UNIVERSIDADE da MADEIRA

Online Communities

"It's all about Online Communities…"

Social Web

by Adriano Lopes

Summary

1. Introduction

During the last 20 years a new social space emerged: <u>Online Communities</u>. These new social spaces frequently have the same purposes than those physical spaces. People come (often) to the Web:

- to share;
- to find;
- to give or ask for information;
- to help;
- or just to meet new people.

Online communities are becoming very common and present in our everyday lives. Now you can use it everywhere (PC and Mobile) and for everything (Fun or Business).

2. Online Communities: Focusing on sociability and usability

"Usability makes things easier to use..."

Introduction to Online Communities: Focusing on sociability and usability →

2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

Introduction

There's no exact definition of online community as the term means different things to different people. In this section will examine some definitions of online communities from different perspectives. After this introduction we're going to see what are weak and strong , commong ground and talk about empathy and trust.

Stay tuned!

But… what is an Online Community? →

2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

But... what is an Online Community?

2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

What is an Online Community?

In 1996 a multidisciplinary group of academics identified the following core characterirstics of online communities:

- Members have a shared goal, interest, need, or activity that provides the primary reason for belonging to the community.
- Members engage in repeated, active participation and there are often intense interactions, strong emotional ties and shared activities occurring between participants.
- Members have access to shared resources and there are policies for determining access to those resources.
- Reciprocity of information, support and services between members is important.

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2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

Strong and Weak ties

The notion of stong and weak ties is useful in further defining relationships. The strength of a tie can be measured by assessing the amount of time invested in maintaining the tie.

These weak-tie groups contain people that share some common interests but not rely on each other for strong emotional support. While Internet helps to support strong ties, such as those between family members, it is particularly good for weak tie relationships. They are important therefore for information exchange, making new contacts and raising awareness about new ideas.

Examples:

- A parent-child relationship is an example of a strong tie;
- The relationship between co-workers in example of weak tie.

2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

Common Ground

Common ground theory provides a framework for understanding how two people or a small group develop shared understanding in a converstation.

For instance, if person 'A' speaks to person 'B' about 'my daughter', the two of them must understand that she is referring to child playing in the living room and not to girls playing in the street three blocks away. The process of acquiring this common understanding is grounding, which varies from situation to situation.

2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

Common Ground (cont.)

Factors that affect the ease with which common ground is established include:

- sharing the same physical space, i.e., co-presence;
- being able to see each other, i.e., visibility;
- being able to hear each other and detect voice tone, i.e., audibility;
- both partners experiencing the conversation at roughly the same time, i.e., co-temporality;
- Etc.

2. OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

Empathy and Trust

Research shows that **empathy** is strongest between similar people and people who share similar experiences, such as people in the same profession or siblings. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in patient support communities, where participants experience similar problems, discomfort and treatment.

Since **trust** seems to similar to empathy, it is likely to be influenced by the properties of the media in a similar way .

One example of successful online trust management is eBay's reputation management system. In this system, ratings of customers' satisfaction of transactions with a particular vender are compiled to provide a history that can be examined by potential customers.

The Great Good Place →

3. The Great Good Place

"Feels like Home..."

3. The Great Good Place

Introduction

Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, converstation is the primary activity and the major vehice for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality.

But there is far more than escape and relief from stress involve in regular visits to a third place

3. The Great Good Place

Examples of Third places

Third places bears to a comfortable home and are located the neighborhood. Some examples of third places are:

- Cafés;
- Coffe shops;
- Bookstores;
- Bars;
- Hair Salons;
- And other hangouts at the heart of a community.

Why Online Communities can also be called Third Places? →

3. The Great Good Place

Why Online Communities can also be called Third Places?

Online communities are almost the same thing as third places, but the main difference is that OC are online while third places are offline:

- Escape or time out from life's duties, relief from stress;

- Neutral ground – individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home or confortable;

- It's public and neutral;

- Is a Leveler – which reduces men to an equality;

- Conversation is the main activity;

- And a home away from home.

