CREATING AND MANAGING A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

A practical manual

Introduction

The ICRC developed a social collaboration network.

The aim is to enable staff to seek expert advice from their colleagues, brainstorm solutions to problems and create new approaches to working together.

Each staff member has their own profile and is able to link up with colleagues online. They are also able to set up online groups for specific thematic or units. These groups are virtual communities in which staff can work together and share information about a topic, even if they are based in different departments or parts of the world. The community is also where all of the topic work can be compiled, you can add links from it to the Team Space libraries. Staff who create and run these communities are called "community leaders".

This networks contributes to change the ICRC's work culture and style of management towards a networked approach. The more people join up and get involved, the greater the impact will be.

However, it always takes time for people to get used to doing things differently. **That is why we need pioneers like you, who can spot opportunities for people to work together online.** As a community leader, you will support staff and create and manage your own virtual community.

What is this manual for?

It is designed to give community managers advice on how to create and manage a virtual community.

A large part of it focuses on how to convince your colleagues of the value of your new community and how to keep them engaged. This is because it takes time to change behaviour. People are quickly excited about a new idea, but it is much more difficult to sustain their interest over the long term.

Typical levels of interest in new initiatives over time

Why should I create a community?

It's a good idea if:

| you think things could be done differently within your team, unit or delegation | you have a particular project that you want people to work on together | you have spotted a problem that could best be resolved by joining forces and pooling ideas | you have an initiative that you want to try out, with the help of your colleagues. |

Purpose Driven Collaboration

Community management: using all tools as its best
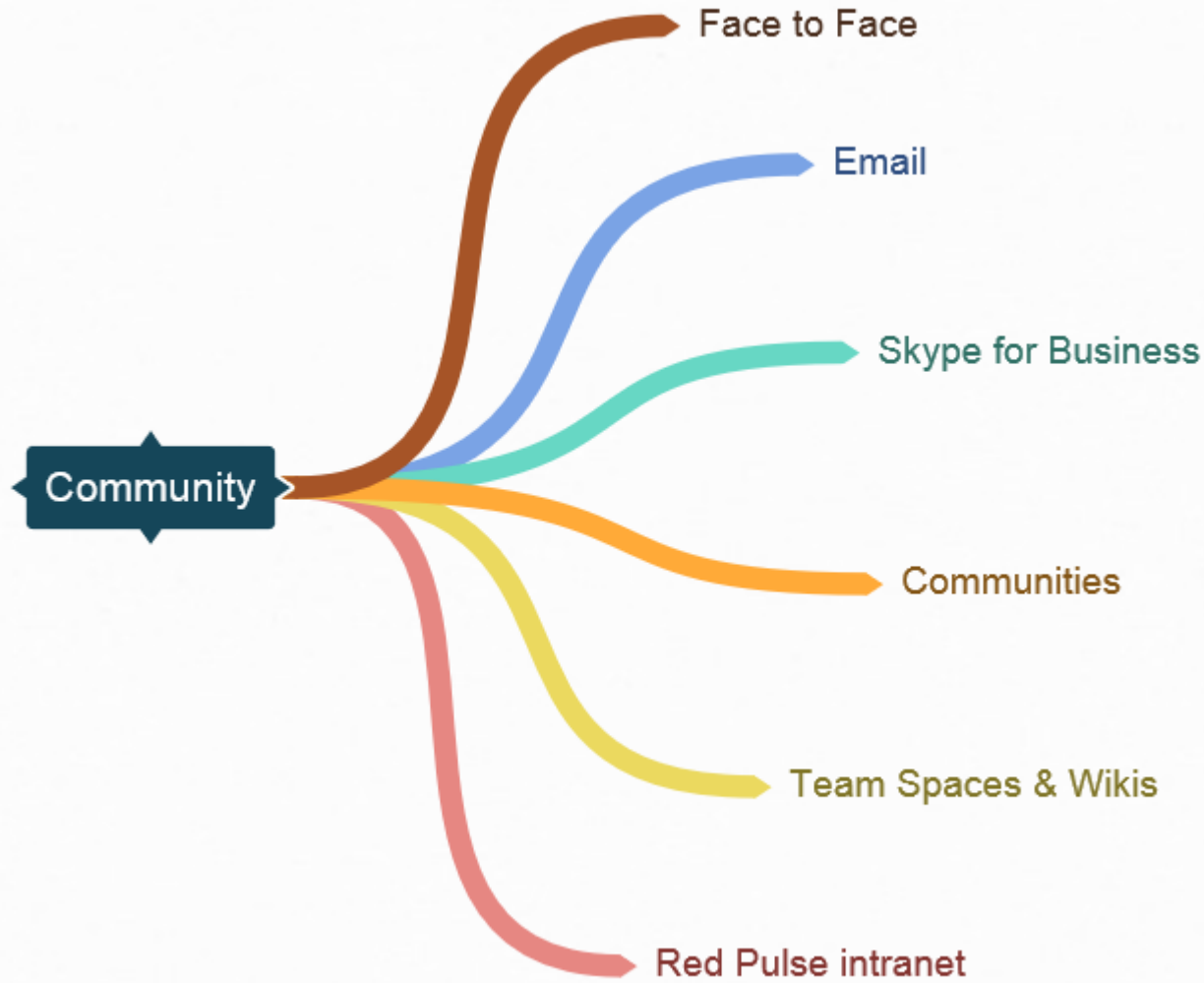
A community is more than just an online platform.

