



Alliance



WE2.1: Can communities of practice help us accelerate and improve our gender research?

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Who am I?

MSc in Systems Thinking in Practice

Interest in social learning systems, especially communities of practice

A legitimate peripheral participant of the gender community for years

Coordinator of Alliance CoPs of varying success and now starting to co-foster the CGIAR GTM CoP (with Anne, Cathy, Diana and Hom, plus more)

What I'm expect to talk about today regarding CoPs

- Definitions
 - Value
 - Reasons for failure
 - Tips for success
-
- Questions and sharing of experiences

What is a CoP

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Etienne Wenger

Community, Purpose and Practice

- **Community:** you need people in your CoP. People who interact and have engagement, identity and alignment with each other
- **Purpose:** Called the 'Domain' in the literature. Your collective reason for interacting needs to be well understood to everyone and shared. Your north star, your direction, your raison d'être.
- **Practice:** Probably research practice in this case. Shared frameworks, knowhow, technical language, data, experiences, learnings, tools, stories

It is by developing these three together that you cultivate a community of practice.

The value of a CoP

(Wenger, Trayner, de Laat, 2011)

Immediate value: identity, connections, information passing, conversation, tips, alignment, access to resources, tools, etc, fun

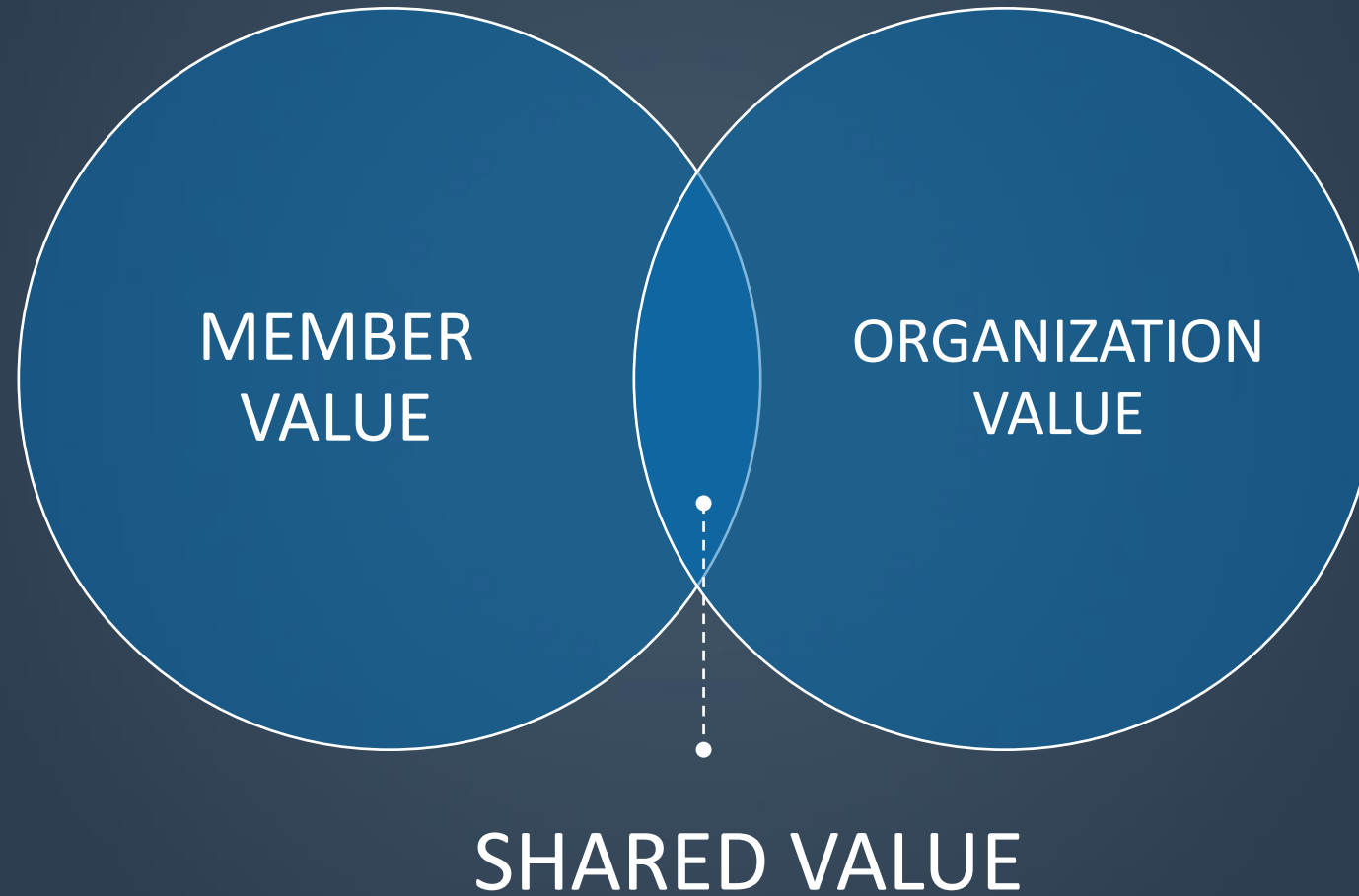
Potential value: 'knowledge capital', skills, new perspectives, new ideas, confidence, keeping up with the field, shared understandings, companionship, knowing who to ask, trust, status

