TEN STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY of PRACTICE

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Preface

This booklet is designed for initiators, organisers and facilitators of Communities of Practice (CoP). Potential participants can also read this booklet to get an impression of what a CoP is.

A wealth of knowledge about CoPs is available in books and on the internet. However, we found little to no information on how to set up your own CoP from start to finish. Who do you ask to participate? How do you ensure that you're actually developing something new? Perhaps these questions require a tool that is used precisely when written guidelines are not enough. Still, we decided to write this booklet. It describes the elements that we believe belong in a CoP and should be included in its preparation. We provide guidelines and ask questions. We list the ingredients, so to speak, but do not give a recipe. The booklet is intended as an invitation to develop your own suitable format based on these ingredients.

We gained a great deal of experience working with CoPs, establishing and connecting networks and promoting new developments, when working in government programmes directed at Learning for Sustainable development and the like. Many of the examples we give come from the world of sustainable development because that is our area of focus, but the steps are applicable in a wide range of sectors. On top of that the examples are mostly Dutch, coloured by a culture of

consultation and negotiation. Still, we think the steps described here are applicable in other countries as well, though you may adapt them to habits and practices in your context. We'd appreciate any comments and feedback in this regard!

We could not have written this without the feedback, sharing examples and inspiration of our colleagues Theo van Bruggen, Caroline van Leenders en Irma Straathof: thank you!

We hope you will forge your own path and enjoy creating something new together within your Community of Practice!

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"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn"

Ten steps for a successful Community of Practice

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE? A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common interest or passion. It is a meeting place where professionals share analyses, inform and advise each other and develop new practices. When the journey begins, the destination is unknown. The aim is to share and build on existing knowledge. Every member can apply it in their own specific situation, in order to then pass on this new knowledge to a larger circle. This includes individual skills as well. Through the free exchange of knowledge, insights and experiences, professionals work hands-on with others to learn and develop new ways of dealing with problems and challenges. A CoP therefore provides an open and experimental learning environment. What ties participants to a CoP is a shared sense of urgency, a difficult issue, and the need and ambition to solve it. Everyone focuses their efforts on the same issue. Learning and developing together in a CoP is a way to work smarter, faster, better and more cost-effectively. What connects people is their love for what they do and the professional pride that goes with it. They identify with and appreciate each other in this regard.

DIFFERENCE WITH OTHER TYPES OF LEARNING. A CoP differs from other groups such as organisational units, (project) teams, informal networks and communities of interest. The differences mainly lie in

the objective and nature of membership. A CoP goes further than communities of interest and informal networks because it has a collective task. An organisational unit focuses on delivery of a product or service by a group of employees who report to the same manager, and (project) teams focus on a specific work process or special project based on an assigned task.

WHERE AND WHEN SHOULD YOU USE A COP? The method of a CoP is too intensive if its only goal is to improve an existing practice or answer a question through scientific research. The purpose is not to solve a known problem or make small adjustments to existing routines (first-order learning). Instructions, step-by-step procedures and knowledge transfer are sufficient in these cases. A CoP is aimed at reforming a situation by examining the underlying patterns and values of the existing issues. Doing so requires input from multiple disciplines, backgrounds and perspectives. This is also known as second-order learning.

The CoP method originally began as a management strategy within multinational companies and is now increasingly being applied to complex (social) issues. Complex issues transcend organisational and sectoral boundaries and affect many different parties. By helping these parties learn and develop together, there is a good chance that suitable solutions will be found and the resulting insights will be put into practice. Within Human Resources Development, attention is also being devoted to informal and social learning within organisations. Because a CoP focuses on behavioural change as well, this is a welcome addition to the current range of learning and development opportunities.

HOW DO YOU SET UP A COP? A CoP can arise spontaneously and exist under various names. The terms 'learning group', 'network' and 'theme group' are also frequently used. Some CoPs are loosely and openly organised, and they may or may not be entirely digital. This booklet is about CoPs that are relatively structured. Such CoPs have been organised and established by an initiator who wishes to achieve a (common) objective through a CoP. There is room for diversity, and members of the CoP actively contribute to and collaborate on the agenda. They hold preferably in-person meetings every six weeks for 12 to 18 months and involve participants from very different backgrounds.

An initiator can use a CoP as a means to achieve something, but it is crucial that participants within a CoP can chart their own course. Facilitators play a supportive role. CoPs cannot be run like projects and programmes with formal planning, control and management mechanisms. Tensions can arise between the initiator who wants to take control and see fast results, and the facilitator who emphasises encouraging and facilitating the community. It's a good idea to pay attention to this possible tensions.

You can also opt to organise a focus group or a type of second circle around the CoP to share experiences and provisional results. You could use the focus group to validate the CoP's results as well.