It's a group of people with shared interests & objectives.

Several channels are available to engage this group.

PfR Objectives

&

Individual objectives

5 key tools for the Community Manager

RedPulse

All ICRC

Official

News

Team Spaces

Work in progress
Document collaboration
Document Storage/Records

Wikis:
Instructions and FAQs

Communities

Discussions

Dynamic Questions & Answers

FYI

Digital brainstorming

Skype

Webinars

Conference calls

Email

Share links

Schedule meetings

For action

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What qualities and skills do I need to be a community manager?

Personal qualities

Community managers are:

- good communicators and active listeners;

- willing to share their knowledge and experience with others;

- creative;

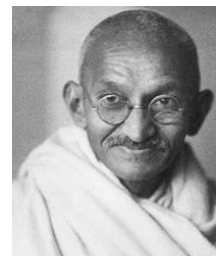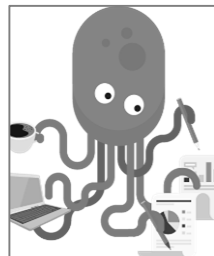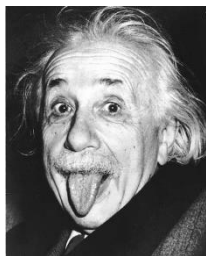- enthusiastic about new technology (though no expertise is necessary).

Professional skills

Community managers can:

- unify people around a common cause;

- explain new concepts to others;

- juggle various tasks and manage several people at the same time;

- think outside the box.

Above all, community managers need to be able to inspire and lead others.