Applied value: changing a practice, using a tool, asking a question to a new contact, convening others around a challenge, adapting an approach, sharing further shared understandings

Realized value: improved research practice, efficiency, effectiveness as a researcher, improved 'performance'

Reframing value: redefining success, new goals, new values, new frameworks and structures

Community Building – shared value



With all this value, why do CoPs fail so often?

1. Only organizational value (i.e., top down)
2. No exchange, only one directional information
3. Too little effort creating the Community part
4. Lack of a core group (it needs a central energy)
5. Low level of one-to-one private interactions
6. People aren't prepared to discuss and engage with the practices of other members
7. Lack of identification and purpose at the right level (Gender? GTMs, masculinities?)
8. Practice seems intangible (talking, reading in the abstract)
9. Lack of momentum (no rhythm, far off achievements)

What is your experience as a member or a convenor of CoPs that have succeeded or failed?

- Do you recognize the kinds of value in successful CoPs?
- Do you recognize those factors that lead to failure?



Tips from theory

1. Measurement: how do you know how well you are doing?



Wenger, Trayner and De Laat's value framework



Outcome mapping:

Expect to see

Like to see

Love to see



Useful to have clear, strategic objectives and at the right level - subtopics

2. Short term and long term achievements



Short term goals

Connect
Webinars
Problem solving clinics
Directory



Long term goals

Changes in practice
Papers
Proposals

3. Principles

E.g. Bioversity Gender CoP

1. Participants must have an interest in developing their competence in gender and participatory research
2. Participation is a gift to the other community members. Leverage what you know. Share it out – educate your colleagues, help someone, mentor someone with lower competence.
3. Bring your ignorance. It must be a space where people are comfortable to expose their ignorance. No one is an expert. We are all people on a trajectory of increasing competence
4. Bring your half-baked ideas. It is a learning space. Mistakes, naïve questions and knowledge gaps are welcome here.
5. Feel free to critique the way we are conducting our gender and participatory research practice. And to look for solutions to make it better
6. The CoP is a place where we seek to improve our practice in a practical way by sharing everyday problems, tools, developments in the field, things that work and things that don't, technical problems, specific problems with methods in the field.
7. Where we go depends on you. All members have responsibility for voicing what they would like to see as the value of the CoP.