Step 1   *Clarify your focus*

A clear path towards a surprising destination. When you start setting up a CoP, you should be aware that the end result will not be clear yet. The outcome will be determined by the group and will develop underway. Existing solutions and routines no longer suffice, and you will not know exactly how an ambitious objective can be achieved. It's quite difficult to explain. A CoP is a process of seeking and learning that can easily go off in all directions if you do not define a clear path. If the domain is formulated too broadly, the process will be limited to knowledge exchange. The practices in this case will vary too widely to allow for sufficient focus. Before staring a CoP, you should therefore be sure to clarify the specific issue you will focus on and the main questions you will explore together. The hallmark of a good CoP is the group's sharper and sharper focus on a specific issue. A clearly defined domain provides a solid foundation and a sense of shared identity. Clarity on the issue and scope are also necessary to attract the desired mix of participants. Questions are worthwhile if they have the potential to mobilise a group of people. Speak their language and identify the challenges at different levels: for the professional field or discipline, for the organisation and for the individual. Don't be too concrete, though. There should be room for free ideas, thoughts and visions, as well as room to experiment. Don't be too broad either, since this will make things too abstract.

The Sustainability Hubs CoP had to provide initiators with various models of hubs within sustainability networks and identify the necessary ingredients for a well-functioning hub. The initiative to start a CoP was linked to the emergence of networks of organisations focused on sustainable development. By explicitly focusing on parties that were working on sustainable education and wanted to position themselves in these emerging networks, a clearly defined domain was formed. This shed light on who would be interested in participating in the CoP.

The choices resulted in the following invitation: 'The participants in the CoP will include a select and diverse group of 15 to 20 people who are passionate about sustainability and believe in the power of education, are open to furthering their personal and professional growth, want to achieve real results and are in a position to make an impact on their own organisation and environment.' This was enough to attract the interest of 21 participants from different types of organisations. They worked on their own cases and developed three models of sustainability hubs as a collaborative result: a hub as a meeting place, as a mobilising source of information and as a partnership to collectively bring about sustainability in practice. These models provide the sector with a guide for future development.

IDENTIFY THE DOMAIN You need to have a clear focus area, specific questions to explore, a shared identity and a diverse group of participants. This can be accomplished by taking into account:
- The domain of the CoP. What is this CoP's focus? Which problem is being solved? What will it look like once the problem is solved? Make a YouTube video of this in your head: what do you see? What do you hear? How does this make you feel? Who will do what?

You should go through these questions a few times and discuss them with others.

- A distinctive practice. Think about the kinds of functions, roles and activities that tie the participants to the CoP. This way you can get a clearer picture of your domain and thus your potential participants step by step, and discover which practices and networks you can use to connect with them. You can also ask potential participants who they would like to join.
- A results-oriented approach. What does this CoP aim to deliver, and for whom? For the individual participants, for the organisations where the participants come from, for the field or system that the CoP's issue concerns, and also for the initiator of the CoP.
- To get a picture of the environment, you can perform a stakeholder, causal or sociotechnical problem analysis. This will give you an overview of the playing field and/or the essential questions involved. For more information, check out https://www.transitiepraktijk.nl/en/.

Step 2   *Unite around urgency*

The more urgent an issue is, the better it is for a CoP. Sometimes you see small developments and signs that all point in the same direction. You see the theme repeatedly come up in politics, society and government policy, or perhaps at conferences, in magazines and in personal conversations. You can no longer dismiss it as an isolated incident. It is a pattern or trend. You have to do 'something' about it.

An urgent problem immediately gets people on the edge of their seats. The problem is linked to strategic issues that concern a specific group of people. The issue can pertain to a particular topic and it can focus on questions relating to what people can do in the context of the topic.

Urgency arises from policy, an ambition or a commercial necessity. A natural disaster or developments on the global market can also raise specific themes and questions. This could involve social urgency or financial necessity. Bringing people together who are working on these emerging themes can create tremendous power. You can then use that power to find solutions and put them into practice.

EXAMPLE: NEED FOR COLLABORATION TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE
Many municipalities in the Netherlands have been pursuing an ambitious climate policy for years, based on the goal of becoming 'climate neutral'. It is becoming increasingly clear that municipalities

cannot achieve this goal on their own. A municipality has a direct influence on 20% of its CO_2 emissions, while other parties are responsible for the remaining 80%. Municipalities clearly must tackle the climate problem together with society. The *Psychology of the Climate CoP* was launched based on municipalities' ambition to collaborate with other parties in society to achieve their goals. During the CoP meetings, discussions were held with the various stakeholders from municipalities, housing corporations and residents.

The CoP of municipal officials also went on an expedition to Heijplaat, a neighbourhood in the city of Rotterdam. Until then, Heijplaat's journey towards becoming climate neutral had been fairly traditional. The municipal authorities determined the process and asked the residents to share their input. This did not create any dynamism among the residents, while they actually should have been at the centre of the process. The paradigm of the participating municipalities was: 'we have a good plan and we have to get the residents on board.' With the help of feedback techniques and follow-up questions, it became clear that 'How do I get the residents on board?' was not the right question. The question was actually how the municipality and the relevant authorities could give the residents more space and give up more of the control. An interesting reversal. As a result of this insight, a shift was made in the process towards an approach in which residents were given more room to contribute at the neighbourhood level.