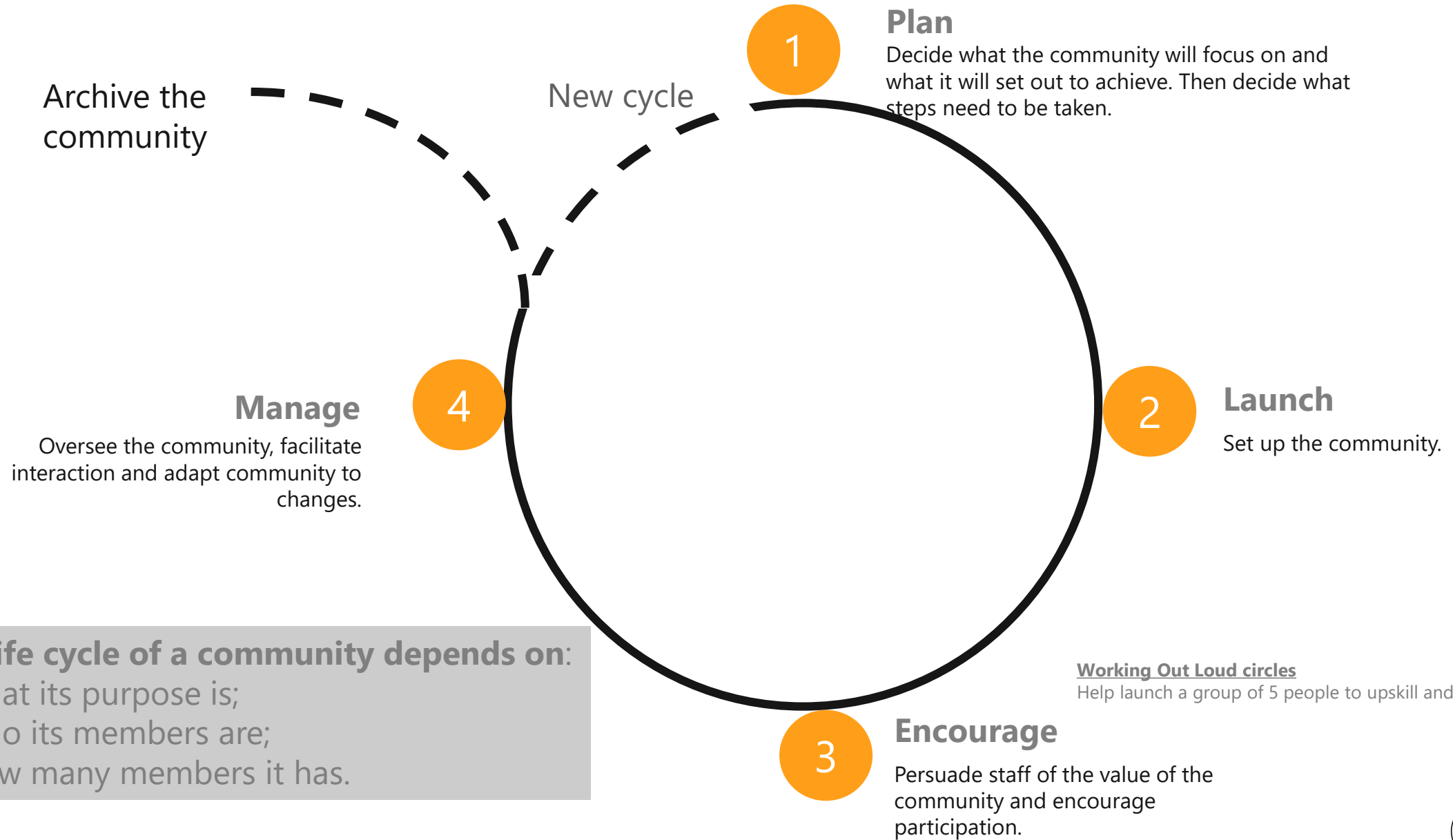# How do I create and manage a community?

1 Plan

2 Launch

3 Encourage

4 Manage

Life cycle of a community

Plan
1
Decide what the community will focus on and what it will set out to achieve. Then decide what steps need to be taken.

New cycle

Archive the community

Manage
4
Oversee the community, facilitate interaction and adapt community to changes.

Launch
2
Set up the community.

Working Out Loud circles
Help launch a group of 5 people to upskill and share.

Encourage
3
Persuade staff of the value of the community and encourage participation.

The life cycle of a community depends on:
- what its purpose is;
- who its members are;
- how many members it has.

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1. Plan

What should I bear in mind when planning to create a community?

Create a strategy. Here's a strategy template to help you.

The success of a community will depend partly on the following factors:

Interest levels: There will be differing levels of interest among colleagues about working collaboratively online. Identify which staff are likely to be enthusiastic, curious, sceptical or resistant when you introduce the idea.

Endorsement: Seek the backing of someone higher up in the organization (a sponsor). This will help give weight to your idea of creating a community, match it to operational priorities and encourage colleagues to take it seriously. Gauge your sponsor's level of commitment to your idea and then identify opportunities for them to get involved in getting the community up and running.

Benefits: Work out what each member can expect to gain by joining your community. The benefits may be immediate or they may depend on how many people take part; they may help people individually or all staff.

Some situations are more favourable than others for setting up a community, but it will never be perfect or impossible anywhere. First, assess the situation; then decide how to set up the community.

