

# Capitalizing on Social Networks through COMMUNITIES OF CONTRIBUTION

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A **COMMUNITY OF CONTRIBUTION** is a group of people who join together for a common cause, exchanging time and resources for a future they believe in. They expect personal benefit and increased power through their collective efforts: the opportunity to make an impact. They are excellent resources for organizations. Used wisely they further strategic initiatives, provide needed guidance to develop successful products and services, increase membership, build strategic partnerships, and align members' goals with organizational objectives. Here are principles to keep in mind when developing these communities in a business context:

**COMMUNITIES OF CONTRIBUTION are Living Systems.** They grow inside, outside, and across boundaries. They will penetrate the organizational hierarchy. This is both their strength and weakness. They cannot be expected to follow protocol, procedures or even policy. However, they have the power to align across silos, as well as up and down the organization, through the common interest of the members. They adapt quickly and responsively to changing circumstance.

Building community is not design and assembly. It is more like cultivation. Develop relationships that mesh with organizational needs. Be prepared for original behavior.

*Technique:* Identify groups with pre-existing interest in organizational objectives. Make time and space for sharing and developing their ideas.

**COMMUNITIES OF CONTRIBUTION thrive on diversity.** Differing views highlight the complexity of issues. The resulting exploration is more thorough, and increases the quality of results.

*Technique:* Invite people outside the community with relevant and varied perspectives to be part of discussions.

**COMMUNITIES OF CONTRIBUTION are sustained by personal benefit.**

Because attendance is not mandated by contractual agreements, members will simply stop participating if their needs are not being met. Stay in close contact with the most committed members and ensure their critical issues are part of the agenda.

*Technique:* The basic building blocks in **COMMUNITIES OF CONTRIBUTION** are relationships. Communicate personally. Face to face is best; phone is next. Email is okay. Impersonal surveys are least effective. Find time to touch base.

**COMMUNITIES OF CONTRIBUTION and organizational structure work very well together.** Think of this dynamic duo as "plant and trellis," bringing together the life force of the community with the structure of the organization. Performance will increase by activating the human deep-felt desire to be part of something larger and good, to make a contribution. As participants become more confident, effective and capable, the organization will increase its capacity, delivering better results.