By examining and questioning the approach, it turned into: 'Residents have good ideas; what do they need to implement them?'. This is also an example of second-order learning.

Decide whether something is urgent by observing signs in the environment. You can start systematically investigating whether the signs you have observed are seen and shared on a broader scale. How do you do that? A few rules of thumb:

- Assess whether the theme is ongoing or if it will only be relevant for a short time.
- Check (trend) reports or sites to see if these confirm the signs. An example is www.scienceofthetime.com.
- Talk to others about whether they have also seen this theme keep coming up.

If you get more serious about the idea of setting up a CoP, you can start holding discussions with potential participants to discuss what the CoP will focus on and to ask them if they have any questions. These could be questions about content (technical matters, communication, commercial aspects etc.) as well as personal questions and learning objectives. Talking is the best way to bring people's dilemmas to light and allow them to experience what these are. And in the process, through the sense of urgency, you will already be working to build commitment.

Step 3 *Recruit an attractive group*

In order to carefully assemble your group, the initial phase can sometimes be a process that requires a large time investment. However, this will pay off in commitment and in the quality of the results. Attract a group of competent people to your CoP who share a passion, interest or vision: people who are interesting to each other due to their knowledge and level. Ideally, participants should represent all parties that are relevant to the central issue.

This also means that participants may come from similar or overlapping practices, which will allow them to exchange ideas quickly and more in depth. It is essential that participants have questions of their own. What does each participant want to achieve in this area? Are they eager to discuss questions with others and collaborate in this regard? Participants must be sufficiently committed. The bottleneck is often time. No one ever has time enough. The more the group has to offer due to its diverse composition, the higher the likelihood that individual participants will get enough out of the CoP to justify the time investment. Participants are people who aren't afraid to take part in an uncertain process. They are curious about others' solutions and can reflect on their own actions and those of others.

EXAMPLE: PIONEERS OF BIODIVERSITY FOR BUSINESSES THE *Business and Biodiversity CoP* was established in 2012 via a so-called Dutch Green Deal: a partnership between a social initiative and the government. In the case of the Business and Biodiversity CoP, this took the form of a CoP with companies and government-funded expert process supervision. The companies in the CoP were all very different. They were deliberately selected this way because it maximises the chance that they will learn from each other and it eliminates any competition between them. They differed in terms of sector (food, industry, energy), size (multinationals and very small businesses), core activities and location. As such, it gradually became clear that each company's relationship with biodiversity was different as well.

Sometimes they worked in small groups, categorised based on the relationship with biodiversity: There are businesses that depend on ecosystems and natural resources, such as a beer brewer, a food products supplier and a drinking water company. There are also businesses that do not depend on biodiversity, but instead have a negative impact on it. These mostly include companies that do not use natural resources, such as those in manufacturing and paving. Finally, there are businesses that make a positive contribution to biodiversity because they work with ecosystems or biodiversity as a natural solution. Examples include an estate, an aquaculture farm, green roofs etc. (Bouma and Van Leenders, 2013).

CONNECT UNIQUE PEOPLE WITH THE SAME PRACTICE The ideal size of a CoP is around 20 participants. This is small enough to really get to know each other and work together, but large enough to ensure the necessary diversity. You can select participants based on the CoP's domain and goals.

However, it is equally important that the participants are willing and able to become a community together. What should you be mindful of?

- A broad, diverse group or a select, uniform bunch? It is important that the participants have a similar practice, but even then, people can come from very different organisations and hold very different positions.
- Direct competitors in the same group, or participants from different sectors? Competition can create a feeling of insecurity and thus impede learning. You could therefore opt to admit only one company per sector.
- One or more people per organisation in the same group? Having multiple people from the same organisation provides more continuity and makes it easier for participants to put what they have learned into practice in their own organisation.
- Leaders or followers? Leaders perceive issues as urgent even if their company or those around them disagree. Connecting these pioneers in a CoP facilitates agenda setting and gives them the confidence that they are working on important issues.