Gauge levels of interest among colleagues

You should check as soon as possible whether your idea of setting up a community has widespread support.
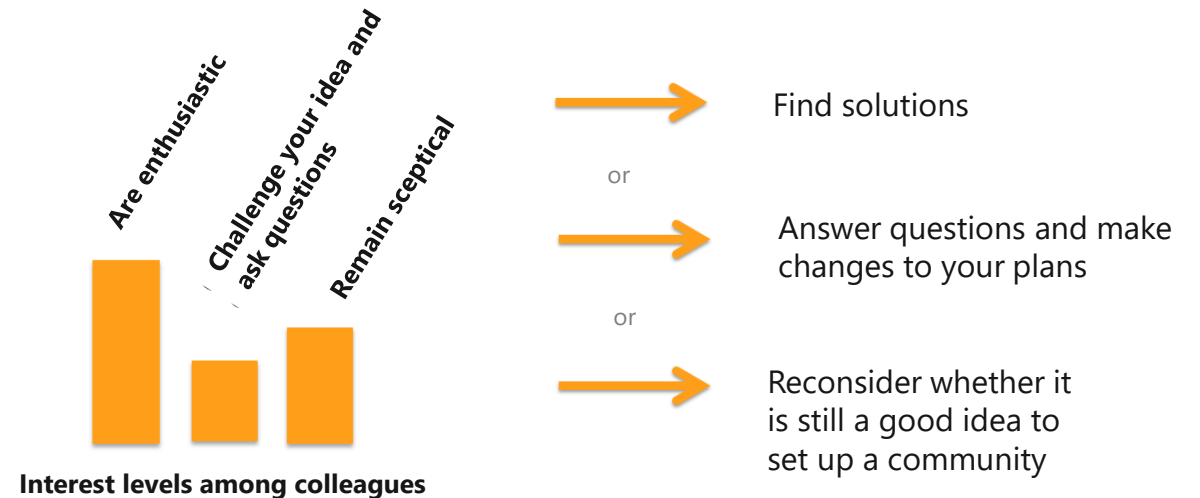
Ideas of how to gauge levels of interest:

- Talk to people face to face.
- Carry out a survey.
- Start a group discussion online.

You should estimate how many people will be:

Enthusiastic　　**Curious**　　**Sceptical**　　**Resistant**

(or wanting to maintain the status quo)

Be strategic

- Produce a flyer or email specifically for those who are sceptical or resistant to your idea.
- Use concrete examples to illustrate the usefulness of setting up a community.
- Publicize how many people have expressed interest in your idea, and celebrate even small successes.

Are enthusiastic

Challenge your idea and ask questions

Remain sceptical

Interest levels among colleagues

→ Find solutions

or

→ Answer questions and make changes to your plans

or

→ Reconsider whether it is still a good idea to set up a community

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Next steps

Enthusiastic

1. Create a strong core group of enthusiastic participants. Their interactions will provide concrete examples of the usefulness of your community, which will convince those who are curious.

Curious

2. Curious colleagues can help you to convince the sceptics once they have understood the value and usefulness of the community.

Sceptical

3. Wait until you have some successes and concrete examples before trying to convince the sceptics.

Resistant

(or wanting to maintain the status quo)

4. Listen to colleagues who are resistant and try to understand their reasons for wanting to maintain the status quo. Ask them questions using the ADKAR method of change management (see next page).

Convince resistant colleagues of the value of a community

It can be difficult to know why a particular colleague is resistant to change or why they want to stick rigidly to the status quo. We suggest you use the ADKAR model of change management. It can help you to ask them the right questions.

Awareness   Do you understand and agree with the rationale for introducing something new?

Desire   Do you want this change to take place or would you prefer for things to stay as they are? What would make it more appealing to you?

Knowledge   Do you know what will be required of you and what new skills you will have to develop?

Ability   Do you feel capable of putting these new skills into practice?

Reinforcement   Are you getting the right support and encouragement to enable you to make this change?

Key questions to ask yourself when setting up a community

1. What do you hope to **achieve** by setting up a community? How are **the goals** of your community **linked to your PfR**?

2. What **new approaches** will be needed to reach these goals?

3. What **tools** are currently being used?

4. Who is the **target audience**? (i.e. Who will be the members of your community and how many people in total?)

5. What will be their **level of interest** in taking part (high, medium, low)?

6. Do you have a **sponsor**? (If yes, who is it?)

7. Who will be the **community manager** (if you cannot run it yourself)?

8. Does your community fit in with one of the ICRC's **global communication strategies**?

9. How will your community help the ICRC address **operational concerns**?

10. What will people get out of it **individually and collectively**?

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Examples of reasons to set up a community

Susan is an expert in implementing educational programmes in conflict zones. After taking part in a one-day conference on educational priorities in humanitarian work in conflict zones, with other international NGOs (e.g. UNICEF and Save the Children), she publishes an article on the intranet outlining her initial reflections from the day. Lots of people seem interested in what she has to say and are glad to see that the ICRC is broaching this issue. Susan talks about this with her six colleagues who are working together on the project.

She has the idea of setting up a community for people who are interested in receiving updates on the progress of the project. She thinks she would use it to tell people about the discussions under way and any decisions made by the ICRC. She likes the idea of working transparently and of being able to gather the views and suggestions of various staff members. Three of her colleagues are less enthusiastic about the idea; they do not believe that their project concerns other staff, and fear chaos breaking out if everyone is able to express their views. Because the idea is only at the drawing-board stage, she cannot yet seek endorsement from someone more senior.

