

## Foreword

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are being increasingly employed in organizations and are probably *the* knowledge management tool today. They are a truly useful knowledge-sharing, transferring and retaining tool, surpassing other intra-organizational networks such as project teams, operational teams, and purely informal networks. They also enjoy far greater success than pure IT tools employed to similar ends. The advantage is that they are based on like-minded people's face-to-face meetings, exchange of experience, discussion and development of best practices etc. on an intra-organizational level, although these activities are often informal and not supported or recognized.

As ever, practice has shown that many intra-organizational CoPs simply do not work while others are truly successful. The thesis provides the readers with some surprising insights into the nature of CoPs and the specific contributing factors.

Stefano Borzillo's meticulous research started off by examining a large variety of CoPs by means of six identified success factors. The results of Stefano's investigation revealed three types of CoPs, which he calls "innovating strategic", "operational excellence", and "social and productive space" CoPs and which may all three be present within a single organization. Another insight in this regard was that each of them is suited to fulfill different objectives and that there is no one type of CoP that is best for managing the development and transfer of practices. The latter is determined by the CoPs' objectives, which are again determined by the organizational context.

Stefano Borzillo also describes each of these CoP configurations' success factors. His research may therefore well be the beginning of an interesting insight that there are configurations of success factors associated with the different orientations and context variables in the different CoPs. This naturally offers an opportunity to identify specific guidelines, which makes the book even more interesting, as studies offering guidelines refer to CoPs in general and mostly specifically refer to inter-organizational and not intra-organizational CoPs.

It was only through a pain-staking and time consuming analysis that Stefano Borzillo was able to get the heart of the matter and identify each type of CoP's configuration of success factors, each of which he describes in detail and illustrates by means of one exemplary case study from Siemens, Oracle and the United Nations respectively. These case studies are no small matter as they, as well as the list of examined CoPs, are ample proof of Stefano's wide knowledge of and familiarity with the most prestigious, globe-spanning intra-organizational communities of practice. They in turn illustrate how appropriate this book is in the current business climate.

However, because eight of the CoPs that Stefano Borzillo examined were unsuccessful, he could prove his point by pointing out that they lacked the configuration of success factors that he had identified for his classification of the three different CoP types. This too contributes to formulating guidelines for intra-organizational CoPs. Theory says that they may mostly self-organize spontaneously, but through his study results Stefano Borzillo proves that they rather need to be guided by clear objectives.

This book definitely provides new insights into and a broader understanding of intra-organizational CoPs and how they can be guided towards success factors. It is a measure of Stefano's skill that despite the high academic standard, the book is easy to understand and read, making it infinitely suitable for managers and students.

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