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Instill the dynamics of quality into your coaching community with groupware

A quality-first mindset

To develop a quality-first mindset inside an organization, it is of utmost importance to develop a coaching community to carry the message and walk the talk.

The coaching community needs a way to manifest its presence inside the organizationto and a groupware solution forms a powerful way to do so.

Why do you need a groupware for sharing information to support your coaching community?

A groupware helps in keeping the momentum on because it supports in remembering everybody of what the coaching community is about, what its values are.
It also serves as a memory for the community by storing its history and reference works.
This helps in developing a sense of belonging for the members of the community and helps in keeping it alive.
It also helps in sharing information and knowledge and provides access to it from everywhere.
Also, the groupware keeps the community members active at practicing what they are meant to spread through the organization.
The groupware also helps in transferring the sought after mindset since the whole coaching community can be reached through it.
The groupware also acts as a powerful channel to bind the community members together and work as a team.

What do you need to put in the groupware to support your coaching community?

The groupware can contain a number of content types to support he community.

To support the community mission, there is a need to have set of documented successes made available. These take the form of case studies. These are stored into the groupware for easy reference and communication purposes.

To help the coaches in the field, a good thing to have are guidelines, that provide guidance for applying the techniques that the coaches are pushing into the field.

In the same spirit, coaching material (presentations, courseware, exercises) is very useful so that coaches do have support when coaching other people in the techniques and approaches.

Reference material is the next step after case studies. Reference material showcases the techniques, approaches, and expectations. People learn best by example and not by sinking them into a sea of theoretical principles.

To create a channel through which to exchange, nothing beats forums. Forums act as a collective memory of the community, allows members to help others, and offers a strucutred venu to maintain contact. Once people are active on forums, intellectual property can be easily created by answering members questions, or formatting threads of discussion in new support articles. Forums also help to send announcements to the community. Follow up of threads with email help in keeping in touch while on the move as well.

To support high bandwith learning, replay live courses, offering a self-training medium in a very effective form, video has no match. Video content is more difficult to develop but is worth is since it allows to refresh the memory of members of the community, educate newcomers, and generally helps in conveying the message. This is the best medium to showcase how to do things in practice. It also helps in showing how to explain things well, so that community members can mimic the approach.

Audio files form a great learning device as well. Through recordings of sessions, or recording of articles, these build a set of assets that can be used to learn while abroad, be it in the car, while working on mundane matters, or at home. There are MP3 players everywhere these days, including in mobile phones. Audio files allow to leverage these.

All of the above can be stored in asset galleries and the best way to make them usable is to put them in a wiki or a blog format. The wiki helps in providing context for content and create lasting structure while the blog(s) provide a time-centric perspective view. An up to date blog helps in drawing people back to the groupware. Up to date means updated at least 3 times a week. Blogs also draw in comments and feedback on discussed topics.

Wiki pages can also provide support for FAQs and articles.

Items that can also be put in asset galleries are templates, tools, and visuals. These do help in coaching people in the field as well.

Something that can also be stored in the groupware are past and current issues of newsletters targetting the coaching community. Newsletters are sent via email to members and an archive can be created in the groupware. People do not keep emails around, so, an archive is much needed. Also, having a space for newsletters allow to wire them through links to additional material in the groupware.

How is the community making use of the groupware?

The community leverages the groupware as a long term memory by storing the results of coaching sessions so that they can be used in support of coaching efforts of other coaches.

The community also follows up the growth of its interactions with the audience through analytics.

Also, it provides remote access from various locations (like at customer sites) so that references, forums, and assets can be used from everywhere.

And it is used to get feedback and help from the

master coaches through its various features and stored assets.

All of these contribute to spread the word to the audience in an efficient way.

Who is benefiting from using the groupware?

The company investing in the usage of the groupware benefits hugely by having shared knowledge stored, spread, and structured so that it doesn't gets lost and end up diluted over time. Also, it fosters a culture of sharing and growth leading to an improved bottom line.

The coaches making use of the groupware benefit from contributing content, which forces them to think it through more than they would usually, and builds a body of intellectual captial. Also, they grow their skills by seeing what other coaches do on the platform. In turn there is a form of emulation, which is good to improve their skills further. Additionally, they see their profile raised within the organization. By answering questions asked by the audience, they build awareness of recurring issues and real problems faced by the audience.

The audience benefits from getting access to a dynamic and evolving resource focused on getting them on the next level. Instead of being forced to reinvent the wheel, they can jumpstart and leapfrog usual hurdles like: explanation of key mechanisms in use, getting acquainted to the way of doing things in the organization, getting access to standard documents, knowing who is able to help them on a given topic. Seeing that their questions are answered does make the audience contribute new questions, building a virtuous upwards spiral. As a variety of assets is available to learn from, the multiple modes of learning can be attended to.

The dynamic of quality is also benefitting from the groupware because it makes manifest the commitment of the organization to improve and learn over time. The learning organization is a prerequisite for the dynamic of quality to take place. The quality mindset is a must have to ensure a minimization of rework, a maximization of added

value, and a general improvement of the sense of work of the personnel.

People are the key asset of organizations in a knowledge intensive economy. Developing people is not an option, it is the only way to stay level on the treadmill of today's competitive world and eschew the most dreadful situation to end up in: service commoditization. When price is the only considered variable, one must be sure that the spiral of death has been entered. And the only way is down, crashing into the ground.

Objections

Of course, there are some objections that do pop up when looking at the concept of the groupware.

One objection is that people will not update the groupware, leaving it alone like a stone in the desert. In order to avoid this, and make a vibrant community, identification of key contributors is a must have. Also, making a habit of creating content and providing contributions is a new skill to be learned. In order to get there, a healthy provision of recognition usually works marvels. It is a fact of life that communities are not kept alive by all of its members, but only a core set of active contributors. These must be nurtured and rewarded for their action.

Another is that the groupware will either end up in a mess or that people will be unable to find back information in it. That's why it is of utmost importance to not start by creating a huge structure that looks like mostly empty. It is much better to start with a small set of valuable assets and features, make them work, and grow from there.

It is also mentioned at times that it is hard to have the initial data set up in the groupware. This has some truth in it but with proper guidance, one can quickly setup a working structure that will beat the pants of scattered folders on network drives.

Another fear is that people will not get back for more. That's why it is so important to get a core set of active contributors working on that. Do not mistake it: getting the community off the ground is a full time job and must be staffed accordingly. Letting the community unattended is sending the

message the learning and growth are secondary to the short term, blind to the future attitude.

One other misled belief is that the groupware must be perfect before being released. That's paralysis by perfection. Perfectionism can be defined as doing something so much that other things that are as important do not get the attention they deserve, ultimately leading to inefficiencies that wouldn't exist without the perfectionist attitude. What we are after is not perfection, it is excellence. How can we make a step forward in improving ourselves is the question. Practice makes perfect, and this occurs over time by trial, error, and learning.

Summary

We can summarize by saying that:

- the groupware is needed to support the dynamics of quality
- it is definitely a doable activity
- that activity is much beneficial to all parties

Next steps

The next steps to make the groupware a reality in your organization are:

- commit to put one in place and just get started
- start small
- create critical mass
- identify key contributors
- make a habit to grow it
- communicate about it regulary in all of your organizational communications