increased engagement. Members are encouraged to be authentic and "human-like."
 - To help unlearn the more conservative behavior, sponsorship is key. In other words, it has to come from the top down. Members need to see the executives modeling the new behavior. It's the only way to give permission for others to behave the same way, especially if you are now asking people to behave in a way that was once prohibited.

- One participant shared that before they even attempt to start up a community, they talk to the members to find out what their needs are and what's missing in their day to day work, again recognizing that they essentially support communities of practice. It would be very easy to get caught up talking to a sponsor and then going off and setting something up based on what they want, but is not of value to the members. Community may not be the answer.
 - It's a good experience to try to find out what their triggers are/what their needs are and that's what needs to be focused on to improve engagement. What they don't do is set something up and then try to make it relevant.
 - Be bold enough to stand up to the pushback. Acknowledge that if community isn't the answer, pushing back against that is not going to work. However, let them know that you'll work together to find the appropriate solution.

- Another participant added that it's important to recognize when a community used to be engaged but is not any longer. Be bold enough to work at re-engaging the community or to sunset it. It doesn't mean that the community failed. Needs may simply have shifted and the community served its purpose.
- Kelly asked people how they think culture can be brought into the strategy conversation:
 - For any organization, change is difficult. Communities and culture are a piece of the change management process, which can be used to bring about transformation. Try to explain why the changes will be better for the organization and address the "What's in it for me?" question.
 - The change is going to happen whether people like it or not. Help people to get on board. Explain that if they don't get on board, they will get left behind.
 - Get in front of people in person. That was a huge lesson learned for one participant. The divide between digital and real life does not exist the way some people want to draw it. For example, her organization was used to in-person contact. However, they were replacing the field resources with online resources. That caused a lot of unrest. They had to explain it in terms of how it would benefit them. The previous way helped one site at a time over long periods of time. The new way would help to share vast amounts of knowledge all at once at any time.
 - Understand that humans are complicated and this will take a long time to make happen.
- Kelly stressed the importance of executive buy-in, particularly as it refers to "soft skills", i.e. those skills that are difficult to prove the value with hard data and a dollar figure. Culture is a perfect example. Participants discussed how they convey the value of culture to executives:
 - Culture surveys.
 - Start with a sponsor. You cannot start a community without a sponsor who is engaged and understands how community can help to build or sustain the culture that already exists in the organization. It's all about psychological safety. If people feel that they are in a safe space to speak up, but they don't have a leader modeling that type of behavior, they're not going to do it.
 - Research with focus groups. This can be used to spot trends. Next, rank the trends, which will reveal the low-hanging fruit that can be quickly addressed. Something that can have an impact with the least amount of effort. Draw a connection to help understand the needs of the people being served by the community.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- Kelly asked participants to describe the culture of their communities:
 - Encouraging.
 - Silent and stagnant for some of the communities. For others, exploration, tactical, infant stage, experimental.
 - Active community.
 - Helpful.
 - Transparent, honest, but also jumbled.
 - Willing to share, but not quite collaborative yet.
 - Curious.

RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the discussion – Case Study:
<https://network.communityroundtable.com/viewdocument/report-governance-matters-steering-a-community-from-hostile-to-helpful?CommunityKey=7340d4a5-8d4c-4a6e-b1dd-3bfb07f292c3&tab=librarydocuments>
- As mentioned in the chat: [State of Community Management 2019: Key Finding 1 - Communities Propel Engagement](#)
- As mentioned in the chat: [TheCR's Engagement Framework](#)