You can hold a one-on-one meeting or use an intake form to inquire about the knowledge and practical experience that someone can contribute, existing networks, learning objectives (often a concrete case/project), urgency and ways to organise impact. You could even close the intake process with a joint contract signed by both the participant and the initiator. This establishes that everyone is prepared to add value.
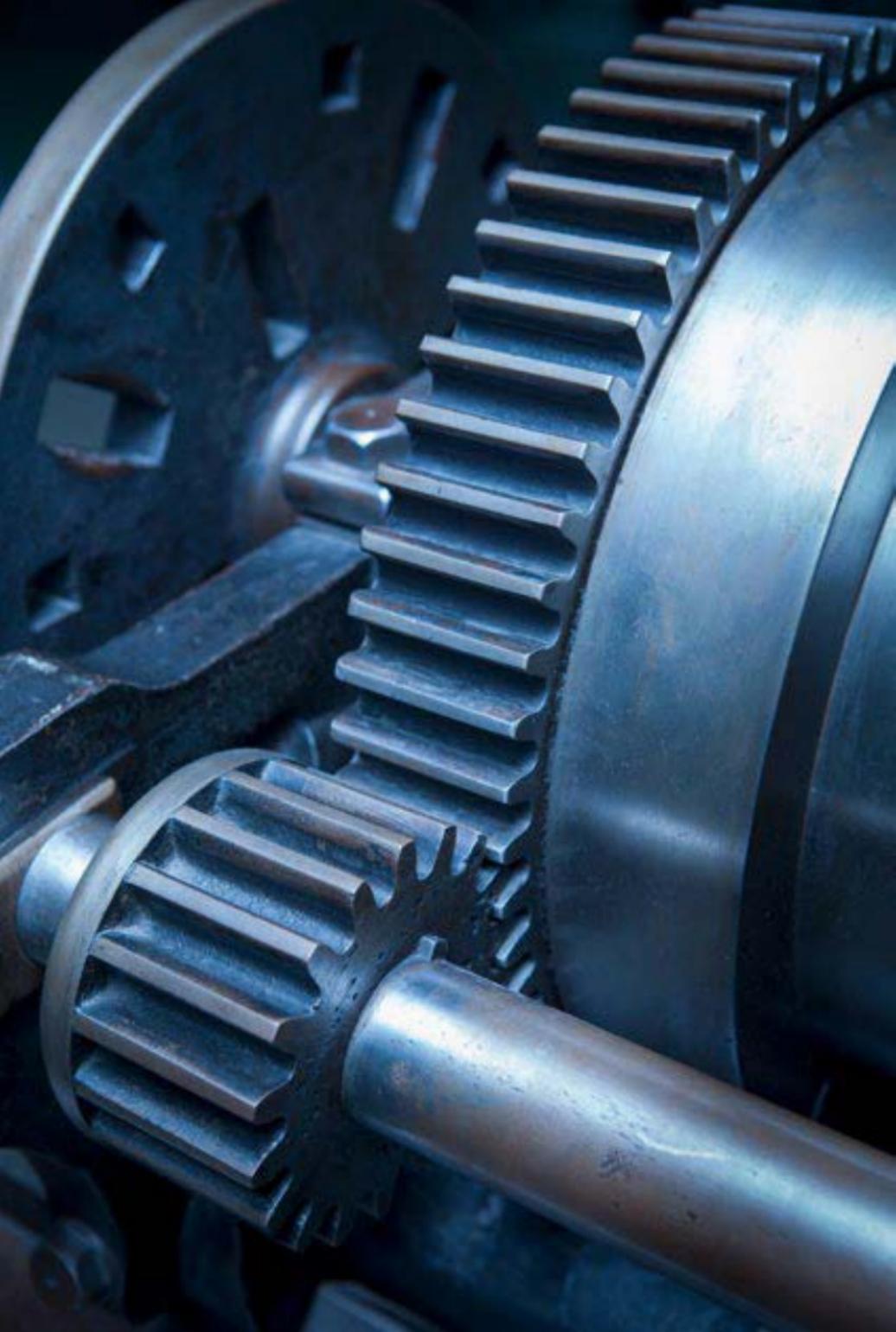
Step 4   *Make an impact*

The aim of a CoP is to start a movement that will continue after the CoP is no longer around. On the one hand, this happens because participants permanently behave differently due to the knowledge and experience they have gained in the CoP. As a result, they will also launch other initiatives in the future. At the same time, however, you want to achieve as much impact as possible at an organisational and professional level. It is therefore important that participants' organisations and the professional field develop along with them. What are the conditions under which this development can occur?

To start, you should ensure that participants establish good connections between the CoP and their own organisations during the lifespan of the CoP. Innovative ideas and new approaches are often difficult to fit within an organisation's existing rules and routines. Participants must make room for new practices by harnessing the powers and forces in the organisation that have an interest in change. As the organiser of a CoP, you can help to make room by bringing the CoP to the attention of managers and executives. You could also create momentum by asking for a contribution to participate in the CoP. Once you have a budget, you will officially exist and you will be asked to provide data for reports. This will generate curiosity and get the attention of colleagues who are unfamiliar with the CoP, thus planting seeds for further growth.

The results of a CoP can be incorporated into government policy, updated tendering guidelines, handbooks and work processes. You can anticipate this by inviting stakeholders to join the CoP or connecting with them in some other way. You can also invite researchers to validate the CoP's results and apply these within their field. This provides the opportunity for impact in scientific publications.

EXAMPLE: IMPACT OF PRACTICE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY When organizing the start of the Dutch CoP *Oneindig Laagland (Infinite Lowlands)*, the period after the CoP broke up was already considered. This CoP engaged participants of several organisations looking for Cradle-to-Cradle area development. The spatial planning of the Netherlands is largely determined at the local level. The national government focused on policy programmes relating to a sustainable living environment. The participants in this CoP therefore came from both municipalities and national government bodies (the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment and the State Property and Development Agency).

