Stages of Community Development

Introduction

In Chapter 4 we looked at what you need to do to get started with developing and building a workplace community. We looked at how to get traction in your organization and the roles you need to fill to get going and successfully develop and build a flourishing community. In this chapter we will share with you a model we developed and that we believe will help you understand the life cycle or stages that a workplace community goes through.

This model will provide you with a framework and road map to help you plan and understand what is happening to your workplace community from the time it is just an idea through to when the community has served its purpose and comes to the end of its life. For those working with existing communities the model will help you understand the stage your community has reached and what the next stages are.

Communities can revert to earlier stages in their life cycle, when significant events occur. You may find that your existing workplace community is not where you thought it was! We suggest you share this model with community members as it will help them develop a common language. It will also help them identify when things are working well and perhaps more importantly when interventions might be needed to move the community along and improve its functioning.
Getting started

At the beginning of our research we sought out people who had experience of being part of a workplace community and explored their experience with them. In many cases, until we spoke with them, they would not have thought of themselves as being part of a workplace community. They simply saw themselves as working cross-departmentally, cross-functionally or being members of a special task force or project team. However as we explored further and dug deeper, we were able to find examples of communities that had come together around issues of importance to people that were not tasked or formally commissioned by the wider organization. These were normally associated with technical problems and issues where the community members felt that the knowledge needed to address the issues in hand were not all contained in their department or silo. They wanted to tap into the collective intelligence of the whole organization.

How we developed the model

Formal, academic research into workplace communities is pretty thin on the ground. What does exist is a lot of work, research and good practice on community development in terms of social change. This work tends to focus on communities of place within civil society. Within this practice of social community development, there are two main approaches; those that are asset- or strength-based and those that are deficit-based. The best way of understanding these two approaches is to think of asset-based models as investing in the strengths of the community and deficit-based models investing in the problems and issues the community faces.

The example below will help you understand the difference between the two. Imagine a local community that has problems associated with poor housing, teenage pregnancy, youth crime and high levels of social deprivation. Here is how the two approaches to community development would work.

A deficit-based approach

People with this frame of reference carry out research into the problems in the community and develop plans, usually top down, that involve