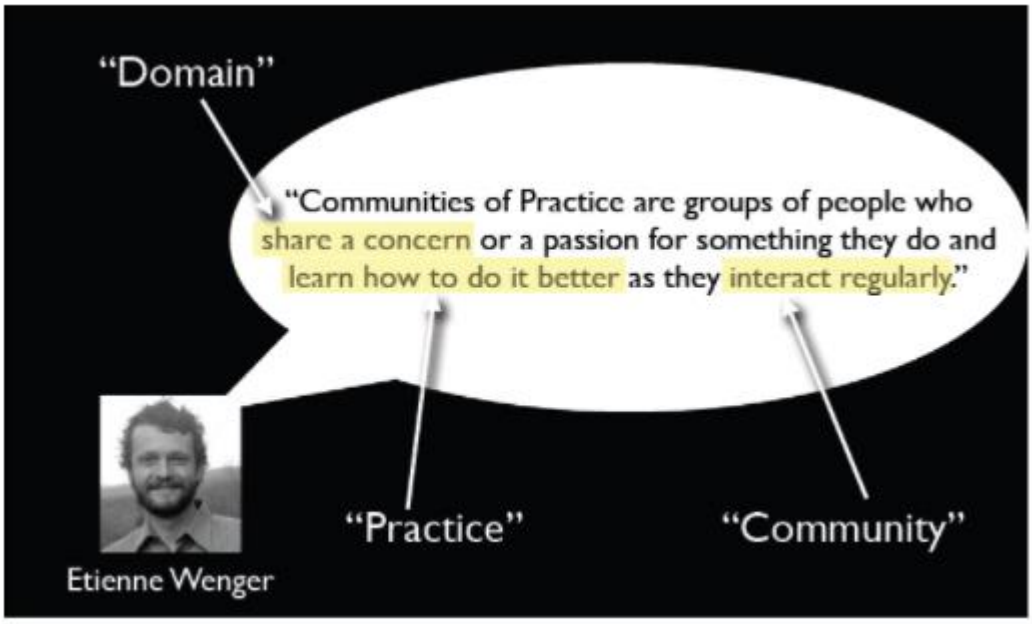
*Excerpted from "**Exploratory Research on Designing Online** Communities," US Dept of Education, 2014*



Key Questions for Community Designers

The community evolution research on newly launched communities, combined with the design research on project-led communities and applications of learning analytics, suggest key questions that community designers should ask about community focus, leadership and stakeholders, the role of resources, public versus private, adapting technology, recruiting members, sustaining engagement, ongoing formative evaluation and addressing specific community management challenges through learning analytics.

Community focus

- **What Is the Community's Purpose?** What problem is it trying to solve? What opportunity is it intended to take advantage of? Why is this significant?
- **Who Is the Core Audience?** Which educators will need to become active in the community for it to achieve its purpose? Will the focus be on a role-alike group or a more heterogeneous collection of educators? Will the scope be local, regional, national, or global?
- **How Will Users Participate?** What kinds of activities and interactions do you envision? Where, when, and by what means will members connect with each other?
- **What Value Does Your Community Add to Educators' Practices?** What will motivate educators to participate actively in the community? What areas of their practices that they are motivated to improve will it address and how?
- **What Differentiates Your Community From Existing Communities?** There are numerous existing means for educators to connect online, and there are likely some that address

purposes and audiences similar to yours. What is distinct about your community that will provide value to educators, students, schools, and districts that these other communities and networks do not? What kinds of collaboration with other social learning spaces might be advantageous?

Leadership and stakeholders

- **Who Are the Community's Leaders?** Will staff of the sponsoring organization lead the community? Will members of the community itself serve as leaders?
- **What Are Their Roles?** What roles will different leaders play, and what competencies are needed for each? How will leaders be supported and recognized?
- **Who Are the Key Stakeholders?** Who are the sponsors of the community? Whom might the activities of the community affect, directly and indirectly, and how?
- **Who Will Help Inform Decisions About the Community?** How will the needs of all stakeholders be determined and addressed? Are some more important than others?
- **How Will Decisions Be Made About the Community?** What role will sponsors have in directing the work of leaders and providing them with the support they need? What say will community members have in determining the community's priorities and activities?