4. Cultivating Communities of Practice

"Knowledge is power…"

Introduction to Cultivating Communities of Practice →

4. Cultivating Communities of Practice

Introduction

Chrysler was struggling with the problem of taking too much time (five years, while some competitors took as little as three years) to get a new vehicle to market. So they started using the so called Tech Clubs, and they succeeded in reducing the product development cycle from five to two and a half years, with a corresponding cut in research and development costs.

Through the Tech Clubs, Chrysler realized the value of what today people call "communities of practice".

What is a Community of Practice? →

4. Cultivating Communities of Practice

But... what is a Community of Practice?

4. Cultivating Communities of Practice

What is a Community of Practice?

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

These people don't necessarily work together every day, but they meet because they find value in their interactions.

Communities of practice are everywhere. We all belong to a number of them – at work, at school, at home in our hobbies.

Key to Success in a Global Knowledge Economy →

5. Cultivating Communities of Practice

A Key to Success in a Global Knowledge Economy

Knowledge has become the key to success. It is simply too valuable a resource to be left to chance. Cultivating communities of practice in strategic areas is a pratical way to manage knowledge as an asset, just as systematically as companies manage other critical assets.

Besides contributing to the success of organizations in world markets, they are also competing for talent.

Knowledge Is Social As Well As Individual →

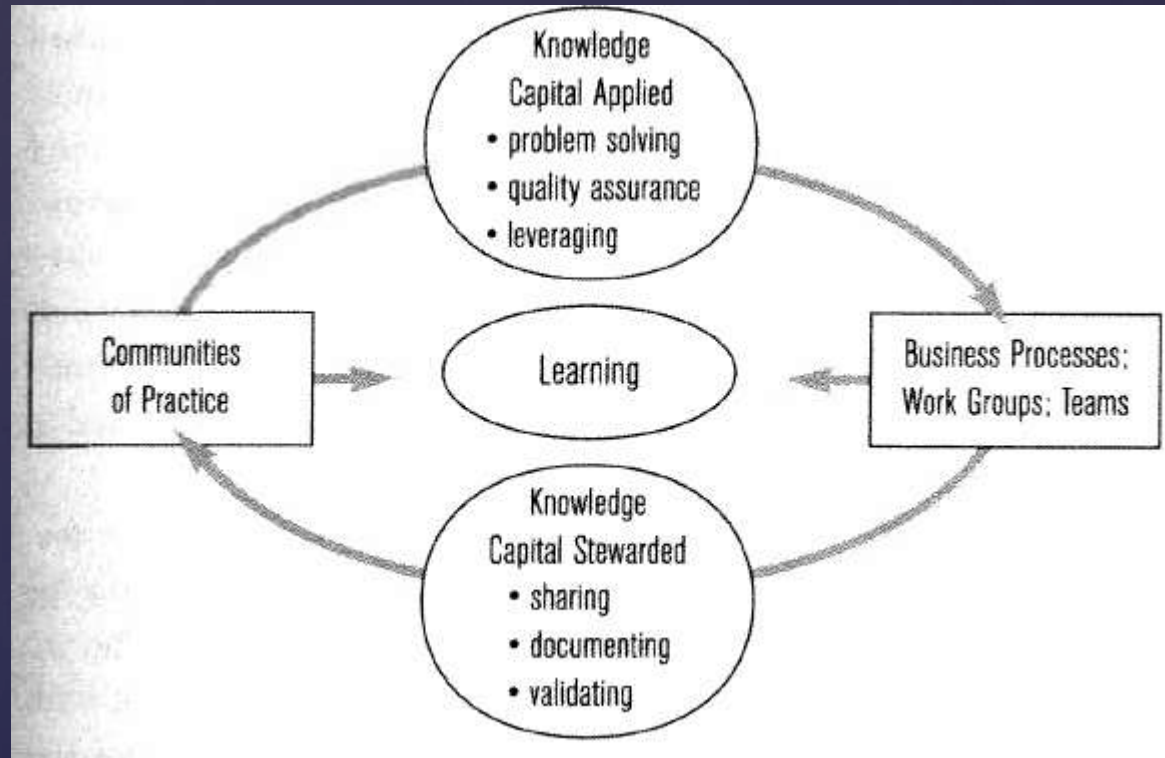# 5. Cultivating Communities of Practice

Knowledge Is Social As Well As Individual

In fact, the best communities welcome strong personalities and encourage disagreements and debates. Controversy is part of what makes a community vital, effective and productive.

