

Chapter 1

Best Practices in Social Media for Knowledge Management: With Special Reference to Communities

M. K. Prasanna Iyer
PromptKPO, India

ABSTRACT

The spirit of Social Media is in community building, and they have enriched the practice of Knowledge Management in very exciting ways. CoPs and Forums are ideal platforms to share experiences and lessons learnt. Communities are extremely valuable because of their informal, just-in-time, increasingly real-time advantage and cannot be replaced by structured KM platforms. It is this aspect of communities, that new Social Media enhances, in spirit as well as in tools support. Social Media provides multiple user-friendly tools to make it easy to share experiences and Lessons Learnt as they happen, as well as in a curated form. Best practices developed by this author and other practitioners are presented, so that other communities can benefit from them. Cases and anecdotes from organizations across industry sectors enliven the discussions. Emerging trends and innovative use of Social Media, are introduced as benchmarks.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of Knowledge Management is enriched by Best Practices developed within the context of each organization and its strategic priorities. The spirit of Social Media is in community building; and they have enriched the practice of Knowledge Management in very exciting ways. Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Forums have been potent tools to organically foster sharing of expertise and experience, actionable learning, innovation, process improvement and engagement. The wide ranges of social media available today, are enablers in this endeavour. Best practices developed by this author and other practitioners are presented so that other communities can benefit from them. Beginning with a real-life scenario to introduce the nitty-grittys of community building, several learnings, and Best Practices and theoretical underpinnings are explained.

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Imagine this scenario: Saritha is an engineer working on two projects within a business unit. These are prestigious and demanding projects and she wants to give her best to each project. She has two project managers, whom she respects immensely; and teammates, who have not worked on a similar project before. Some of her teammates are located in the US, others are constantly implementing on client sites in Ontario and Tel Aviv. The team also has to consult some subject matter experts on the go.

The primary project manager is convinced that social tools can help improve the project timelines in requirements gathering, planning, documentation, communication with all stakeholders.

There are several challenges and Saritha feels she needs the help of trusted, though not authorized partners. When Saritha faces a problem that stretches her knowledge, she turns to people like Partha, Chiranjeev, Thulasi and ex- manager Arup. Even though they work on their own projects in other business units, they are her real colleagues. They all go back many years. Saritha believes Arup has been there, done it all.

Arup had a successful experience with project wiki. His team member has offered to set up the wiki for the current project. The team had earlier used Google Drive to collaboratively document the project. For informal sketches, they used OneNote. With a wiki, they could save 50% of documentation and communication time. On hind-sight, it can be said that the wiki helped the team the most in requirements gathering. There was greater clarity and commitment for the project team and the client team. And, it helped when requirements changed all the time, which is how all projects are!! In addition, they could track changes made by any team member; there was the advantage of an early start and greater clarity for everybody concerned.

The primary project manager also works well with Arup. At first he needed some convincing that it would help the project if they learned from the experiences of Arup's team, instead of re-inventing the wheel.

It can be safely concluded, that this collaboration helped Saritha and the entire team in their learning on a new domain. Teammates also learnt a lot on practices and processes. Arup's team members were happy with their mentoring opportunity. Saritha also felt comfortable to bring valuable innovations that she had been thinking about for a long time.

In fact, Saritha had earlier in her student days moderated a community of Solid Works designers for the automobile industry. The current project was for the aerospace industry; and there were many similarities. Saritha used best practices from TWIN- a community of technical writers in India.

Now, going back to Aerospace Design Community, Saritha built a forum where all of these members were included. As she was learning about aerospace domain, she prepared PowerPoint presentations, which she hoped she could use for training new project joiners. She also found a number of YouTube, Vimeo, Webinars and Slideshares and shared the links with new forum members. As these new members also began sharing industry news, standards, diagrams, tips and tricks, small tools that they could use, the forum was fast becoming a learning community.

As Saritha reported- most members understand her style of approaching the project, how she learnt, issues she may face and were ready to *explore new ideas* with her. Arup, as her first PM actually taught her how to understand a new project, and even Razi, who now works for one of the sister concerns, is only a phone call away. These are the people with whom Saritha can discuss domain knowledge, ask very basic questions in the domain; the latest developments in the field and discuss pros and cons of each other's most difficult design challenges. Through the Aerospace Design Community, Saritha felt comfortable just sounding off an idea; or validating an improvement or innovation. She understood that most of her *introvert team members* felt the same way. They felt a sense of belonging and so opened up

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