The group focused its efforts on five area development projects in the municipalities of Almere, Haarlemmermeer and the Floriade Venlo. Because the participant from the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment was working on the Sustainable Area Development guidelines during the CoP, the results were immediately embedded in government policy. Participants paid a fee to be part of the CoP, which is not very common for a CoP set up by the government. But it was precisely thanks to this fee that the CoP was given a formal place in the different organisations the CoP participant came from. They reported on the group's progress and results in their own organisations. In addition, aldermen and executives from the participating organisations signed a collaboration covenant. This covenant reinforced the agreements on results and knowledge

development to be achieved. Having three participants per project also enabled them to strengthen each other within their own working environment.

LEVERAGE EXISTING STRUCTURES AND MOVEMENTS Be aware of the temporary nature of a CoP and try to organise the conditions for continuity and impact.

Starting points include:
- *Existing tools in the professional field*
  Leverage the conditions that determine behaviour in organisations, such as the pay structure and the usual communication channels. But use tools in the professional field as well: financial schemes, laws and regulations, existing networks etc.
- *A pattern language*
  Create transferable patterns. A pattern describes the core of a design solution. This core can be applied to something thousands of times without ever yielding the same final solution. Patterns are short stories in a fixed format. Once several dozen or hundred patterns have been developed, a pattern language emerges. It ensures that the insights (cores for solutions) are recorded and transferable.
- *Participants' values*
  Make specific themes personal, for instance by asking why the theme is important to the participants themselves and what they need to take the next step.
  - Have a meeting in the organisation of some participants. You can do this in turn. This gives the opportunity to invite and inform high level managers by letting them learn from the Community as well.

Step 5 *Facilitate development*

Perception is largely determined by the past, and not by what we see or hear in the moment. Prior knowledge dictates how we interpret words and situations. In our thought processes as well, we often tend to keep operating within the patterns that were programmed into us during our younger years. Observations are easier to accept if they confirm what we already know. To stimulate development, it is necessary to help participants break out of these kinds of patterns. The facilitator plays a key role in this process. You must be able to recognise and challenge self-evident truths and patterns, and establish an environment for creation and mutual trust. This paves the way for so-called second-order learning: changing the situation by adjusting underlying norms and values.

The pressure of production deadlines, ingrained patterns and hierarchies in organisations often leaves little room for reflection within teams and departments. In a CoP, you can step away from this hectic daily routine. As a leader, you will be expected to have sufficient knowledge of the issue to be addressed, while at the same time focusing on the process. The pitfall is spending too much time on either the process or the content. It is therefore effective to assign these tasks to two co-facilitators, especially in larger groups. One will focus on the content and remain committed to the jointly defined goals and sense of urgency, and the other will facilitate the process.

You will always aim to strike the right balance between the rhythm and dynamics of the group, while also leading the group. Qualities like organisational skills, making clear agreements about actions and working towards a result are therefore important for facilitators as well.

EXAMPLE: MAKING LIVEABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY PERSONAL In their first meeting, the facilitators of the *Liveability and Accessibility CoP* asked the participants to think about what they wanted to accomplish over the course of five workshops, both for themselves and for their organisation. The answers revealed the common themes that could serve as the agenda for the group: decompartmentalisation, communication and participation, an integrated approach, new logic for sustainability and the CoP itself as a social tool. The facilitators brought thematic inspiration to the group from the outside in. Directors and project leaders discussed the tendering process for the tunnel on the Highway A2, through the city of Maastricht, the river widening project in the Overdiepse Polder, highway construction in Watergraafsmeer and area development in Rijnenburg.

The facilitators ensured that specific themes were made personal, for example by discussing the insights gained following the presentation about the river widening project. The facilitators didn't ask about viewpoints, but rather about shared interests and underlying values so that participants could get to know their own values, reflect on them and also see and hear how things could be done differently. In addition, this strengthened the mutual trust and closeness of the community. Another example of making things personal during the CoP meeting while focusing on strategy was having participants introduce themselves based on where they are going (future) and what they are doing now (present) in order to get there.

By asking process-based questions, the supervisors challenged the participants to think from a different perspective and be aware of their own position, actions and influence.

SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE Based on the rhythm and dynamics within the group, the leaders will determine the mix of activities and working methods. They can do this in collaboration with a few (rotating) participants. The following elements can serve as a memory aid:

- Each participant has different sides. Try to appeal to the rational, the physical, the creative and the intuitive. You can do this by asking various types of questions and using a range of working methods. Go crazy!
- Make time in your programme to learn about participant's beliefs, intentions and motivations. Alternate the focus between the content, the individual, the group and the environment. Specific methods include the Theory U (Otto Scharmer) and Theme-Centred Interaction (Ruth Cohn).
- Include variation in your programme between working with the whole group, in small groups or in pairs. The more people, the more ideas, which favours plenary working sessions. People will perceive three participants as a group. Not everyone thrives in a (large) group. Pairs feel safer and encourage participation.
- Harness the power of asking a good question, and wait for the answer. This applies to both the facilitator and the participants themselves.