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5. Cultivating Communities of Practice

The Learning Cycle

5. Communities of Purpose

"Helping others is a good purpose…"

Introduction to Communities of Purpose→

5. Communities of Purpose

Introduction

As the online world matures, social communities are splintering into groups, with consumers becoming smarter about how and where they spend their time. Shared interest communities and communities of purpose – those with a single aim, or goal – offer brands a great way to target previously hard-to-reach consumer with a very specific demographic profile, need, or interest.

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What is a Community of Purpose? →

5. Communities of Purpose

But... what is a Community of Purpose?

The real answer to "What is a Community of Purpose?" →
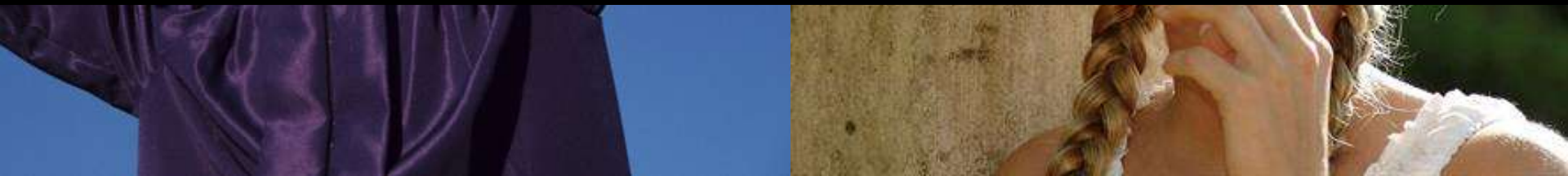
5. Communities of Purpose

What is a Community of Purpose?

A Community of Purpose can be defined as an online community of people with a common, clear, defined goal.

They have a particular cause!

Examples:

That could be a community that helps you give up smoking, supports students through university, or aims to raise money (or awareness) for a particular cause.

Tips for creating a community of purpose →

5. Communities of Purpose

Tips for creating a community of purpose

Any community should be clear in its purpose, and in defining the time it will take to achieve that purpose.

Here is the list of things a brand should consider:

- Create the 'burning imperative'.
- Bring value.
- Stay relevant to your brand.
- Agree the timeframe for the community.
- Set goalposts, to motivate users.
- Set clear guidelines.

5. Communities of Purpose

Communities of Purpose Vs. Communities of Practice

Communities of Purpose	Communities of Practice
• Online community of people with a clear and defined goal.	• Online community of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic.
• Particular cause (cancer, stop smoking, have a better life, etc).	• Knowledge is shared (how to master Java, C# or how to reduce cost and time to build a car?).
• Purpose is king!	
• Examples: AMI, ONU, National League against Cancer, Uma's Students Union, etc.	• Knowledge is king (and is the main reason why the community exists)!
	• Examples: Chrysler, Stack Overflow, MSDN Network, etc.

Online Communities and their impact on Business: Ignore at your Peril →

6. Online Communities and their Impact on Business: Ignore at your Peril

"Brands are your new friends..."

6. OC and their impact on Business

Introduction

Online Communities are an astonishing way for companies to save money in its marketing, support, sales, and even product development. But for most companies, to be online is a kick-ass challenge.

Also user reviews drive product purchases, because the most frequent contributors are the influences, and they have a strong influence on purchase decisions.