Delphine is one of 12 Hindi interpreters working in the field. She often meets people who speak local dialects that are close to Hindi but have subtle, fundamental differences. Her two colleagues sometimes help her, but they do not always know the answer and so are just as stuck as she is. She wonders if she could call upon other colleagues working on other sites, but she does not have the courage to make enquiries about this. She has only been working for the ICRC for six months and does not know who she should ask about that kind of thing. Besides, three of the other interpreters work in really isolated areas.

She has the idea of setting up a community for all the Hindi interpreters to be able to talk to each other. She knows five of them personally, three of whom she speaks to regularly about professional matters. She approaches her manager about it, who is quite senior. Her manager does not currently use the ICRC's enterprise social network but since she wants to encourage Delphine to take on greater responsibility, she gives her the green light to set up a community.

Frank is in charge of a subsidiary ICRC foundation which promotes social integration through sport. It provides young people living in underprivileged urban areas with sports equipment. After reviewing the business model, it becomes clear that he needs to broaden the foundation's donor base so as to increase funding and reach more young people. There are currently a range of different donors, including governments, foundations and individuals, but he would like to attract new donors and find innovative ways of raising money. He has several ideas but, since he often works on his own, does not know how good his ideas really are.

Frank has the idea of setting up a community for the ICRC's 150 fundraisers. His aim is to help people exchange ideas and brainstorm new ways of fundraising. He knows of some fundraisers who would be keen to take part. He is also close to one of their managers.

Facilitating a particular task

Connecting people in a similar position

Creating a mutual support network

Sharing best practices

Getting other people's advice

Managing a project

Brainstorming new ideas

2. LAUNCH

How do I successfully launch my community?

1 Prepare a brief message to grab people's attention

You only have one chance to make a good first impression! The clearer and punchier your message, the more likely you are to persuade people to take part.

- Name the community.
  Choose a short and catchy name, which is easy to remember.
- Say how you expect the community to be used.
  Be as precise as possible and illustrate the benefits of its use with concrete examples and success stories.
- Write a description of the goals and gains.

→ Back up your message with a small flyer, which your colleagues can take away with them (pictures and stories are a good idea here).

2 Prepare a launch plan

Establish what steps you will take to launch your community.

Use all the means of communication available.

Try and spread the message among your colleagues in person, if possible. Announce the upcoming launch at staff meetings, bring it up in informal discussions and chat to people about it over coffee.

→ If you are not managing to draw in the crowds, adjust your launch plan and start with a small group of people before casting the net wider to reach your entire target audience.

3 Check levels of interest again

Check again how much support there is for your community.

- Talk to people face-to-face.
- Carry out a survey.
- Start a discussion online.

Estimate how many people will be enthusiastic, curious, sceptical or resistant. Identify key sources of support.

Be strategic: produce a leaflet or email specifically for those who need further convincing, publicize how many people are interested in the community and celebrate even small successes.

→ Don't waste your energy trying to convince those who are resistant! They will join the community in their own time once the others have joined in. However, do take onboard their comments so you can adjust your approach and improve the community.

How do I make my colleagues aware of the new community?

COMMUNICATE

1 **Introduce key people to your community and its proposed use.**

- Make your launch an event! Whether you decide to deliver a slide-show presentation at the staff meeting or announce it during an informal one-to-one, make sure the situation is right.

- Give an overview of the goals, benefits and new approaches of the community, and how this fits in with your particular situation. Don't go into too much detail at this stage.

- Leave flyers in public areas so that people can read about your community in their own time.

2 **Get your sponsor to back up what you say.**

- Your sponsor could help you present your community to others.

