Establishing successful knowledge communities

The software development industry is knowledge-driven, and bespoke engineering engagements are no exception. When clients engage in such engineering partnerships with IT vendors, they also place immense trust in their capabilities to continuously build talent, manage knowledge and mitigate associated risks.

The value developed by IT vendors increases in proportion to the maturity of their knowledge management practices. For a holistic approach on knowledge management, you can read more in our blog post "**Five pillars of knowledge management for software engineering.**"

Forming knowledge communities as voluntary groups of similarly interested individuals can help accelerate knowledge growth and drive significant innovation. They enable rapid cross-learning in an informal environment through building team trust and sharing knowledge across diverse domains, technologies and processes.

However, it may be equally challenging to keep such groups focused on a mission over a longer period due to their voluntary nature.

Through our experience at Luxoft, we've identified several fundamental solutions to mitigate this challenge and enable the creation of cutting-edge solutions, purely through voluntarily formed knowledge communities.

There are eight core principles in the establishment of successful knowledge communities. Let us introduce you to them:

Foundational principles to establish
successful knowledge communities

Structure the unstructured	Unpack the mixed bag
Host a surprise guest	Connect to the world outside
Adapt to Gen Z	Focus on the goal
Individual motivation	Communicate stylishly

1. Structure the unstructured

Enabling unstructured ways of knowledge sharing in a structured manner can motivate and enthuse community members. It leverages the unpredictability element, keeping members guessing and engaged, thereby breaking monotony.

Examples of adopting such an approach include:

• Unconventional ways of drawing a knowledge analogy, such as playing funny relevant videos, organizing a skit to communicate key messages, showing humorous pictures depicting knowledge topics and so on

• Gamification of knowledge-sharing — organizing engaging games to enable participants to learn from the experience

2. Unpack the mixed bag

An overused conventional approach to knowledge-sharing sessions may lead to boredom and reduced engagement from participants.

Unpacking a mixed bag of versatile methods for knowledge sharing can enhance participation.

In addition to conducting theoretical and verbal knowledge sessions, alternative methods can include:

• Running roleplay sessions to assign specific roles to members, forming breakout groups, assigning specific exercises per group and encouraging them to play back results

• Presenting practical use cases and problem statements, encouraging each member to offer their perspectives on solutions and share experiences

• Playing relevant videos and requesting members express their observations and inferences

3. Host a surprise guest

A community develops team bonding over continuous interactions, and this bonding leads to the sharing of knowledge freely. However, beyond a certain period, this group may enter a comfort zone, and this can minimize knowledge-sharing effectiveness.

Introducing surprise guests into specific sessions can help break this comfort zone and rekindle the knowledge-enhancement spirit of the group. The guests need to be sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced in the areas of interest in order to command respect from participants. Typical candidates may include executive management, industry experts from outside the organization, accomplished authors and so on.

4. Connect to the world outside

Any knowledge shared, even in versatile ways, can remain insufficiently absorbed unless it has relevant, practical significance. This can be enabled by linking the knowledge to the external world of relevant industries.

Connecting to this real-world experience can be achieved by:

• Sharing industry-specific case studies where associated knowledge areas have been implemented

• Doing a physical walkthrough in such industries, where practically feasible, to enable real-life experiences

• Sharing video presentations of industry experts conversing on practical applications and providing future trends

5. Adapt to Gen Z

Gen Z talent is now a significant part of many organizations. They infuse tremendous energy, enthusiasm and collaboration within knowledge communities. They also actively engage in such voluntary groups and can act as inspiration for senior members.

However, they are also very demanding in terms of their expectations from such communities. It is essential to adopt modern ways of knowledge sharing to keep them engaged and derive the aforementioned benefits.

Examples include:

• Enabling digitalization of knowledge sharing, such as forming virtual communities over internal social media apps, packaging knowledge as "posts" over these apps, leveraging virtual assistants as BOTs to provide knowledge on demand, establishing 3D knowledge content, etc.

• Implementing unique techniques (such as hackathons), presenting solutions, seeking relevant problem statements and reverse-engineering knowledge from implemented solutions

6. Focus on the goal

A key approach to reinforcing community engagement over a longer period is to focus them on the end goals as a target. Every knowledge-sharing exercise needs to be associated with a realistic target to motivate the members to achieve that end goal. And there can be a series of goals, one following the other, to ensure continued engagement.

Example goals include:

• Forming an A-Class virtual team to build a specific product, service or solution as an in-house accelerator

• Creating a white paper or blog targeted for a reputable website or newspaper

• Transforming an existing engagement from current challenges to a partner of choice for the client

7. Individual motivation

Every individual community member inherently thinks "What's in it for me?" when being encouraged to engage. It's essential to gather and understand these individual aspirations initially as well as on a continuous basis and when new members join.

Ensuring the community sessions fulfill these expectations leads to the incentivization of members who see the realization of their personal objectives, and this increases their engagement.

Examples of such possible expectations may be:

• Receiving monetary compensation or rewards for effort spent, contributions and results achieved

• Increasing self-skills and maturity to attain a desired role

• Obtaining visibility through authorship of specific knowledge articles or delivery of industry presentations

• Gaining specific knowledge to address challenges in ongoing assignments
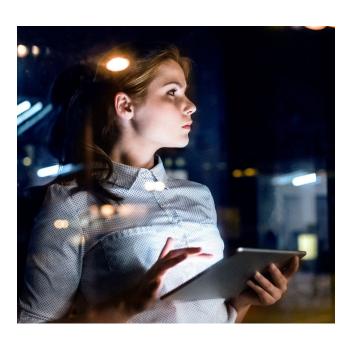
8. Communicate stylishly

Communication is the key practice that binds the community together, and it needs to be meticulously planned. Keeping the communication professional, unique, engaging and appealing can significantly increase effective participation.

An effective communication approach can include:

• Proactive announcements on an agenda for upcoming sessions while still keeping the surprise elements

• Interesting posts on internal social media apps to promote expected benefits from the sessions

• Publishing the accomplishments of the group virtually, on physical boards in offices, and to executive management in organization reports

• Establishing mobile messaging groups, while ensuring information security, to enable higher engagement

Establishing successful knowledge communities requires IT vendors to invest in transformation champions along with meticulous planning, unconventional methods, and effective governance. The vendor can then see significant results toward knowledge management, retention, innovation and transformation, eventually leading to great added value to clients from such an investment.

About **the author**

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Balaji is a senior director with Luxoft India. He leads engineering process solutions, globally, across lines of business and is responsible for delivery strategy for the APAC region. During his 22 years in the IT industry, Balaji has driven large-scale technology solutions and transformation initiatives in Silicon Valley technology companies, as well as service partnerships with global financial clients. He has extensive experience in knowledge transitions, transformations, Agile, DevOps, big data and analytics, cloud and program management.

About Luxoft

Luxoft is the design, data and development arm of DXC Technology, providing bespoke, end-to-end technology solutions for mission-critical systems, products and services. We help create data-fueled organizations, solving complex operational, technological and strategic challenges. Our passion is building resilient businesses, while generating new business channels and revenue streams, exceptional user experiences and modernized operations at scale.

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