Online communities are not created equal →

6. OC and their impact on Business

Online communities are not created equal

Online Communities are not created equal and can be into five broad categories:

- Proximity, where users share a geographic location (Craiglist is an example);

- Purpose, where they share a common task (eBay, Wikipedia);

- Passion, where they share a common interest (YouTube, Dogster);

- Practice, where they share a common career or field of business (many online professional groups fall in this category);

- Providence, where they discover connections with others (Facebook).

7. How To: Manage a Sustainable Online Community

"Sustainability is the key for the success…"

7. How To: Manage a Sustainable OC

Introduction

In a 2008 Gartner study on social software noted that "about 70 percent of the community typically fails to coalesce (is the same as join)." While the measurement and the statistics behind this statement raise questions, there is an element of truth.

There are detrimental effects of over-hyping the technology and then committing the three cardinal sins of running a community.

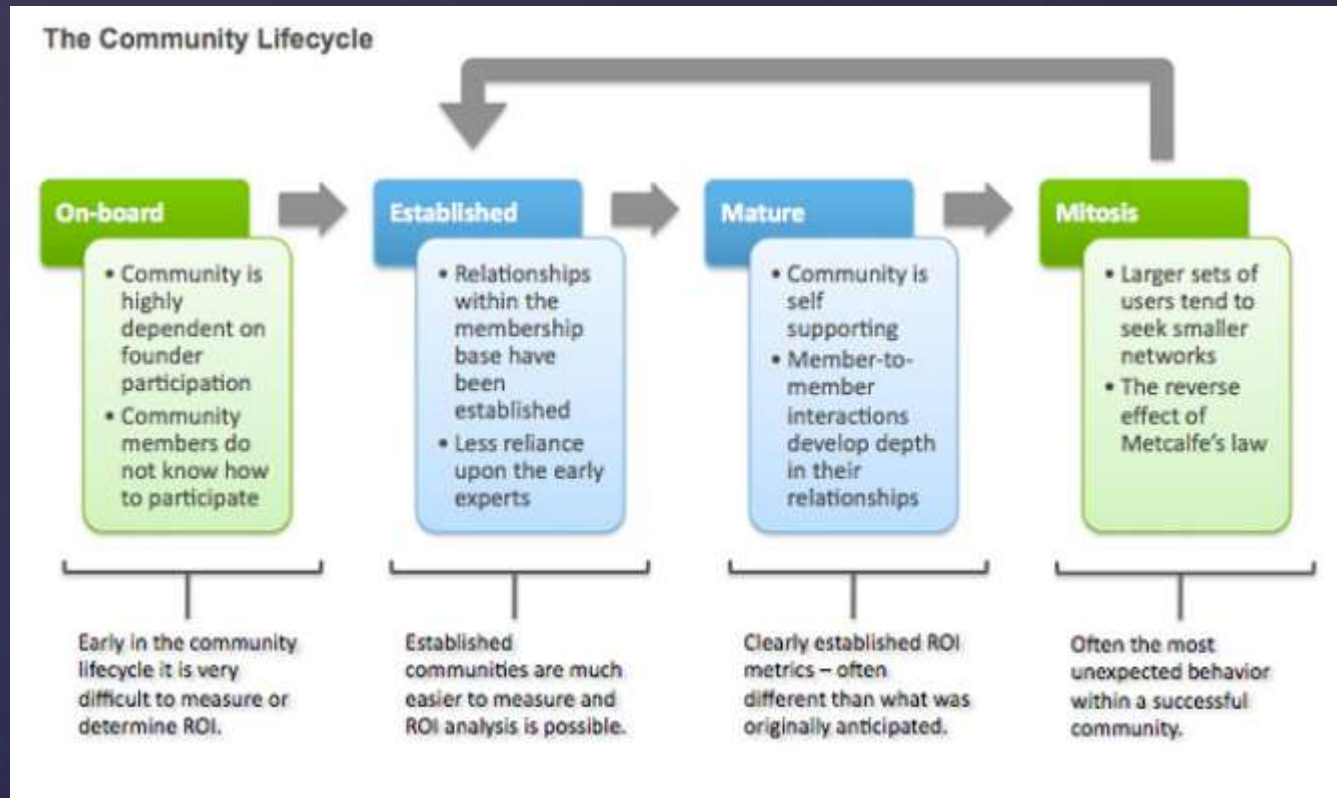# 7. How To: Manage a Sustainable OC

The three cardinal sins of running a community:

- **If you build it they will come**: This is probably the best known online community fallacy.

