Orchestrating self-managing product teams through self-managing CoPs
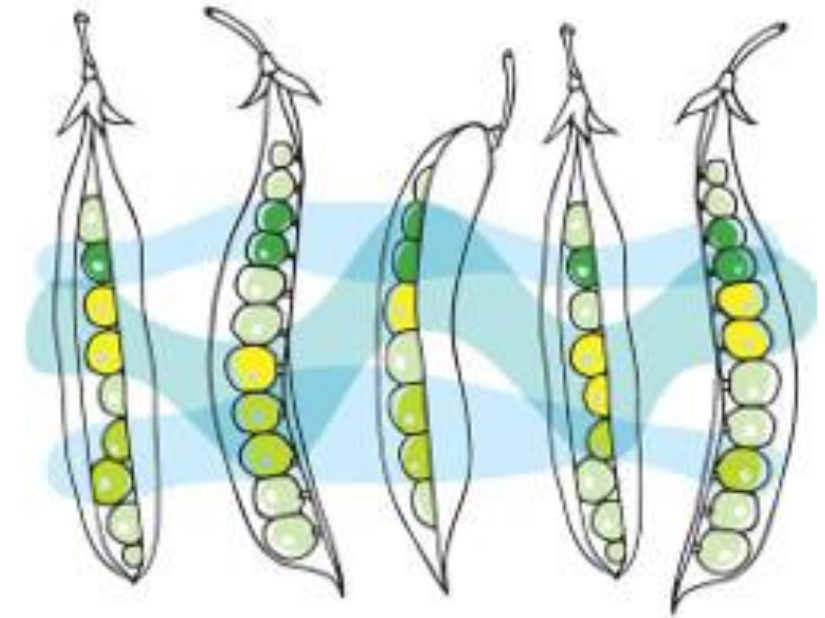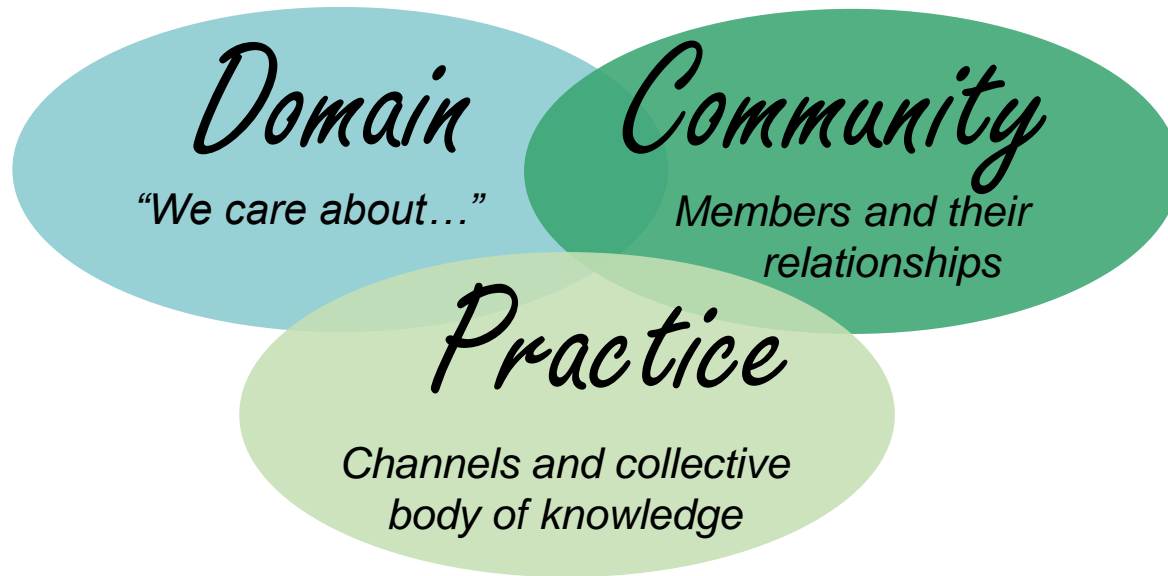
by Darja Smite

What are Communities of Practice?

