

Visualizing Community

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Politics of Learning

IIR Communities of Practice Conference

October 26th, 1999

Implementing CoPs is easy! Not!

- *Can't just send out a memo telling people to "Learn!"*
- *Can't pull up a CoP's "knowledge P & L" statement on the accounting system*
- *Can't draw sharp boundaries around CoPs*
- *Can't just hop on CoP bandwagon....*

Challenging characteristics of CoPs

- *Complex: everyone sees a different facet*
- *Subtle: “identity” & “agency” hard to see*
- *Situated: participation affects what we see*
 - Inside & outside of CoPs look different
 - Which community shapes my views?
- *What “outsiders” think matters a lot, yet they can’t see inside other people’s CoPs*

Visualizing CoPs: necessary and challenging

- *Visualize: make something visible to eye*
- *Visualizing CoPs matters when we*
 - Intervene or participate in CoPs
 - Cross CoP boundaries
- *Joint visualization is tough but important*
 - Coordinate actions or build infrastructure
 - Assess or justify work for or in CoPs

Learning Histories for community visualization

- *Invented in organizational learning (OL) community*
 - Showing bottom line impact of soft issues
 - Need collaboration & cooperation to succeed
- *Borrowing from OL experience & effort*
 - Learning history is ideal tool for representing or visualizing subtler aspects of communities

Ford use of and experience with learning histories

- *Using Ford experience to visualize the potential of learning histories (LH)*
- *Who did the visualizing and what did they see using a learning history?*
- *LH shared with executives, network leaders and new employees*

Source: Dance of Change, p. 467

Senior managers at Ford

- *Known to read LHs—page by page!*
- *Occasional mysterious support from top*
- *OK to show learning—warts and all*
- *“LHs made our efforts credible....”*

New Employees at Ford report

- *Surprising appreciation of LH*
- *Forewarned about steep challenges*
- *Attuned to:*
 - importance of walking the talk
 - recognize who “walks” and who “just talks”
- *Introduced prototyping*

Other leaders at Ford report

- *LH was valuable to*
 - Expose leaders to new techniques
 - Glimpse organization's culture as a whole
- *Most useful as a mirror to see*
 - That looking inward is necessary
 - Double-talk, ambiguity and ethical issues sooner

What could we borrow from LHs?

- *More than unusual text layout*
- *Mature practices around producing*
- *Mature practices around using*

First: consider CoP requirements & issues

CoP requirements & issues

- *Our borrowing should be guided by:*
 - Understanding learning as a social process
 - CoP-building should be felt but not seen
 - Tuning into a new audience is real learning

Understanding learning as a social process

- *Drama: Learning experienced and seen*
 - As experienced, learner's perspective
 - As observed, benefiting from other's learning
- *Dramatic form to present “other people's dialog”*

CoP-building should be felt but not seen

- *Making our contribution “visible enough”*
 - How much did we actually do?
 - Celebrating failures?
- *Observing the space for learning*
- *Intimacy & sense of safety*
- *Reflective questions as intervention*

Tuning into a new audience is real learning

- *Resolving conflicts between needs of:*
 - Reaching a management audience: \$
 - Reaching other practitioners: getting free heckles
- *Telling and re-telling the story around the camp fire*

Reaching a management audience

- *A “privileged community” shaped by*
 - Focus on producing “value”
 - Learn from each other not school or text books
 - Offering reflection on LH to repertoire
- *Our conversations with managers*
 - Entering their communities
 - Bringing our stories, voices, situation
- *Working back from noticeable results*

Reaching other practitioners

- *How central is our support role?*
- *Who plays a key role in supporting CoPs?*
- *Are we part of a community of practice?*
 - Formality
 - Generality
 - Utility
- *What is our learning strategy?*

Artifact benefits summary

- *Dramatic form of RH/LH column analysis*
- *Effort to represent the space*
- *LH Imperatives:*
 - Rigor: exact quotes
 - Business purpose: noticeable results
 - Mythic truth: simple truths to new audiences

Process benefits summary

- *LH research & writing*

- Lots of listening
- Making sense of change
- Balancing many “imperatives”

- *LH “dissemination”*

- Approving publication as walking the talk
- Sharing, warts and all
- Dialog, celebrating many different views
- Mirror to generate data on the spot

Building our practice

- *Keep writing—about real action—and share*
- *Grow reports & minutes into histories*
- *Use these resources:*
 - Examples from OLC (SoL)
 - Field Manual for Learning Historians
 - Ongoing conversations

Conclusion

- *We need visualization practices, artifacts*
- *LO community provides LH as model*
- *Grafting elements onto existing practices*
- *Our future*

“In 5 to 10 years communities of practice will be as much a part of how people talk about organizations as business units and teams are today.” – Etienne Wenger