- **Once I've launched it, I'm done:** Many communities launch successfully, only to fade out and disappear.

- **Bigger is better:** The assumption that the overall size of a community is indicative of its success.

7. How To: Manage a Sustainable OC

Understanding the Community Life Cycle

The Community Lifecycle

On-board
- Community is highly dependent on founder participation
- Community members do not know how to participate

Early in the community lifecycle it is very difficult to measure or determine ROI.

Established
- Relationships within the membership base have been established
- Less reliance upon the early experts

Established communities are much easier to measure and ROI analysis is possible.

Mature
- Community is self supporting
- Member-to-member interactions develop depth in their relationships

Clearly established ROI metrics – often different than what was originally anticipated.

Mitosis
- Larger sets of users tend to seek smaller networks
- The reverse effect of Metcalfe's law

Often the most unexpected behavior within a successful community.

How is value perceived? →

7. How To: Manage a Sustainable OC

But... How Is Value Perceived?

The answer to "How is value perceived?" →

7. How To: Manage a Sustainable OC

How Is Value Perceived?

Community life cycles are often portrayed as simple linear progressions, with the goal of "maintenance" once maturity is reached. However, I have found that a community has unique characteristics that conflict with many of the preconceived notions of success. While the value of the community to its creators increases as membership increases, the value to individual members may diminish.

8. Conclusions

But what I've learned about Online Communities?

8. Conclusions

I've learned a lot!

One aspect regarding online communities which impressed me during the entire research was their great potential for facilitating social interaction on an equal or higher degree than traditional social structures. Three great examples are: communities of practice and of purpose and third places. In my opinion, due to their astonishing capabilities regarding communication and information, they serve as potentailly optimal candidates for social spaces.

Last but not least it's important to undestand the community lifecycle to create a kick-ass Online Community that is sustainable!

Regards,

Adriano Lopes

Now it's time for **Brainstorming!**

Tell me your thoughts about the topics I presented, in the 10 minute question-and-answer session.

What's Next?
10 minute question-and-answer session →

OC: Focusing on sociability and usability

Questions:

☙ What's an Online Community?

☙ Do you think it's possible to have many (+300) strong ties?

☙ In page 6, the author talks about the Emergence of online communities where he says "The listserver, bulletin board and chat that supports many of today's online communities changed comparatively little during the last twenty years."
What is your opinion about this afirmation?

☙ What Online Community websites (like Facebook) can learn from the reputation system used in other OC websites?

☙ The afirmation of the author says "Communities for professionals and others who share knowledge and resources are often referred to as 'communities of practice' to..." is a good point as the main interest in Communities of Practice is to share knowledge that is gonna help in a given task or job.
Why Communities of Professionals are often referred as "Communities of Pratice"?

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Questions about The Great Good Place →

The Great Good Place

Questions:

- How can online communities use this idea from Third Places?
- In third places the people status disapper? Or the third places are related with the status of the person?

Questions about Cultivating Communities of practice →

Cultivating Communities of practice

Questions:

- Can communities of practice create better workers? Why?
- Do communities of practice help solve problems? Why?
- Communities of practice can be used in any type of organization?
- In Communities of practice Knowledge is King?

OC and their Impact on Business

Questions:

↪ Can really companies save money (on marketing, support, sales and product development) using Online Communities?

Questions about How To: Manage a Sustainable OC →

How To: Manage a Sustainable OC

Questions:

- *Bigger is Better*
  The size of an Online Community is important when to choose what Online Community to use? Why?

The End →

The End

Online Communities Lecture