Domain
"We care about…"

Community
Members and their relationships

Practice
Channels and collective body of knowledge

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. "Knowledge systems" aiming at improving practice building on the collective experience of members

/Etienne Wenger

Did anyone **succeed** with CoP implementation?
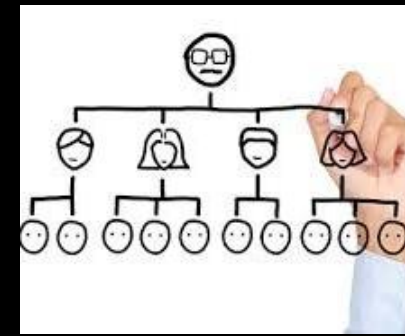
Did anyone fail with CoP implementation?

Quite a typical scenario

MANAGERS DECIDES TO START
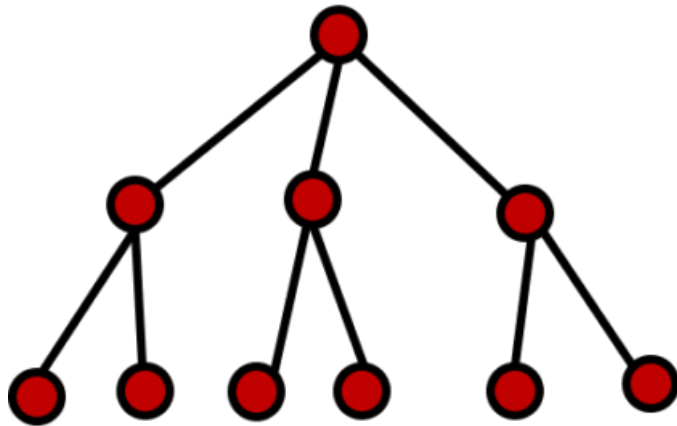AN AGILE TRANSFORMATION

A SAFe EXPERT IS INVITED
AND ASKED FOR A PLAN

ONE OF THE PLAN
STEPS IS CoPs

MANAGER
"CREATES" CoPs
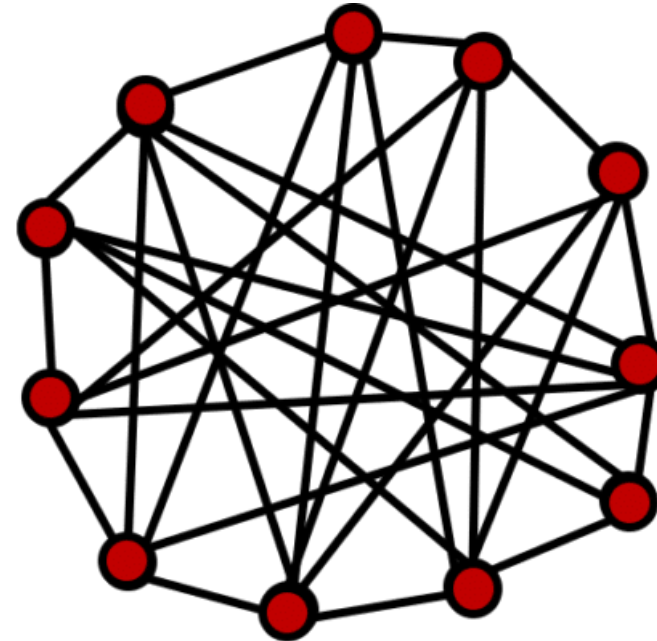
CoPs are parallel org structure, acts like a team

Formal organization

"Top-down"

Informal organization

"Bottom-up"

How to ensure that CoPs are truly self-managing?

Alternative way to implement CoPs

❑ Implement CoPs to supplement the regular organization by performing functions that it does not perform or is ill-suited to perform well

❑ Combine the top-down trigger with the bottom-up interest. Management support is important