CONVINCE

3 **Meet your target audience in person to persuade them of the value of your community and respond to any objections.**
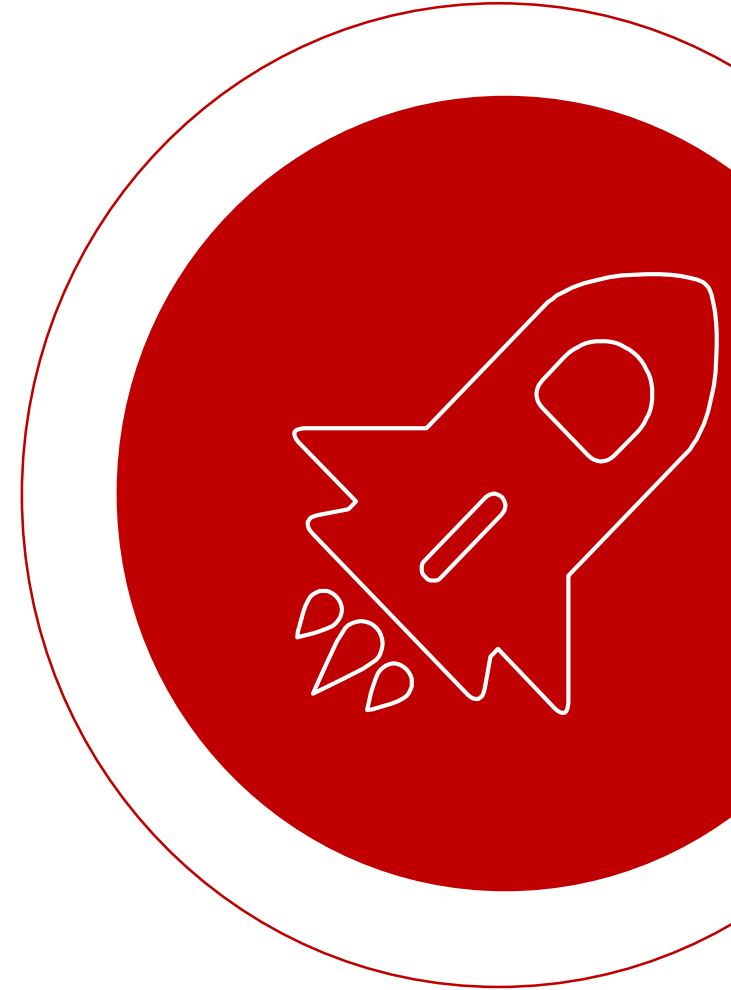
- Prioritize direct contact with your target audience since you are trying to persuade them of the value of your community. Create an argument that could help to convince each group of people (enthusiastic, curious, sceptical and resistant) and/or make sure you address each issue flagged up by your colleagues.

- Communicate with others throughout the life cycle of the community: talk, talk, talk.

After announcing the launch of the community, tell your target audience about early successes. Adapt your message according to levels of interest.

3. Encourage

How can I get colleagues to join in?

1 **Draw up a road map
Define a challenge
and a deadline**

2 **Recruit ambassadors**

3 **Engage others by celebrating successes**

OBJECTIVES

Keep in regular contact with your community members but space out your communications.

Suggest that the most enthusiastic members of the community become ambassadors. Their support can set a good example to others.

Put together a document that celebrates those members whose contributions are helping the community to grow. Show how many people have joined the community and publicize initial successes to attract new members.

BEST PRACTICES

The road map should indicate what steps to take at each stage of setting up the community.

Here are some example steps:

	ACTIONS	1	2	3
PREPARE	Qualify my idea for a community	X		
	Define my proposed new approach	X		
	Create the community using the chosen means	X		
	Publish initial reference documents	X		
	Put together a launch plan	X		
LAUNCH	Organize a launch event		X	
	Invite members to join the community with a welcome message		X	
	Make sure that members have understood my proposed new approach		X	
	Make sure that no contribution goes unanswered		X	
CONSOLIDATE	Encourage participation by publishing success stories and indicators of success			X
	Involve my sponsor through strategic contributions			X

- Organize a meeting to train the ambassadors in the new approaches and to explain what you expect them to do in the community. Be enthusiastic and persuasive.

- Hold regular meetings to gather their views on the way the community is organized and adjust goals together.

- Develop their leadership capabilities and their independence within the community by allowing them to follow their initiative.

- Establish a governance system to facilitate how roles and tasks are shared out and to bring the community to life.

Ambassadors are **enthusiastic** staff members. They are the advanced users and spokespersons for your community.

Go looking for small successes by asking members of the community how it is working and what they are getting out of it.

Illustrate the usefulness of your new approach with examples.

Regularly publish success stories about your community or organize events to share these successes.

Jerome has found a solution thanks to his colleagues' answers to his question.

Sophie likes the fact that more people know about and understand her project.

Paul's team share information about the competition.

Key steps for getting colleagues involved

1. Make an **appeal for contributions**, either images or stories (e.g. through a banner on the intranet).

2. Make sure that all questions receive a **quick and appropriate reply** (use your network of experts and ask for help from members to get answers).

