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# Cultural Aspects in (Online) Communities of Practice

## - How to deal with them?

Liza Wohlfart, Fraunhofer IAO, Stuttgart  
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Arbeitswirtschaft und  
Organisation



## Cultural aspects in (Online) Communities of Practice

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*"Differences of habit and  
language are nothing at all  
if our aims are identical  
and our hearts are open."  
J. K. Rowling*

- 1 Communities of Practice (CoPs)
- 2 Culture
- 3 Impact of culture on collaboration
- 4 Outline of today's workshop

## Communities of Practice (CoPs)



*"[CoPs are] informal groups of people bound by a shared practice related to a set of problems".*

Snyder and Wenger (1999)

CoPs ...

- a) work on common problems
- b) share insights, experiences, information
- c) mentor and coach each other
- d) generate plans for future activities



## Communities of Practice (CoPs)



[www.rusmeco.net](http://www.rusmeco.net)

Community of Russian iSMEs on business development,  
face-to-face meetings + online platform, starts in November



[www.knowledgeboard.com](http://www.knowledgeboard.com)

Global researchers and professionals community on KM,  
mostly online collaboration, started in 2001



[www.ve-forum.org](http://www.ve-forum.org)

Global res.+ prof. community on virtual organisations,  
mostly online collaboration, started in 2004



## Cultural aspects in (Online) Communities of Practice

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### Culture



- Culture is a collective and dynamic phenomenon that helps to deal with complexity ... The world is observed through this phenomenon which gives orientation, meaning and stability to a system. (Cybulski 2004)
- Cultures are different in terms of their assumption with which they look at the world. (Adler and Jelinek 1986)

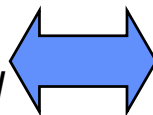


## Impact of culture on collaboration

Cultural dimensions impact

- how people talk to each other
- how they work with each other
- how they share experiences and knowledge

*“Russian executives seldom show their position openly but argue very vaguely on the basis of general moral values.”*



*“German executives frequently have a materialistic and strongly profit oriented attitude and neglect social aims.”*

(Holtbrügge 1996)



## Impact of culture on collaboration

*"Honest differences are often  
a healthy sign of progress."  
Mahatma Gandhi*

CoPs ...

- a) work on common problems
  - b) share insights, experiences, information
  - c) mentor and coach each other
  - d) generate plans for future activities
  - e) develop shared understandings and  
methods for solving common problems
- => A way to bridge cultural differences?

## Cultural aspects in (Online) Communities of Practice

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### Outline of today's workshop



- 1) Proposition of **four challenging statements** concerning cultural aspects in (online) CoPs
- 2) 2 **Presentations**, discussion on **your experiences**
- 3) Workshop summary and verification of statements
- 4) Publication of results on VE-Forum, KnowledgeBoard and RUSMECO

## Outline of today's workshop



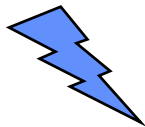
### 4 Challenging Statements:

- *"The **concept of CoPs** works best with people from similar cultural backgrounds."*
- *"Culture impacts the choice of **technology**."*
- *"**Language** is the main problem of intercultural communities."*
- *"Intercultural communities call for intercultural competences of **moderators**."*

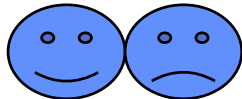


## Outline of today's workshop

### Cultural aspects in (online) communities of practice: Your experiences!



- Which cultural aspects did you observe / which challenges did you encounter?



- What were your lessons learned?



- What are your recommendations for other CoPs?

Cultural aspects in  
(Online) Communities of Practice

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## Outline of today's workshop



[www.knowledgeboard.com](http://www.knowledgeboard.com)

Corinna Flöck - Ecole Centrale Paris, France

*Language and Cultural Barriers in Intern. Cooperation*



[www.rusmeco.net](http://www.rusmeco.net)

Johann Riedel – University of Nottingham, UK

*Setting up CoPs for Innovative Russian SMEs*



## Cultural aspects in (Online) Communities of Practice

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### Contact

*"Diversity is the one  
true thing we all have  
in common."*

*Anonymous*



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