Leveraging the Community of Practice Approach for Industrial Relations in Asia and the Pacific

Johan Arvling
The Regional Knowledge Team
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok, Thailand
“Maybe we should write that spot down.”
Knowledge dilemmas: Sharing vs. Hoarding

If you give it away…
You still have it!

Guess what…
they’ll find out anyway!

The more quality you share…
the more you gain!

Knowledge is a fresh product - it becomes obsolete & quickly loses its value!
Outline

• Leveraging the CoP approach
  o Explore what a CoP is, their history, types, features & rationale
  o Critical steps in setting them up
  o Emerging lessons & challenges from using CoPs

• Food for thought moving forward – how it could work for us?

• Plotting a starting point and a future for the CoP
Leveraging the CoP Approach
CoP conceptual history: their origin

• Rooted in specialized work e.g. medical & legal profession, engineering etc.

• Start appearing in KM literature (1991)

• Private sector saw it as adding $ value

• Boeing, Xerox, Volvo & HP explore CoP potential in various specialized business units

• UN explores CoP concept in late 90s

• Constituents grant ILO mandate to begin using CoPs in 07
What is a CoP: some common definitions

Bonding by exposure to common challenges:
"a group of professionals, informally bound together through exposure to a common class of problems or pursuit of solutions..."
– Peter & Trudy Johnson-Lenz, Awakening Technology

Commons sense of purpose:
“Peers executing 'real work'. What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows”
– John Seely Brown

Working strategically – organizational glue:
“Organizational thematic priority around which professionals come together to learn, improve service efficiency, develop skills and to help shape and execute corporate policy... “
– Johan Arvling
Basic Features: what do they look like?

• Members have common professional ambition / interest / motivation / passion

• Members believe they will achieve common goal more effective through collaboration

• Members share sense of responsibility & accountability for a given task, output or result

• CoPs can be time bound and/or long lasting

• CoPs are topic focused & problem-solving oriented
Rationale for CoPs: why use them?

- Improves **bottom line** e.g. service delivery
- Enhances individual & organizational **learning**
- Helps build member **ownership** & shape policy through sharing knowledge & experiences
- Relatively **cheap** way to centrally collect, disseminate, re-use & apply traditional and/or new knowledge
- Concentrates energies / resources on **niche areas**
Types of Communities:

- **Enabling**
  - loosely organized
  - learning & sharing
  - broad topic area
  - Q & A

- **Delivery**
  - tightly organized
  - specific outputs
  - narrow niche area
  - issue / problem

**External** (Founding members ++)

**Internal** (Founding members only)
### How virtual groups are different:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Glue</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Groups / Project Teams</td>
<td>Product or Service Specific Task</td>
<td>Assigned or Selected Under one manager</td>
<td>Job / Budget / Project milestones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities of Practice</td>
<td>Exchange Knowledge</td>
<td>Demand Self – Selected</td>
<td>Passion / Strive within Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Networks</td>
<td>Information Knowledge</td>
<td>Donor Driven</td>
<td>Passion / Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Steps when establishing CoPs:

**Phase 1. Scoping & Analysis**
- Identification of demand / expansion of existing smaller groups already networking – formalization process

**Phase 2. Planning**
- Develop Conceptual Framework for the CoP – niche process

**Phase 3. Implementation**
- Roles & responsibilities, utility of tools – performing process

**Phase 4. Evaluation & Feedback**
- Review of achievements – learning process / moving on…
Emerging lessons: UN / ILO / Private Sector

- **Niche based** – *a CoP that does everything is at the end doing nothing*
- **Dedicated resources** – *Facilitator / Thematic Champions / F2F event*
- **Start-up group / passion to productivity** – *critical mass of practitioners*
- **CoP membership** – *must visibly impact work behavior/style of members*
- **Start-up F2F between members** – *key feature / building trust & quality*
- **Regular monitoring of performance** – *moving forward together*
- **Branching out** – *creating mutually beneficial CoPs at national levels*
How could this work for us: Moving forward

- **Membership** – growth strategy?
- **Purpose** – what's the rationale for a community of this kind?
- **Service** – tools e.g. discussion forum / roster / good practices / yellow pages?
- **Branding** – virtual one-stop-shop / outreach / advocacy?
- **Geographical links / scope** – global / regional / sub-regional?
- **Management** – by ILO staff / members / dedicated facilitator / outsourced?
How does online discussion work in reality?

“CONSOLIDATED REPLY”
To all subscribers Globally
- Acknowledging contributions
- Final Product for codification

“Consider:
- Local governance

“Consider:
- Incentive structure”

“Consider:
- Proportion of administrative and managerial budgets
- Youth employment alternatives / gender roles
- Number of social and professional organizations dealing with youth employment

“Network query: India Comparative Research – Youth Employment experiences”
Plotting a beginning for AP-IRNet:

- **Enabling**
  - **External** *(Founding members +++)*
  - **Internal** *(Founding members only)*
- **Delivery**