3. Start discussions or ask open questions that enable members to express their views and get involved.

4. Regularly promote the community via other means of communication (newsletters, emails, intranet, etc.).

6. Use a network of enthusiastic ambassadors to follow the community road map after having established together the goals and governance structure.

7. Organize face-to-face events.

8. Draw up **guidelines for using the community** (clarify the role of member and how the community is structured).

4. Manage

How can I best manage my community?

Traditional indicators measure the quantity of data, but you need to gauge how much your participants are interacting and whether it will lead to new collaborative practices. To do so, you should use both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Quantitative

Qualitative

Base your indicators on the goals of your community and the expected benefits. Your indicators should enable you to:

track the way in which members engage with the community over time and use that as a guide for adapting it

make changes to the community and adjust your strategy to attract new members

demonstrate the value of your community from an operational standpoint (to sponsors, members and future community managers)

align your community more closely with operational objectives.

How can I define suitable indicators?

Objectives	To gauge the level of engagement	To gauge the degree of interaction and momentum	To gauge the reach
Example quantitative indicators	Number of members who have joined	Number of documents shared	Membership by profession, delegation, department, etc.
	Number of active members	Number of likes	
	Number of inactive members	Number of comments	
	Profile completion rate	Number of publications	
		Number of questions	
		Number of replies to each question	
		Response time	
		Number of views for each document	
Example qualitative indicators	Success stories and case studies gathered from the field Examples of how these stories helped you achieve your PfR Objectives		

You may wish to map out your indicators on a report page so that you can easily track the progress of your community on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis.

Example report page

Profile

Public

Community name:
My community

Objectives of the community:
Create a network of economists
Share monitoring tasks among economists
Promote internal events

Target membership:
150 members

Community managers:

Successes

⭐ **SUCCESS**

Input from a sponsor.

⭐ **SUCCESS**

Collectively produced summary of the work of the economists.

⭐ **SUCCESS**

Feedback on two documents shared on the community and comments in a discussion initiated by a member.

Membership and level of engagement

111 members

155 people have contributed to the community at least once since it was launched*
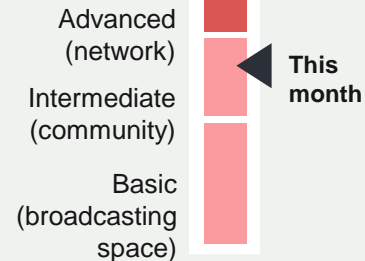
2
leaders
this month

20
new members
this month

91
colleagues who have still not joined

The community is public so people can contribute without joining, if recommended by a member.

Maturity level

Advanced (network)

Intermediate (community)

This month

Basic (broadcasting space)

There is currently a high level of interest in taking part in the community, as it is still quite novel. There is a strong core of enthusiastic members who, together with the community manager, are bringing the community to life. The community is developing nicely and people are finding new ways of working together.

Data analytics

31
+29%
No. of documents

22
+140%
No. of discussions

7
+285%
No. of comments

High level of interest

Drop in level of interest

Stabilization

Drop-out rate

7%
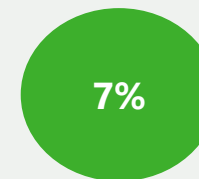
Only a small percentage (7%) of members who joined the community last month have since left. Meanwhile, the core group of enthusiastic members has strengthened.

Next steps

Identify which members form part of the core group and reward them for their commitment and input. It is important that they continue to be highly active in the community so that they draw in new members.

The community manager should meet with the members to gauge their levels of interest. The aim is to make sure that the community matches up with what its members need.

Conclusion

Summary

The four stages of setting up a community

Plan	Launch	Encourage	Manage

Plan
- Goals
- Benefits
- Approaches
- Situation
- Strategy

Launch
- Draw up a launch plan
- Gauge levels of interest
- Improve participation experience for members

Encourage
- Encourage input and interaction
- Recruit ambassadors
- Draw up a road map together
- Facilitate discussions
- Celebrate successes

Manage
- Align approaches with operational objectives in your Planning for Results (PfR)
- Track levels of engagement
- Improve community participation and put forward new approaches

Community management framework

By Richard Millington

The task of the community manager can be divided into the following sections:

Strategy - Establish and execute the strategy for developing the community.

Growth - Increase membership of the community and convert newcomers into regulars.

Content - Create, edit, facilitate and solicit content for the community. Upload content to the right libraries.

