



The Change Management Community of Practice:

A fast track to enterprise change management competency

By Bill Wilder, Director, Life Cycle Institute

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Success at last! The new employee self-service module has finally been implemented - on the third try. The promised synergies associated with the merger have been realized. People are finally using SharePoint.

As a change management professional, you've experienced project success and set the stage to move on to organizational competency—for some organizations a matter of competitive survival. Leadership has noticed the success and how application of a structured change management effort contributed.

Now your challenge is to leverage that project success and leadership support to help the organization become more change-agile.

How will you achieve this?

The community of practice (COP) is an effective vehicle to build organizational change management competency and maturity. You will discover proven techniques for setting up a sustainable, effective community of practice. In some organizations the COP is called a center of excellence (COE). For the purpose of this document we will use COP to refer to either a community of practice or a center of excellence.

The Community of Practice Promotes Organizational Change-Agility

A community of practice will accelerate individual and organizational change management competency. What began as a project-by-project approach has developed into a more holistic process—one that integrates the mindset, competency and structured practice of change management throughout the organization. The evolution from applying change management on a project or departmental basis to an organizational competency involves several tasks that lend themselves to the COP.

Prosci[®], a global leader in change management research¹ introduced the Prosci Change Management Maturity Model (CMMM)² in 2004. This research-based model introduced five levels of maturity.

Research following publication of the model began to investigate the attributes and activities that contribute to organizational maturity. Five capabilities have been identified. This led to Prosci's 2012 introduction of an audit to assess the five capabilities that contribute to organizational maturity.

The Prosci CMMM measures how mature organizations are in developing their change-agility. The change management COP will facilitate organizational maturity, or moving up the CMMM maturity scale.

Let's look at this in more detail. First we will focus on the levels and then how the COP advances specific capabilities.

At Level 3 multiple projects apply a comprehensive change management process that features some integration with project management. The two processes are no longer separate. You have change management success stories and leadership attention. The stage is now set for a change management COP to accelerate an enterprise move from Level 3 to Level 4 and beyond.

Visit the Prosci website for additional information: <http://www.change-management.com/prosci-cm-maturity-model-writeup.pdf>



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In Level 4, we begin to see organizational standards established and consciously integrated into the project management methodology. According to the CMMM, it's common at Level 4 for a "super user group" to emerge. This is a core group of individuals who have become experts on change management and are focused on activities like establishing metrics and measures, sharing best practices, and maintaining a resource library. A group that develops organically around a shared domain of knowledge can be called a community of practice, whether or not the members refer to themselves this way.

Prosci Change Management Maturity Model

LEVEL 5	Organizational Competency	Change management competency is evident in all levels of the organization and is part of the organization's intellectual property and competitive edge	Continuous process improvement in place	Highest profitability and responsiveness
LEVEL 4	Organizational Standards	Organization-wide standards and methods are broadly deployed for managing and leading change	Selection of common approach	
LEVEL 3	Multiple Projects	Comprehensive approach for managing change is being applied in multiple projects	Examples of best practices evident	
LEVEL 2	Isolated Projects	Some elements of change management are being applied in isolated projects	Many different tactics used inconsistently	
LEVEL 1	Adhoc or Absent	Little or no change management applied	People-dependent without any formal practices or plans	
			Highest rate of project failure, turnover and productivity loss	

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The process of a maturing change management competency naturally offers opportunities for communities of practice to emerge. The good news is that enterprises don't have to wait for this natural evolution. By proactively organizing them, organizations can use a COP to support each capability area in the CMMM.

With the introduction of the CMMM audit Prosci identifies five capabilities. All five are advanced by the COP. The COP and CMMM table outlines examples of the tasks and responsibilities that the COP can undertake in each of the five capability areas. There are undoubtedly others. The point is to think of the COP as a flexible, cross-organizational entity that can enhance learning and speed development of organizational change agility.

COP and CMMM

CMMM Capability	Role of the COP
LEADERSHIP	Create policies and procedures around CM requirements and application.
APPLICATION	Develop a repository of tools, expertise, and resources for managing the people side of change.
COMPETENCIES	Deploy training in the common CM methodology at all levels of the organization.
STANDARDIZATION	Adopt a standard approach to CM and create standardized tools; establish criteria for applying CM.
SOCIALIZATION	Encourage a shared definition of CM across the organization; capture, publicize, and share CM success stories.