4. Different levels of participation

Core group, active, passive

Fluctuating participation

Inward and outward trajectories

Legitimate peripheral participants

5. Different modes of participation

- All together AND One-to-one
 - Public AND private
 - Organized AND emergent
-
- Have a heartbeat, a rhythm, even if it's slow

Tips from experience

From my experience in CGIAR

1

Find the passion

2

Bottom up AND
integrated into
organizations

3

Value value value –
for organization and
for you

4

Get the ratio right:
Small efforts in, big
results out

5

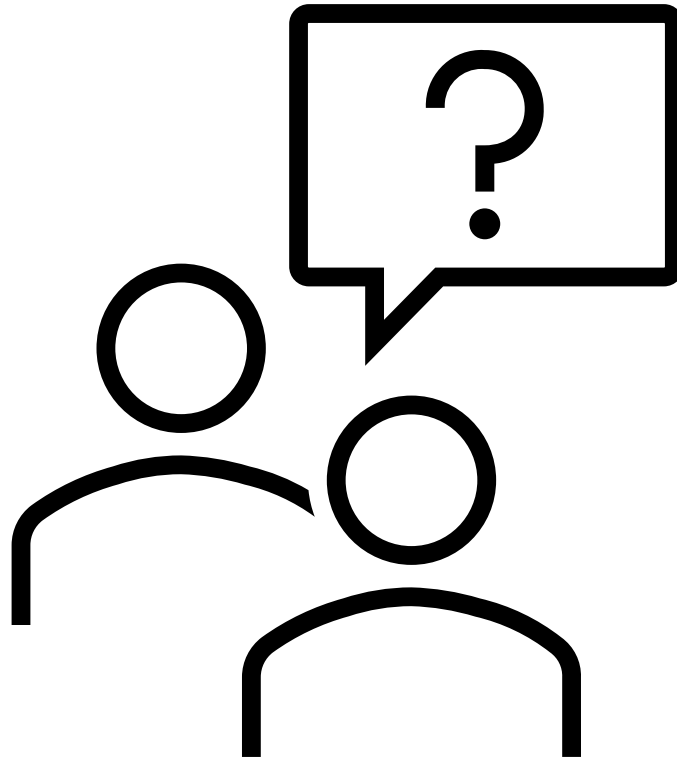
Don't stop, don't
get discouraged.
Baby steps are steps

6

Share the load

Questions?

(first let's have a minute or two reflection)



What? So what? Now what?

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What? What stood out for you?

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

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So what? Why might this be useful for you?

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Now what? Is there anything you think you can use?

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Thank you!



Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) are CGIAR Research Centers.
CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future.

- **Can communities of practice help us accelerate and improve our gender research?**
- There is often just one gender researcher per project or program team or CGIAR initiative so gender research can be a lonely and challenging business due to lack of collaborative and critical discussion with fellow researchers. Collaboration helps researchers to develop and enrich their theory and practice, and share their experiences, doubts, successes and puzzles /conundrums. Communities of Practice (CoP) are one way to cross organizational boundaries to create overarching learning and knowledge communities, providing spaces for collaborations and conversations throughout a project cycle. CoPs have been described as “A gathering of individuals motivated by the desire to cross organizational boundaries, to relate to one another, and to build a body of actionable knowledge through coordination and collaboration.” (World Bank). But what does it take to make a CoP successful?
- **Objective**
- In this session, I will offer some tips from research and experience, so that participants can use CoPs better to achieve their own objectives in gender research. I will draw on examples mainly from the Alliance Gender Nexus Enabler (active since 2015) and the CGIAR Gender Transformative Methodologies (just launched).
- **Who would benefit**
- The session would benefit anyone who is curious about the power of Communities of Practice and thinking of setting one up to exchange experiences and ideas, address challenges, and improve their research-for-development practice
- **Format**
- Format will be a presentation of around 30 minutes, then up to an hour to answer your questions. The session will cover:
 - Basics of CoP theory
 - What research and experience show works to make CoPs successful
 - Examples from two Gender CoPs, one old one new