Moderation - Remove obstacles to participation and encourage members to make contributions.

Events and activities - Create and facilitate events to keep members engaged.

Relationship and influence - Build relationships with key members and gain influence within the community.

Business integration - Advocate internally within the organization and integrate business processes with community efforts.

User experience - Improve the community platform and participation experience for members.

Community Management Framework

By Richard Millington
Feverbee
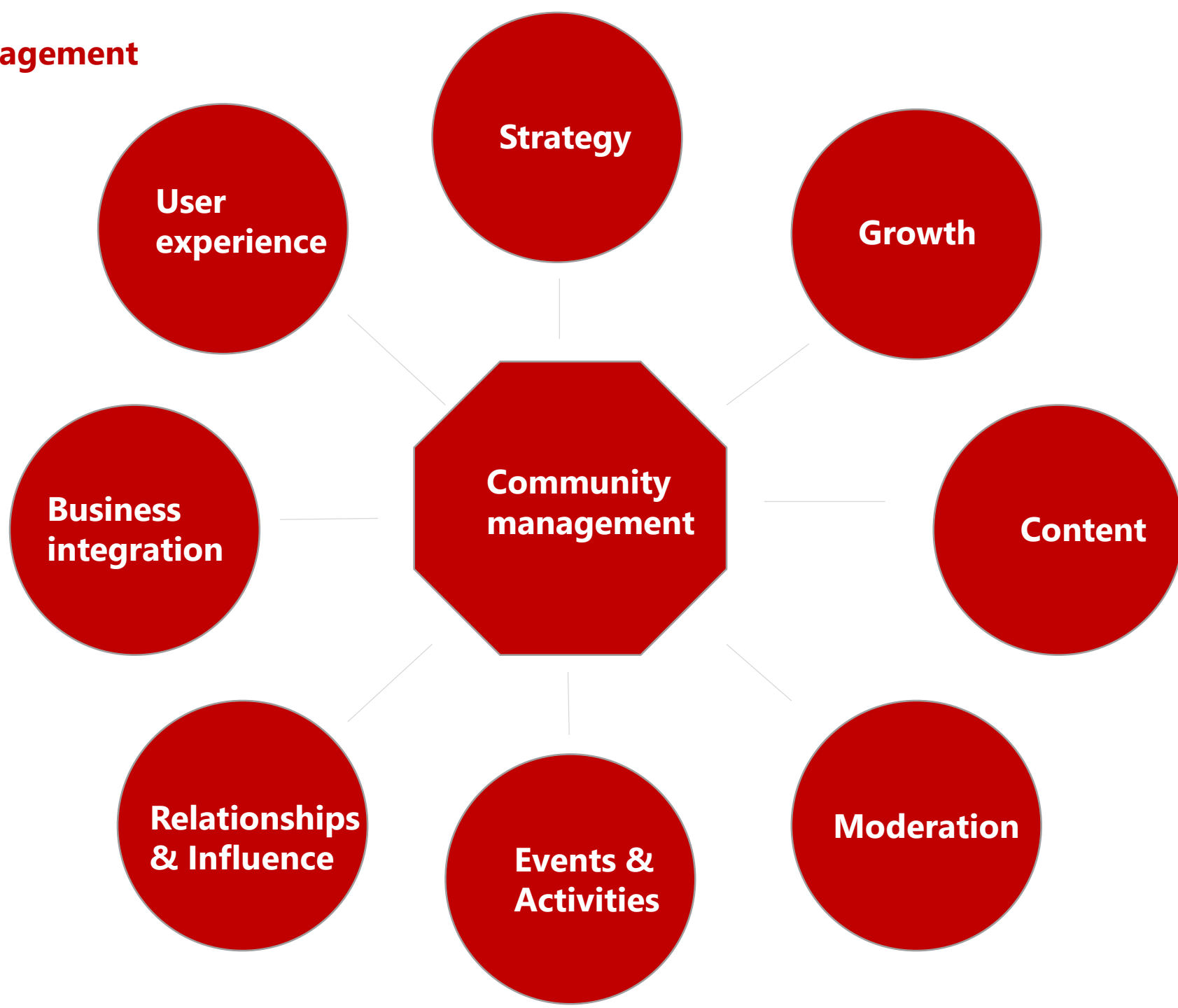
More resources

In Europe

Ernesto Izquierdo, Community videos

Richard Millington & Feverbee

In the Americas

Rachel Happe & The Community Roundtable

David Spinks and the CMX