Many organizations are deploying a COP to build enterprise change management competency. For some, the COP is focused on establishing measures and metrics for change management, integrating change management into the project management process and maintaining a best practices library. For others the COP is established to provide access to program resources and training in the organization.

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The Community of Practice Promotes Learning

Research has proven what most of us know intuitively—that organizational learning is a social function. Communities of practice are, by definition, vehicles for learning through social interaction and support. As such, they can help organizations apply new learning. Learning is a process of acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills. The classroom can be an integral part of this process but the most significant factor in learning that sticks – that changes behavior - is application. Application is the third stage in the Life Cycle Institute’s 3A Learning^{®3} process.

Visit the Institute website for more information: <http://www.LCE.com/Institute>

3A Learning[®] Process

	Align	Assimilate	Apply
Purpose	Engagement Alignment Expectations	Active Learning Learning Objectives Transfer and Retention	Accountability Sustain Behavior Change Results
Tools	Blooms Learning Objectives Learning Impact Maps	Openers/Closers Facilitator Competencies Action Planning Simulations Case Studies	1-2 Goals Success 90 days Follow Through Coaching Success Case Method Celebrate Success

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The COP is an effective vehicle for encouraging application and leveraging individual learning to the organization’s advantage.

A COP will support reinforcement of new learning. This is the last stage in two important change models: the Prosci model of organizational change, and ADKAR[®], a leading model for understanding how individuals change, with important implications for organizations as well.

The process of change is inherently one of learning. In this sense, institutionalizing change management can also be seen as a process of building a learning organization. The COP, therefore, is an ideal technique for enhancing learning capability and change agility.



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Defining the Community of Practice

Chris Hendry has described a community of practice as simply “the relationships people strike up to solve problems.”⁴

Normally, though, a COP is defined with a few more parameters. The concept is based on the fact that people are social animals and will naturally come together to solve problems. It seems we have always done this. For example, medieval trade guilds allowed members to learn and collectively develop their trades. Impressionist artists met together regularly to share ideas about the unique style of painting they were developing.

In the last 30 years, the COP has emerged as a powerful, flexible tool to help modern businesses and organizations meet pressing business issues. In the Information Age, companies have to be able to harness and transfer knowledge, support innovation, and foster learning. They must also have the capacity to do these things quickly.

Traditional business units or teams are often too cumbersome to do these things well or fast. On the other hand, communities of practice are well suited for these tasks because they’re structured around what people know, rather than how they stack up on an organizational chart.

Benefits of Communities of Practice

Short Term Value	Long Term Value
Individual	Individual
Help with challenges	Personal development
Access to expertise	Reputation
Confidence	Professional identity
Fun with colleagues	Networking
Meaningful work	Marketability
Organization	Organization
Problem solving	Strategic capabilities
Time saving	Keeping up with industry progress
Knowledge sharing	Innovation
Synergies across units	Retention of talent
Re-use of resources	New strategies

Source: Etienne Wenger, <http://wenger-trayner.com>

A COP may grow organically from the bottom up—that is, they might self-organize and be entirely voluntary. Most often leadership sponsors the COP.

Regardless of how they start out, COPs are generally defined by having these elements:

- A Domain. The COP’s domain is the interest, skill, or field of practice that unites the members.
- A Community. A COP is more than a list of people working in the same field. They share knowledge, information, practice, and relationships, developed through collective activities.
- A Practice. COPs develop a shared repertoire of resources and knowledge over time.

Regardless of the subject matter or domain, the COP can benefit individuals as well as organizations. In fact, the most effective communities will offer enough rewards to individuals that they continue to participate enthusiastically and contribute their knowledge and expertise.

The chart on the left is from Etienne Wenger, one of the earliest practitioners to identify and describe the community of practice. This graphic illustrates typical benefits to people and enterprises, for change management and other communities of practice.

⁴ Chris Hendry, “Understanding and Creating Whole Organizational Change Through Learning Theory,” Human Relations May 1996 vol. 49 no. 5 621-641

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Creating the Community of Practice

As we've already seen, the traditional community of practice evolved organically from the ground up. And most of these did not exist within a larger organization.

