

## **Growing Communities of Practice**

As introduced in Chapter 2, communities of practice are self-organizing, resistant to supervision and interference. From the knowledge worker's perspective, one of the attractions of communities of practice is that they aren't part of the infrastructure and subject to the rules and formalities of institutional groups. However, since they often form the basis for knowledge sharing in a knowledge organization, it's in management's best interests to somehow support the development of communities of practice without making them a formal component of the corporate infrastructure.

Management can't require knowledge workers to form communities of practice and be enthusiastic. A parallel scenario is seen in organizations that have a newsletter or other publications and user's group associated with membership and require members to join one or more groups. Members may discard the newsgroup's flyers unless they are genuinely interested in the area. The same is true of communities of practice. No one is served by having an employee spend time in a nonproductive meeting.

From a knowledge worker's perspective, a community of practice is often a happenstance meeting of knowledge workers with similar interests and challenges. The composition of the community may shift from week to week, depending on individual schedules, project responsibility, travel, and other chance events. Furthermore, a knowledge worker may belong to one community of practice one month and three the next.

A community of practice is simply a label for old-fashioned networking. A group that plays ball together during the lunch break or after work may constitute a community of practice because it fits in with the scarcest resource of all—discretionary time. Having management dictate groups of common practice based on work factions alone could easily be perceived by knowledge workers as an effort by management to control discretionary time.