Step 6   *Place responsibility on the group*

The facilitator in a CoP does not (secretly) seek to achieve his or her own goals. As a facilitator, you work to achieve the ambition of the group and to support the individual and group learning process. But above all, you also place responsibility on the group. Participants are professional, responsible for their own learning process and capable of choosing a direction together. You should make this clear from the start by not only saying it, but above all by conducting yourself accordingly. If you find that you're concerned about something, speak up and don't always try to fix it yourself. This can be uncomfortable, but it is essential to put and keep participants in their roles. Those who participate in a CoP do so out of passion and connection to the issue, the group and its expertise. Their participation is voluntary, but not without obligation.

This means that you as a facilitator must make sure that the participants are collectively in charge when it comes to defining the thematic direction as well as structuring and organising meetings. The group can make decisions about whether or not to invite external experts, for instance. They can also help to determine the approach. Do they want to work on practical case studies, for example, or on general thematic issues? In the kick-off meeting, you can ask participants what they want to do with the shared knowledge. Do they want everyone to sign a confidentiality agreement, or will they

adhere to the Chatham Rules? These rules state that 'participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.' After exchanging different arguments, make sure that the group makes a decision together. This helps to cultivate engagement.

From the start, the programme of the *Local Sustainable Energy Companies CoP* has been determined by the participants involved: municipalities confronted with private initiatives relating to sustainable energy generation. They needed legal, technical and financial knowledge. But they also needed to reflect on the role of the municipality in these kinds of processes. This was translated into a draft design of the programme. In session after session, they asked themselves: 'What is the next step?' A handful of municipalities prepared the material for each meeting. One acted as the host and one or two others brought in a case study. A common thread quickly emerged.

At the beginning of the process, they explored how a municipality could set up a Local Sustainable Energy Company itself and what this would involve in organisational, legal and political terms. Over the course of the meetings, the emphasis shifted to facilitating the local community in order to help *them* set up sustainable energy initiatives. During the session in Amsterdam, it got very clear that the group had taken responsibility for the content of the programme. The focus of this meeting was a specific nitiative. However, at the moment of the meeting, the political-administrative climate demanded a response from local initiatives and local authorities. The group turned the programme around so that they could provide this response. The result was a Green Deal proposal to the Dutch House of Representatives.

BALANCING BETWEEN LEADING AND LETTING GO. Here are a few rules of thumb that can help you place responsibility on the group.

- As soon you as you find yourself working hard as a facilitator, take a break, sit back and reflect. Think about how you can reverse the roles.
- Ask yourself to what extent you are connecting the participants with their own goals and learning objectives. Remember that participants are driven by their personal motives. These motives give them energy and perseverance. That is intrinsic motivation. Let participants know that they can take action themselves based on new insights, frameworks and concepts. Anything we must learn to do, we learn by doing it.
- If things do not go smoothly with certain participants when it comes to taking responsibility, you can discuss this bilaterally or present it to the group as a case study.
- Giving feedback is an important tool in reflecting and learning, and can also help to assign responsibilities where they belong. By sharing what you notice (hear, see etc.) and how this affects you, you are giving someone valuable information. You can do this as a facilitator. Even more importantly, you should encourage participants to do this amongst themselves.

Step 7　*Act and reflect*

The role of monitoring is to continuously reassess whether the group is still doing the right things. That is to say, pursuing the ambition of the CoP. You can think of monitoring as the CoP's 'conscience': at the individual level of the participants, but above all at the level of the participating organisations and the broader professional field. Monitoring in a CoP is about analysing the activities and learning process of the CoP and its surrounding environment. The results are then fed back into the CoP. This allows the group to reflect on these results. Compare the results with the original ambitions. This provides insight into the developments and lays the foundation for follow-up activities. Reflection focused on action. This type of monitoring is called reflexive monitoring in action.

Monitoring in a CoP serves a different purpose than in projects. It's about learning and making adjustments, not about accountability. If the monitoring insights suggest that it would be better to do so, then you as a CoP can decide to change the programme for the next meeting or revise the intended end result.

The role of monitoring can be assigned to a separate person (the monitor) or to a facilitator. Monitoring itself takes place with the participation of those involved. Monitoring can also help to assess

and, if necessary, adjust problem perceptions, deeper preferences and values (second-order learning).

EXAMPLE: REFLEXIVE MONITORING IN ACTION Reflexive monitoring in action was applied in the *Business and Biodiversity CoP*. The monitor was part of the core supervising team. A central component was the diary in which participants kept track of their progress, experiences and insights. This diary resulted in a learning history for each participant. All thematic questions throughout the CoP were recorded in a dynamic knowledge agenda. Follow-up questions and challenges were included in the agenda for subsequent meetings. For the monitor, the dynamic knowledge agenda is a tool to determine the topics for new meetings. The learning objectives that remain on the knowledge agenda for a longer period of time represent the persistent problems and fundamental questions.

