



ATTRACTORS
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*EVERY MONTH **ATTRACTORS** SHARES TIPS AND TOOLS FROM HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS. IN THIS MONTH'S EDITION, GLENDA EOYANG TALKS ABOUT HOW TO INCREASE YOUR RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE.*

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE:
YOUR HR ROI

Do you struggle to:

- Recruit committed and reliable staff?
- Stretch loyal employees toward innovation?
- Build capacity to meet future challenges?
- Adapt to ever-changing technology?
- Respond to growing client demands?
- Stay competitive in a fast-moving industry?
- Retain staff who understand your clients and your business?

Human beings are the key to future success in every industry. If your people are not up to the task, your organization cannot succeed. The business and social challenges of today require remarkable adaptation and innovation, and the future promises more of the same. Successful organizations and their leaders will invest in skills, knowledge, and attitudes to entice talented people to join them, to build key competencies, to adapt to unknowable complex challenges, and to retain highly qualified workers at all levels.

Not many years ago classroom training was the standard. Instructional designers worked with subject matter experts to define objectives and structure activities to transmit known information from one part of the organization to another.

Technology enabled a different approach as computer-based and web-based training moved into the forefront. The training still drew on information that was pre-determined, but it could be shared with one employee at a time. On-line testing and tracking of personal development plans let us think about individual staff members and invest in their professional development.

In between we have experimented with other training media. They all brought new opportunities, but they also came with drawbacks—one-on-one coaching (narrow effects), video conferencing (rigid and constraining), mentoring relationships (inconsistent), professional conferences (undependable), and knowledge management (expensive). None of these has met the requirements to:

- Draw highly qualified people into our organizations.
- Increase staff capacity to do current tasks.
- Prepare staff to meet unknowable future needs.
- Retain highly qualified staff.

Today's emergent landscapes of technology, society, economy, and politics demand a new way to discover and disseminate knowledge. This new way must be able to provide learning that is:

- Just-in-time—delivered in response to specific questions or concerns.
- Accessible—available whenever and wherever the question arises.
- Expandable—open to new information discoveries in theory and practice around the world.
- Inexpensive—reaching the largest number with the best information at the least cost.
- Ubiquitous—available to all employees at any part of the organization.

Research and practice in network theory, social capital, knowledge management, and other domains of human systems dynamics have introduced a powerful approach to respond to this urgent and growing need: **Communities of Practice**.

The Funderstanding Team (www.funderstanding.com) points out that Communities of Practice are based on the following assumptions:

- *Learning is fundamentally a social phenomenon.* People organize their learning around the social communities to which they belong.
- *Knowledge is integrated in the life of communities that share values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things.* These are called **Communities of Practice**. Real knowledge is integrated in the doing, social relations, and expertise of these communities.
- *The processes of learning and membership in a community of practice are inseparable.* Because learning is intertwined with community membership, it is what lets us belong to and adjust our status in the group. As we change our learning, our identity—and our relationships—change.
- *Knowledge is inseparable from practice.* It is not possible to **know** without **doing**. By doing, we learn.
- *Empowerment--or the ability to contribute to a community--creates the potential for learning.* Circumstances in which we engage in real action that has consequences for both us and our community create the most powerful learning environments.

IBM's research has shown that Communities of Practice:

- Decrease the learning curve of new employees.
- Respond more rapidly to customer needs and inquiries.
- Reduce rework and prevent "reinvention of the wheel."
- Spawn new ideas for products and services.

What more can one ask as a return on investment in people, process, progress, and profitability?

For more information about how human systems dynamics can help you establish strong Communities of Practice, give us a call.

*Glenda H. Eoyang, [Ph.D.](mailto:geoyang@hdsinstitute.org)
geoyang@hdsinstitute.org*

Direct: 763-783-7206

Toll free: 866-HSD-INST