

Reducing Obstacles to (Radical) Innovation with Communities of Practice

an Action Research Study

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ECCOP

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for Communities of Practice**

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This Action Research Summary responds to the following questions.

1. WHY this action-research project is mission-critical to increase and sustain high business performance? What results will it deliver?
2. WHAT tangible deliverables will participating companies receive?
3. HOW will the project be organized?
4. WHO will participate in the project?
5. WHAT resources will be required to produce the expected results and deliverables?

WHY?

Why the capacity for radical innovation is essential to long-term success?

“[C]ompanies introduce sustainable innovations and continually improve their products and processes, but they get caught unaware by newcomers who have introduced disruptive innovations, capturing and transforming traditional markets.” (The Innovator’s Dilemma, by Clay Christensen, 1997)

The capacity of a business to consistently deliver radical innovation is one of the key factors of its long-term success. It is very different from incremental improvement. When facing disruptive innovation by markets and technologies, incremental improvement is like re-arranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic. Yet, numerous research studies have shown that “it is often difficult to get support for radical projects in large firms where internal cultures and pressures often push efforts toward more low risk, immediate reward, and incremental projects.” (Walter Derzko, at the European KM Forum, 03.02.25)

The dual purpose of the action research:

1. To create a replicable model to demonstrate that CPs are a core business capability both for incremental and radical innovation generating a dramatic increase in business performance.
2. To validate the research-based “[Radical Innovation with Communities of Practice](#)” framework of CommunityIntelligence for developing and supporting innovation communities in the participating companies.

According to KPMG’s “European KM Survey 2002-2003,” in the last two years, 45% of the companies started internal “communities of practice.” Yet, very few of them have paid attention to the crucial link between CPs and innovation, let alone “radical innovation.” That’s why we focus this action research project on that connection. We’ve put “radical” in parentheses to indicate that whenever it’s appropriate, we will also explore the implications of CPs for contributing to both incremental and radical innovation.

WHAT?

The project will result in the enhancement of your organization’s capacity to:

- Develop strategic communities of practice in such a way that they can support innovation through their intrinsic features, and
- Understand and strengthen the roles that CPs can play in supporting and fostering innovation, and

- Understand and improve the ways in which membership in CPs can lead to better personal innovation capabilities, and
- Mobilise the power of collective intelligence—that CPs represent—for innovation, when needed.

In addition to the above results, your organization will receive the following tangible **deliverables**:

1. An action-oriented research report on “[Radical Innovation with Communities of Practice](#)”, and periodic updates that reflect recent advances in the action research of the participating companies, minus proprietary company-specific information, plus
2. A preliminary report of what has been learned from our initial interviews with the key internal stakeholders of the project, including emergent challenges and opportunities of CP development and its support requirements, plus
3. Research-based guidelines for implementing effective approaches to create and leverage business value from CPs, tailored to each company’s unique situation, plus
4. A prototype process toolkit and methods for using it, that can be directly applied by you to assess and increase the impact of CP’s on innovation in general and radical innovation in particular, plus
5. The design and experience of working in a state-of-the-art, collaborative learning system that will facilitate the ongoing transfer of research results to your organization.

HOW?

The project will be organized as an “action-research” which, in this context, means a facilitated, productive inquiry to:

- Discover and enhance the ways in which CPs, a core business capability, contribute to both incremental and radical innovation leading to a dramatic increase in business performance.
- Validate the research-based framework of distinctions, models, and tools for developing and supporting innovation communities of practice.

The success of the project requires explicit support from the company’s top knowledge and innovation executives, and CP support team. It will be also essential to attract support from the leaders of any department or business unit that will get directly involved with the project.

The project will start with a face-to-face learning dialogue (meeting 1) in which we will jointly review the action research’ purpose, objective, and high-level roadmap. In addition we will also cover the project’s methodology and introduce the online tools to use for supporting the collaboration between your project team and our researchers.

During or after that meeting, your project team has to identify at least 1 functional department or business unit and 1 existing or yet-to-form CP, to anchor the research in relevant business issues and lead it to immediately useful and actionable results.

Following that, our researchers will conduct interviews with all the key, internal stakeholders of the project, and deliver a report summarizing what has been learned from them, in meeting 2. There, we will review the emergent challenges and opportunities of developing an innovation CP, its support requirements, and finalized detailed project plan and responsibilities.

The project will advance in re-iterative cycles of defining direction, introducing models and tools; testing them in action; learning from the testing and improving them. It will conclude with evaluation and a final report with recommendations for next-phase work, delivered in meeting 3.

The project is organized as a service of the European Collaborative for Communities of Practice, a partner of CPsquare, a global community of CP practitioners. Participating organizations will automatically gain membership in and the associated benefits from both groups.

Opportunities to review, test and provide feedback on research results emerging from any of the participating organizations will be given to the other participants, less the company specific information that we'll keep in the strictest confidence. Project teams from the participating organizations will have several opportunities to engage in productive conversations with one another.

Reports from the research - minus the company-specific recommendations — will be published on the website of the European Collaborative for Communities of Practice, comprised of a public and a members-only virtual space.

WHO?

The project team of each company may include the executive sponsor, CKO, head of innovation management, or whoever is responsible for your “communities of practice” strategy, plus interested coordinators and members of the CP support team.

Research design, facilitation, project management, and research reports will be provided by the research team of the European Collaborative. The lead researcher is George Pór, Founder of CommunityIntelligence, a Research Fellow in the Collective Intelligence Lab, University of Ottawa, and Visiting Researcher, Complexity Research Group, London School of Economics.

The team includes Erik van Bekkum, founder and managing director of Efios, and a seasoned professional of corporate communities of practice and Social Network Analysis.

Maximum number of participating companies in our action research projects is 6. However it is structured such that it will deliver equally important results if it's conducted only for one company.

WHAT resources are required

Action research fee: The resources required to conduct the action-research and create its expected results are cost and time. The project fee for the 4 months is €9.200 per company, including a 1-year membership in CPsquare for up to 3 people, and access to the members-only site of the project.

Expenses: researchers' travel, international phone calls, and project administration, will be billed at costs.

Time: commitment required during the 4 months of the project is to participate in:

- 3 meetings of $\frac{1}{2}$ day
- 1 interview of approximately 1 hour with each of the key internal stakeholders
- Conference calls of 1 hour per month between the company's project team and the research team.
- Reading and contributing to the online collaboration, minimum twice a week (approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ hour each time)

The estimated total time required from project team members is 1 to 2 days per month, on average.

For more information please visit www.eccop.com or contact us directly:

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