The knowledge agenda of this CoP will be offered to knowledge institutions that conduct research related to the interdisciplinary professional field of business and biodiversity. One of these questions has been further elaborated by a party outside the CoP. Based in part on the learning histories and the answers to the questions on the knowledge agenda, a publication has been created for other companies that want to start working on biodiversity.

At one of the last CoP meetings, a social map was drawn up of the biodiversity network that the CoP participants now have at their disposal. For the monitor, this is a way to examine the participants' surrounding environment and gain insight into changing relationships. An important conclusion in this CoP is that when people collaborate on a biodiversity goal, completely different partners come into the picture compared to a purely economic approach. The group also learned that collaborating with regional partners is

important, since many biodiversity themes are location-specific. An example of this is the partnership between Kruidenier, Heineken and the province of South Holland in the Green Cirkels project.

USE TOOLS Various methods and tools are available for the purpose of monitoring. In addition to the dynamic knowledge agenda, here are a few suggestions:

- Individual notes (individual level). This could include a report of the intake interview about the practical case study, the learning objectives and the highlights of each CoP meeting. By reflecting on the notes, participants can be prompted to take actions that contribute to this practical case study.
- Individual notes make it relatively easy to create a Learning History afterwards. A Learning History is a reflection process in which developments are recorded. It is a story that systematically distinguishes events, the perspectives of those involved and outsiders' reflection on this.
- You can conclude meetings with a brief evaluation that serves as input for the next session.
- Making a social map (organisational level). To get an idea of all the new coalitions and joint initiatives that are underway, you can create a graphical overview of these coalitions, partnerships etc. This provides a clear picture of how knowledge transfer between parties and system levels evolves and spreads.
- An example of a system analysis method (professional field/system level) associated with business projects and the field in which they operate is the Technological Innovation System analysis (Marco Hekkert).

Step 8   *Do new things*

A CoP is aimed at learning while innovating. Participants do not start out from the perspective of learning, but from the perspective of working. They bring persistent issues from their own real-life situations. As such, the focus is often on 'how' questions: how do you make results more sustainable, how do you respond to a rapidly changing environment? It is important that the resulting change in insights leads to a change in behaviour.

Learning and innovating are cyclical processes that take place simultaneously in people, in groups, and in and between organisations. A characteristic of these types of learning processes is that they do not happen on command. However, there are a few rules of thumb for increasing the likelihood that a new practice will emerge. Experience has shown that a CoP timeline of 18 months with meetings every six weeks is optimal for learning, allowing the knowledge to sink in and putting this knowledge into practice.

It is also helpful for participants to work with their own practical case studies. Participants will learn from each other's cases, but can immediately apply their new insights to their own cases as well. As a facilitator, you can keep participants' own practice on the agenda by taking time during each meeting to look back on what participants' have actually done differently up to that point and by focusing on activities in between meetings.

In the *Oneindig Laagland CoP (Infinate Lowland CoP)* for a 'cradle-to-cradle' approach to area development, new solutions to the same issue were put into practice in different ways. Various participating municipalities encountered the problem of having ambitious sustainability goals that were not being safeguarded in practice. As a result, sustainability would often fall to the wayside in the execution phase. In Almere, this specifically concerned a new housing development that was scheduled to be built. Everything is normally set out in a zoning plan, but the municipality wanted sustainability and organic urban development in the neighbourhood. During the CoP meeting, participants worked on this issue in small groups, with each group taking a different perspective. There was a growing understanding that there should be room for future developments, and that this space can actually be included in a zoning plan: a new idea at the time.

As a solution to the same issue of safeguarding sustainability, Haarlemmermeer developed a tender in which parties concluded innovative contracts with the municipality and amongst themselves as a 'smart coalition'. The idea behind this approach is to outsource the problem and not the solution. The municipality provided scope in this regard as well, in this case by specifying only a few roles in the tender for the development of the area. By choosing not to define any hard agreements or procedures, but instead forming partnerships and involving executives, the municipality built flexibility into the project's implementation. Taking part in the CoP allowed the municipality to experiment with this type of solution and focus more on participation in the project.

A CONSCIOUS APPROACH In order to experiment with new behaviour, you must be aware of the current behaviour and any obstacles to changing it. Participants can use a little push when it comes to reflecting on and experimenting with new behaviour. What can you do? A few options:

- Backcasting: starting with the future and working backwards towards the present. You start with one or more desired visions for the future and reason your way back to the current situation from there. You can ask questions like: what is important to you and what does it look like once you have achieved this? What do you need to get there? Who will help you? This will give you an idea of the steps that are needed over time to realise that vision for the future.
- Make agreements about taking steps by participants in between meetings and provide feedback to the group. You can work with 'buddies' who call each other or share interim reports in the meantime.
- A great way to try out new behaviour is through role playing. And in the CoP itself, the facilitator can also pay attention to actual and desired behaviour (based on the learning objectives). This will allow you to use the CoP as a practice setting for new behaviour among participants. Have the participants keep a logbook of their actions and insights.
- Divide the participants into small groups during meetings and have them ask each other about their own practice. Use objects, drawings and creative working methods to involve both sides of the brain. This will allow you to tap into the multitude of perspectives and the strength of the group, and bring them one step closer to doing so on their own.