❑ When setting up CoPs, ensure:
   ❑ Clear purpose
   ❑ Expected value and results
   ❑ Sufficient level of granted authority
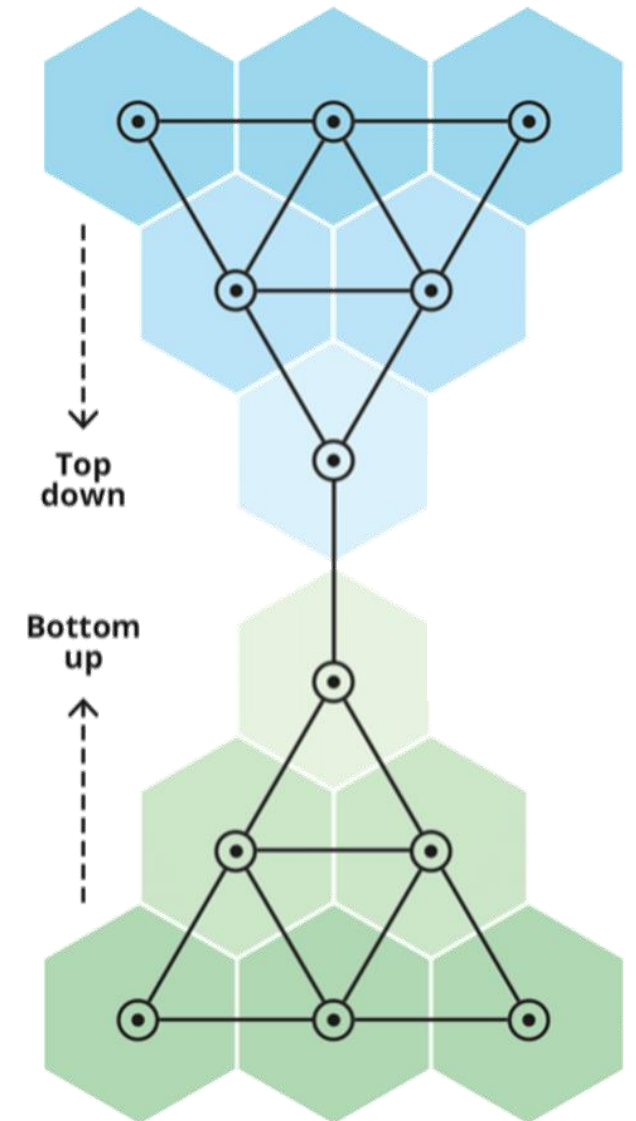
Ideas for introducing CoPs
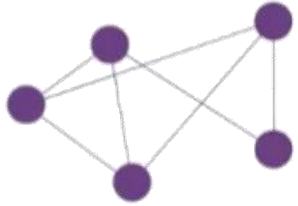
**Arenas
for networking**

foster professional
connections, help
to share
knowledge and
establish strategic
alliances

**Arenas
for growth**

help to learn new
skills, and get
better at what we
do, together

**Arenas for
decision-making**

help with adjusting
and scaling ways of
working and
sharing common
approaches that
suit the company

**Arenas
for collaboration**

facilitate frequent
interactions and
creation of better
practices for everyone
in the company and
the customers

**Arenas
of support**

give confidence,
motivation, sense
of belonging and
fun for being with
colleagues

The four community archetypes
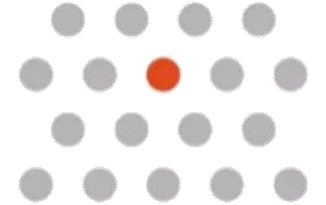
Purposes for CoPs

**Arenas for
decision-making**

help with adjusting
and scaling ways of
working and
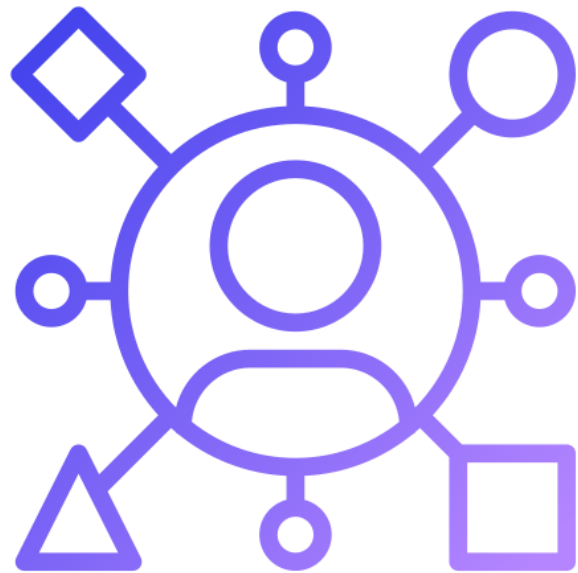sharing common
approaches that
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**Raise the level of knowledge and
skills in the product development
organization**

← **"Book club"** →   ← **"Standardization
committee"** →   ← **"Open-source
society"** →   ← **"Support
line"** →

Purposes for CoPs

Arenas for networking

foster professional connections, help to share knowledge and establish strategic alliances

