



Best Practice

# Communities as catalysts for change.

How companies build motivation and engagement during times of tremendous change.

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More and more companies are actively introducing new systems and tools in the context of different change processes, such as the digital transformation. In doing so, they often forget to include the employees in the implementation and change management processes. Motivated employees who organize themselves in a digital community can function as a mouthpiece, point of contact for feedback and as drivers of change. This should provide companies with advantages particularly in volatile times and when confronted by cost and resource pressures.

## 1. Communities as the driving force

Motivated employees who are enthusiastic about IT can proactively address the normality of continuous change and the resistance of their colleagues. They become the mouthpiece of their colleagues, departments and locations. Empirical psychological studies have shown that competence, autonomy and social integration are fundamental to intrinsic motivation. This means that users prefer to learn on their own or from their colleagues. Personal contacts create incentives for learning about new features and functions, which can benefit the entire company: Changes are accepted more easily and more quickly, which reduces the costs for training.

It is particularly during times of crisis that employees with IT expertise can take on an important pioneering role and disseminate

success stories and knowledge in the company. A central platform (such as Yammer or Teams) can be used as a collaboration and communication tool and also enables the regular exchange of information. A relaxed and informal attitude ensures the required motivation, while banners and logos on profiles provide a sense of belonging and community. In this way, communities can replace the personal contact at the workplace, which is sometimes lacking. This can also be transferred to the contact between the community members and other colleagues. Some ideas include setting up virtual coffee and lunch breaks, or office hours for questions and suggestions. Therefore, the options for strengthening communities in times of crisis and using them as change management tools are unlimited. Companies also benefit from increased employee efficiency and motivation.

## 2. How to design successful communities

Establishing a community of motivated employees who take on a pioneering function requires the appropriate planning. Communities have a strong tendency to scale and develop their own momentum. Community planning aims to manage this momentum and turn it into an advantage. Therefore, management and

project members must define the size of the communities and clear responsibilities within the community. At the same time, the community should receive the full support of superiors and management.



### Five steps for building communities



#### Define objectives and responsibilities

The first step should consist of defining and communicating the objectives of the community. Community members must know their tasks and expectations.

Therefore, the members of the community require information in order to carry out their roles:

- What is my responsibility within the community?
- What are (not) my tasks and obligations?
- How do the people in the community work together?



#### Define the scope

After the objectives and responsibilities have been defined, the number of members must also be determined. How many contact persons do I need in order to provide my employees with adequate support? In general, each team should have at least one community member. This indicator must always be examined in the context of departments, locations and divisions and will therefore differ from company to company.



### Enable community owners

Communities require a central contact person (a so-called Community Owner), who answers questions, receives suggestions and feedback and regularly distributes information. In some cases, it may also make sense to divide this role into a technical and functional contact person. Experience with the application cases is particularly important for the functional role. But the most important factor is time. Managing and maintaining a community is very time-consuming and can develop into a full-time role. Therefore, a Community Owner must be given the required leeway and flexibility.



### Develop and provide contents

Using descriptive, easy-to-understand and user-centered application cases/examples, members of the community quickly understand how and when certain tools must be used and how they can support their colleagues. The goal is to train employees through the community while also increasing the degree to which training documents can be re-used. Here, the role of the Community Owner is to collect, finalize and consolidate different information. Afterwards, the information is made available to the entire company through the participants. Concise tips, tricks and videos are recommended in this context.



### Plan community activities

A community must be alive! However, it cannot develop its own momentum without the regular addition of information and updates. To this end, thematic weeks and regular meetings must be planned and communicated. Such (mostly virtual) community events increase solidarity and the integration of the community members.

#### Tips and tricks:

The members of the community should have an incentive to provide feedback or actively participate in the exchange of information. Thematic weeks are a perfect starting point in this regard.

### Conclusion

Against the background of increased remote working and the home office, along with reduced personal contacts, communities are a tool for disseminating knowledge about new

applications and processes within the company. Communities ensure that personal contacts are maintained and a steady process of change is promoted even during volatile periods – accompanied by significant increases in motivation and efficiency.

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