Step 9   *Identify results and communicate*

Make sure your programme includes time and attention to discuss the results and share them with others, both during the lifespan of the CoP and afterwards. One of the pitfalls of CoPs is that they can go unnoticed by the management of organisations where participants come from. Managers are not always aware of their employees' social and learning networks. It is important to show that each participant's time investment will deliver demonstrable results for their organisation. Take time to do this. Communicate and show what you are up to!

The value that a CoP adds to an organisation can be expressed in various ways. When applied in practice, the knowledge, tips, methods, tools and networks of CoP participants have direct value for their organisations. Changing or improving procedures and tools also brings added value. Less noticeable, but certainly just as valuable, are the insights, relationships and knowledge that participants gain. The potential value of these contributions only becomes clear later on.

You may be less explicit about individuals' professional competencies in your external communication due to their confidential nature. Participants themselves will have to share this knowledge with their managers and team members.

When communicating results in the professional field, you can utilise the relevant existing channels: trade journals, newsletters, courses and training programmes. Ensure that fellow professionals can access the insights from the CoP via networks, presentations, publications, social media and workshops. Offering different interpretations and opinions about the CoP's results will increase the possibilities for reflection and technical development, thus boosting the effect of the CoP.

In publishing the results, you will also be accountable to any client(s) and/or initiator(s) of the CoP. They will want to know how the CoP has contributed to the objective, for example by working on a system innovation for Green Growth.

EXAMPLE: TRANSFER OF APPROACH TO PROBLEM NEIGHBOURHOODS VIA PUBLICATION The *Community Approach CoP* included participants from 18 cities, the national government and social housing organisation Aedes. The CoP focused on how to address 40 disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. By embedding the strategic consultation between the national government and the cities in this learning environment, the opportunity arose to direct the community approach via partnership. This offered cities the chance to influence national government policy, and gave this government the opportunity to organically integrate policy at the local level. The practical solutions and opportunities generated by this CoP have been compiled in a publication. The notes are a mix of lessons learned by the participants themselves, input from CoP guests and reflection on the discussion that was held. This publication is aimed at providing knowledge about the CoP approach and the community approach to other cities facing the same issues. For people who are new to the community, it is also a way to bring them up to speed on the situation and facilitate a smooth transition.

GO OUTSIDE Multiple roads lead to Rome, as the saying goes. Here are a few:

- Spend two days working with participants to create a publication or film which they can then use in their own environment. Keep the agenda in mind and have participants reflect on what they have achieved for themselves, for the thematic issue and for the organisation where they work.
- Ask relevant scholars to respond to the outcomes of the CoP and organise a dialogue on this.
- Organise a workshop or course component for colleagues of the CoP participants in which participants give the presentation(s).
- Identify the common thread in the CoP meetings yourself and check if the participants agree. Then, publish the results.
- Allow participants to ask questions if they find it difficult to state what they have learned.
- Use the timeline method. Highlight the important moments in the lifespan of the CoP. Based on this, you can ask the participants to describe the initial situation, what happened and the subsequent effects. Help them be specific about where that effect can be seen, measured or experienced.

Step 10 *What will your CoP look like?*

What do you think is important in your CoP?

When setting up a CoP, this means:

Who will help you?

'Our Common Future 2.0: Roadmaps for Our Future Society'
The core aim of the Our Common Future 2.0 project was to develop an inspiring vision for the society of tomorrow with a group of 300 volunteers in a short period of time. What dream do we have in mind, and in which area? And once that is clear, what should we start working on now? The starting point is the idea that people will think and act differently if they have a new perspective to work towards. A large group of people who did not know each other beforehand collectively wrote the book 'Duurzaam Denken en Doen' (*Thinking and Acting Sustainably*). This was the basis for a large-scale final conference held in the Netherlands on 20 May 2011.

Economy Transformers
A fundamental reorientation of the economy: that was the initiator's ambition in 2009 when she gathered a team of people and a steering group, a patron and a process supervisor. An important starting point was to bring together people with diverse backgrounds, perspectives and experiences. What started with 40 people has now grown to 500. All are highly committed, with a strong ability to enact change. Creating new theories and practices goes hand in hand with personal leadership and growth, after all. The group focused on in-depth mental exercises and sharing personal stories and reflections on our relationship with things like property, as well as on collective perceptions of the past and future, nature, silence, physical activity, musical reflection of the group process and good food. For details on the change dimensions and new activities, see:
www.economytransformers.com

Published in English in this series

- » Ten tips for clever change, Caroline van Leenders (2009)
- » Ten opportunities for dynamic public servants, José Andringa, Liane Lankreijer, Caroline van Leenders, Lidwien Reyn (2012)

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