

# Communities of Practice:

## Lessons from Leading Collaborative Enterprises

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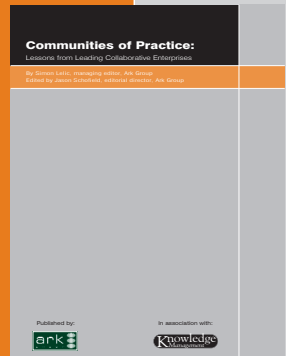
“Communities of practice are a practical way to frame the task of managing knowledge. They provide a concrete organisational infrastructure for realising the dream of a learning organisation.”

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder,  
*Cultivating Communities of Practice* (2002)

“Two-thirds of those organisations surveyed have communities of practice in place, citing enhanced innovation, collaboration and learning, and reduced levels of rework as key business drivers. Yet only 11 per cent of these companies can point to tangible success in realising these benefits.”

*Knowledge Management* magazine survey, 2003

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# Communities of Practice:

## Lessons from Leading Collaborative Enterprises

FEW CONCEPTS in the field of knowledge management (KM) have generated such sustained interest as that of communities of practice. The word ‘community’ itself connotes so many of the ideals that KM practitioners hold dear: collective strength, openness and trust, a predication towards mutual support and collaboration. Little wonder, then, that those charged with building a culture that encourages collaborative working have latched on to the concept with such enthusiasm. For many, communities of practice are the bedrock of the knowledge-enabled enterprise, and rightly so.

This report uncovers how some of the world’s leading collaborative enterprises are realising the value of communities of practice. In turn addressing exactly what communities of practice are, why they are important, and how organisations can look to derive maximum benefit from them, *Communities of Practice: Lessons from Leading Collaborative Enterprises* draws together case studies from organisations that have first-hand experience putting theory into practice.

We feature in-depth case studies from companies such as Halliburton, Ford, Solvay, Buckman Laboratories, AON, Fidelity Investments, Rio Tinto, Unilever and more, in addition to real-world examples of good practice drawn from the archives of *Knowledge Management* magazine and from Ark Group’s extremely successful series of events dedicated to communities of practice. In addition, we have spoken to the indisputable thought leaders in the field, notably Etienne Wenger, Hubert Saint-Onge, Debra Wallace and Richard McDermott, all of whom are interviewed in the opening chapters of this report, together with a number of other prominent CoP and KM experts.

*Communities of Practice: Lessons from Leading Collaborative Enterprises* presents a comprehensive review of good practices and lessons learnt, and puts theory into a real-world context through the successes and sometimes spectacular failures of organisations that have been there, done that. To reserve your copy, or for more information on Ark Group’s series of reports, please contact Adam Scrimshire at [ascrimshire@ark-group.com](mailto:ascrimshire@ark-group.com) or call +44 (0)20 8785 5914.

## CONTENTS

Listed below is a detailed rundown of the key themes covered in *Communities of Practice: Lessons from Leading Collaborative Enterprises*. In addition, the report features case studies from Halliburton, Ford, Solvay, Buckman Laboratories, AON, Fidelity Investments, Rio Tinto, Unilever and many more, as well as quotes from leading experts in the field and the results of Ark Group's extensive survey on communities of practice.

### Introduction

#### 1. Building on our sense of community

Scope and readership  
Ark Group survey results

### Part One

#### 2. Defining the concept

The knowledge imperative  
What a community of practice is not  
Essential characteristics  
Variations on a theme  
Conclusion and lessons learnt

#### 3. The business case

Innovation, good practice, problem solving and knowledge stewardship  
Benefits to the individual  
Communities and learning  
Benefits to the organisation  
Demonstrating value and ROI  
Realising the limitations of communities of practice  
Conclusion and lessons learnt

#### 4. The foundations for success

A common purpose? Levels of formality and organisational expectations  
Managing without managing  
Prerequisites to success  
Developing a project-management approach  
Creating a climate for collaboration  
The community lifecycle  
Roles and responsibilities

Encouraging member participation and building trust  
Technological infrastructure  
Forms of intervention (including SNA, storytelling and community toolkits)  
Conclusion and lessons learnt

### Part Two – Case Studies

#### 5. Case Studies

Halliburton *by Michael Behounek*  
Dutch KM Open *by Paul Louis Iske*  
English Nature *by Ron Donaldson*  
Ford *by Stan Kwiecien*  
Solvay *by Philippe Drouillon*  
ActKM *by Shawn Callahan*  
AON *by Julia Cotter*  
Buckman Laboratories *by Sheldon Ellis*  
Fidelity Investments *by Kurt Kreh*  
Arthur Andersen *by Stephen John*  
Unilever *by Anita Pos*  
Scottish Enterprise *by Karen Perkinson*  
Thames Water *by Linda Tait*  
Caterpillar *by Reed Stuedemann*  
Chevron *by Jeff Stemke*

#### 6. Summary and conclusions

#### 7. Useful resources

*This information is correct at time of going to press but may be subject to change.*

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