Arenas for growth

help to learn new skills, and get better at what we do, together

Aligning architectural decisions across the product organization

Standardizing the user-experience in the whole product

Arenas for collaboration

facilitate frequent interactions and creation of better practices for everyone in the company and the customers

Arenas of support

give confidence, motivation, sense of belonging and fun for being with colleagues

◄─── **"Book club"** ───► ◄─── **"Standardization committee"** ───► ◄─── **"Open-source society"** ───► ◄─── **"Support line"** ───►

Purposes for CoPs

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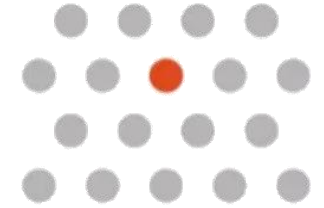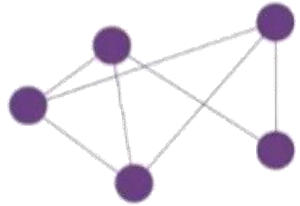
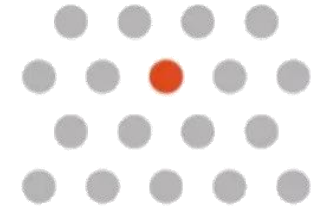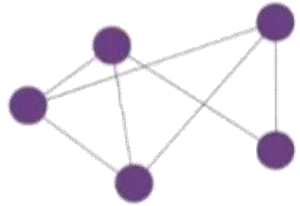help to learn new skills, and get better at what we do, together

Arenas for decision-making

help with adjusting and scaling ways of working and sharing common approaches that suit the company

Optimizing development efforts and facilitating reuse of components

Arenas of support

give confidence, motivation, sense of belonging and fun for being with colleagues

◄─── "Book club" ───► ◄── "Standardization committee" ──► ◄── "Open-source society" ──► ◄── "Support line" ──►

Purposes for CoPs

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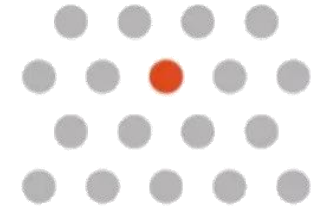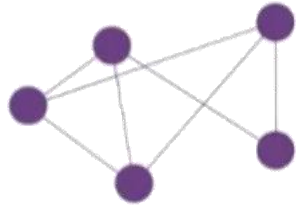help to learn new skills, and get better at what we do, together
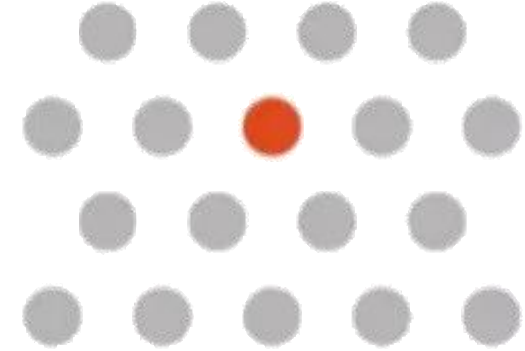
**Arenas for
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help with adjusting and scaling ways of working and sharing common approaches that suit the company

**Arenas
for collaboration**

facilitate frequent interactions and creation of better practices for everyone in the company and the customers

Providing expert support for joint problem resolution and unblocking junior developers who are stuck

⟵ **"Book club"** ⟶ ⟵ **"Standardization committee"** ⟶ ⟵ **"Open-source society"** ⟶ ⟵ **"Support line"** ⟶

Success factors for implementing CoPs

① **Concerns a practice**

② **Demonstrates signs of mutual engagement**

③ **Interacts regularly**

④ **Improves practice**

Mission and scope	Leadership	Members	Activities and tools	Outcomes
Clear purpose and direction	Passionate leader with dedicated time for community work	Representative membership	Regular interaction, activities	Creates value for the company
Interesting topic with concrete benefits for participants		Stable core	Engaging agenda	Recognized by the management
Decision-making authority		Motivated members with dedicated time for community work	Pre-booked or fixed schedule for meetings/activities	
		Active participation and contribution	Supporting tools to create transparency	

Thank you for your attention!

P.S. Why should you trust what I just said?

Experience from working with

- Company-wide communities of practice connected to key practices
- Engineering communities of practice
- CoPs connected to particular products