Role of resources

- **What Role Will Resources Play in Your Community?** Are they a means for members to learn from each other or is access to or the production of resources an end in itself?
- **How Will Resources Align with Your Community's Focus?** What kinds of resources align with the community's objectives and values? Which are likely to be useful to the community's intended audience? What genres and media are likely to be most accessible?
- **Who Is Responsible for Contributing Resources?** Will resources be developed by the sponsoring organization, outside experts, community members, or some combination?
- **How Will You Organize the Resources for Easy Access?** Will resources be organized into preset categories or will categories emerge across time? Who will do the categorization?
- **How Will You Vet the Quality of Resources?** Do community resources need to meet some external standard of quality? Will people externally designated as experts or community members determine quality? How will members' judgments be solicited?

Public versus private

- **What Types of Privacy Issues Might Be Encountered?** How sensitive are the experiences and the artifacts that members will likely need to share advance the community's purpose? How comfortable is your intended audience about sharing practices in public forums?
- **What Is the Appropriate Balance Between Making Practices Public and Fostering Trust?** How much of the knowledge shared and produced through community activities needs to be made public to achieve the community's goals? What level of privacy do

members need to feel comfortable participating frankly and authentically? How can private activities be structured to build confidence in public sharing?

Adapting technology

- **How Can Technology Be Leveraged to Support Your Vision?** What needs for communication, resource exchange, collaboration, and relationship building can technology help fulfill?
- **What Constraints Will Affect the Platforms, Tools, and Features Being Used?** Are there policies about privacy or technology development and use that affect managers or community members that must be considered? What are the budget and the time frame for implementation?
- **What Limitations Does Technology Place on Your Community?** How will the chosen tools constrain as well as enable community activities? How will technology shape members' perceptions of what the community values?
- **What Is the Learning Curve for Members? For Managers?** What is the comfort level of members and managers with learning new technology? How much time are they likely to be able and willing to devote to it?
- **What Technology Issues Might Be Encountered? How Will You Negotiate Them?** When the technology does not work as expected, what will you do to ensure that the community can continue its activities effectively?
- **How Do We Effectively Communicate the Community's Purpose to New Members?** What are the clearest and most concise and concrete ways to help potential members understand why it would benefit them to participate in the community?
- **How Do We Convert Users Into Members?** What are ways to begin participating in the community that have a low barrier to entry and will be appealing to your audience?
- **How Big Can and Should the Community Be?** How many members can the community leadership and infrastructure effectively support? Is there a critical mass necessary for the community to serve its purpose?

Sustaining engagement

- **How Do You Encourage Members to Participate?** What kinds of communication will you continue beyond initial recruitment? What incentives for participation can you offer?
- **How Do You Sustain Engagement?** What will motivate members to participate regularly across time? How can activities be designed to encourage regular and substantive contributions from members?
- **How Do You Support Members in Achieving the Community's Goals?** What tools and services do you need to provide to members to enable their collaborations to bear fruit? How will you work to clarify and modify the community's purpose across time?
- **How Do You Engage Users Who Vary Widely in the Time Available to Commit?** What are reasonable expectations about how often and for how long members will be able to participate? How do you ensure a high-value-to-time ratio for that participation?

Formative evaluation

- **How Do You Define Success?** What does it look like when the community serves its envisioned purpose? At what scale does it need to function? How quickly can it reach its goals?
- **How Will You Measure Success?** How does success translate into specific metrics that can be tracked? What methods for tracking them are feasible and appropriate?
- **What Data Are Most Useful?** What kinds of data are likely to yield actionable information about community activity? How much is enough to inform decision making?
- **How Will You Report Data to Stakeholders?** Which formats for presenting data are appropriate to which groups? How much time do they have to digest it? What skills do they have for working with it?

