

FACING THE INFLEXIBILITY OF THE CURENT SYSTEM: CONSTRUCTION OF "KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITIES"

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Over recent years much has been said about knowledge communities at the European Research Agency (ERA), thanks to the launch of the [European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#). A Knowledge Community is a structured, legal and financial collaborative association of teams distributed internationally but with a common subject matter. The main objective: to coordinate research activities carried out by different typologies of agents throughout Europe.

They are **communities of interest** who meet to share knowledge and who affect action and operate independently from the traditional organizational structure to search for common elements in their field of interest, they are virtual knowledge communities without frontiers and who are not constrained by physical barriers that establish a chain of complete innovation: from education to economic impact.

Followers of knowledge management consider that a critical factor for the success of knowledge management is the creation of a cultural domain that encourages the exchange of information. Sharing information and knowledge requires a balance between the individual's natural instinct to share his or her work and receive recognition for it and the instinct to protect, which recognizes that creative knowledge can give an organization or individual a competitive advantage.

Faced with this inflexibility it is necessary to formalise a **Knowledge Community** domain as a tool that makes it possible to modulate the creation and dissemination of knowledge and also to establish circuits and mechanisms that facilitate access and collective use by the community of such knowledge.

What is that tool? A viable proposal is the **Community of Practice** (CoP)

Communities of Practice are "*groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly*" ([Wenger, 2002](#)).

Launching Communities of Practice and their dissemination not only makes it possible to **generate, transfer and disseminate knowledge** on the subject of interest in the Knowledge Community, but also facilitates the definition of strategies to generate research and economic activity, as well as carrying out projects that have an impact through the generation of new activities.

For a Community of Practice to be effective, its **members must share** three main premises:

- Each member of the Community must share his or her knowledge based on the principle of reciprocity and mutual commitment
- People who make up the community must have common, but not homogeneous objectives and needs
- The different components of the community must have a shared repertoire, routines, words, tools, expressions developed among all the members

Communities of Practice are also the **ideal tool for the structuring and introduction of Knowledge Communities at the time of globalization and growth in 2.0 processes** in which we are immersed.

They are also an element of asynchronous communication, as they offer huge possibilities for Knowledge Communities:

- No spatial, territorial or time limits
- All members of the Community have the same chances to participate
- Involvement of members will have greater visibility
- Group memory is maintained
- Low cost

This means that Communities of Practice are an **exceptional tool to help create effective**

networks, because they revitalise communities at the same time as giving support, facilitating tangible results through collaborative work and favouring the relationship between members of Knowledge Communities and others interested in their area of work.

What are the keys then to the success of a Knowledge Community?

- Establishing a Community of Practice to further communication from the word go
- Communication, communication and more communication
- Constant dissemination of information and knowledge
- Identification of leadership to keep the Community alive
- Identifying other existing communities in the same field to generate channels of communication and transmission of knowledge, or, find joint forms of work
- Giving complete freedom to members of the community to participate in and use the Community of Practice
- The Community of Practice should grow and become consolidated both in the number of members and the quality of the results of their collaborative work

What are we waiting for?

Reference:

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. and Synder, W. (2002), *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press.

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