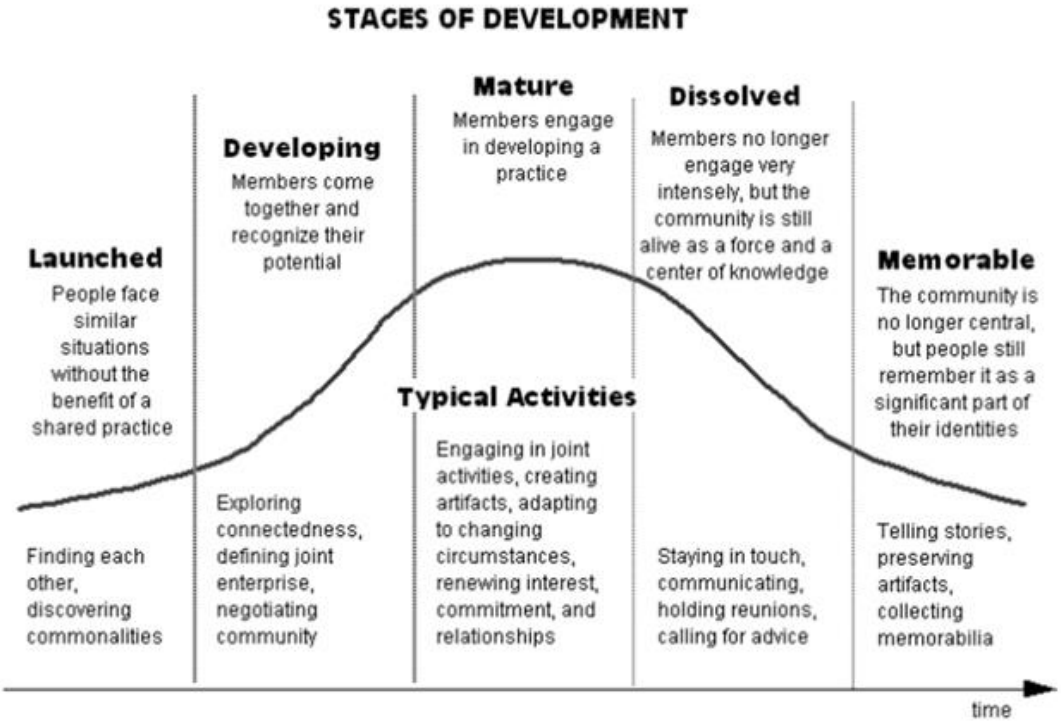
How Communities Create Value

Participation in the online communities of practice studied is voluntary, the participants are diverse, and the activities offered varied widely. Educators come to these communities for different reasons, and what constitutes a productive engagement with the community for one may not for another. For these reasons, it is important to look broadly at the value created through community activity. Depending on the context, the value generated may range from something as immediate as teachers feeling more confident in their work having heard others' experiences to (1) applications of innovative practice in the classroom, (2) measurable improvements in student learning outcomes as a result of those applications, and (3) changes to school and district policy to embrace those innovations.

The research employed the value creation framework developed by Wenger et al. (2011), which was designed to capture the range of values created by participating in communities and networks and begin to understand the relationships among them. Building on a well-established approach for evaluating training developed by Kirkpatrick (1976, 1994), the framework includes five types (or cycles) of value.

1. **Immediate** value is realized directly through community activities and interactions. This is the value that educators experience immediately by participating in the community.
2. **Potential** value is the accumulation of knowledge and social capital that can result from participation. This value could prove useful in the future, including new knowledge, skills, resources, or relationships.
3. **Applied** value manifests itself in changes in practice. This value is generated when teachers apply what they have learned or developed to their professional practices.
4. **Realized** value is improvements in performance. This value results from applying what has been learned or generated by engaging the community.
5. **Reframing** value is changes in what is valued about practice, either individually or collectively. This value is created when educators redefine what success means as a result of their collaboration.

The five cycles of value creation are strongly interrelated but not just linearly. For example, a teacher using a lesson plan that someone else has shared in the community would be an example of applied value. The educator's sharing of evidence of improvements in student work that resulted from using the plan would constitute realized value. Seeing that evidence of realized value might generate immediate value for another educator by giving him or her the courage to try something new.



Source: Wegner, 1998

https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/