By contrast, the modern COP often develops under the umbrella of a larger organization, and its purpose is to support the overall strategy or business goals. The COP may be initiated from above, or may emerge organically from within a group of practitioners. Some COP's have emerged out of a company's leadership training process for change management. Others began with training for change management practitioners within the leadership development group.



Regardless of how it begins, a COP within an organization will likely need involvement from the larger structure to be sustainable. Top-down support will include funding, technical resources, and sponsorship. Because of the fluid nature of COPs and their uses, there are several different ways to set them up. The following is a general guide to use as a jumping-off point.

Get a sponsor. Sponsorship is a key to success for all communities of practice. Sponsors give the COP visibility and legitimacy. People are more likely to join a group that has been endorsed formally by corporate leadership. The sponsor will also, ideally, be in a position to make sure the COP has access to necessary technical and financial resources. Part of the sponsor's role is to make the community's work visible and to communicate its value.

Align on the purpose of the COP. To be of value to the larger organization, the COP will have a domain that is relevant to organizational strategy and goals. For this reason, it is important to align on the specific purpose of the COP. The sponsor can be very helpful in sorting this out or working as a liaison with the company's strategic decision-makers.

For enterprises that have the goal of becoming more change-agile, assessing the organization's change management maturity can help the process of aligning on purpose. Prosci's CMMM audit tool is effective in framing the discussion and establishing the future state vision.

Determine the organization's role. In this step, several important questions need to be answered. How involved will the organizational leadership be in setting up the COP, and /or maintaining it? What financial and technical resources will be needed? Will members be invited or required to participate?



Even if the answers to these questions can't be answered right away, making them conscious can go a long way toward reducing waste, duplicated effort, and chasing goals that aren't relevant to the company's overall strategy.

Get the right people. Invite or require participants to engage. Interview potential members and find out what the issues are. Identify potential coordinators, looking for people who are good communicators, respected, and committed to the discipline. Help members organize initial community-building activities, and encourage them to take ownership of the process.

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Create a charter. Develop a charter that defines the community's purpose, structure, and governance. Schedule a meeting of all interested people. The invitation should include anyone who has been involved in applying change management in projects or been trained. In the meeting, break the group into teams to brainstorm ideas in five areas.

1. **Purpose** – A simple statement of why the COP is being established and a bullet list of COP goals.
2. **Membership** – Describe the people who are required to participate and those who may participate. This may include criteria such as their change management training, experience, title, or group.
3. **Administration** – This will describe the roles and how the COP will be governed. Roles that should be addressed include sponsor, champion, leader, and coordinator. Members will be addressed in the next group.
4. **Member Role** – Describe the expectations of the members and any rules of engagement. This could include maintaining confidentiality of information as the COP is likely to discuss sensitive people issues in specific changes.
5. **Schedule** – How often will the COP meet and for how long? This could include a typical agenda or COP development activities such as training, field trips and guest speakers.

At the conclusion of the meeting you should have a list of ideas and criteria in each area. Ask for volunteers or appoint a group to compile this input into a charter draft. This group should be no more than three to five people.

Contributors to Community of Practice Success

The following list was compiled from a variety of sources on what makes a good community of practice work. These are general ideas that can be applied to any COP, including those created to support change management.

- Leadership sponsors
- A documented business value proposition for the individual and organization
- A leader/coordinator who is a skilled communicator with a vision for the COP
- Access to technology for knowledge exchange and retrieval, and collaboration
- Have an easy-to-use knowledge-sharing process
- Success measures that assess health and business impact

Developing a change-agile organization takes time and effort, along with financial and human resources. It takes commitment. It takes a willingness and ability to make change management a part of the organizational DNA, not simply a good business practice rolled out for specific projects.

Communities of practice are based in human nature and the social component of change as learning. By harnessing the people-based strength of the community of practice, change initiatives have better outcomes and organizations become more capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.



About the Author

Bill Wilder, MEd, is the founder and director of the Life Cycle Institute, the learning, leadership and change management practice at Life Cycle Engineering (www.LCE.com). The Institute integrates the science of learning and the science of change management to help organizations produce results through behavior change.

Bill led the creation of the 3A learning process that incorporates the concepts of active learning and change management. He has worked with many organizations to develop learning and change management solutions that engage people and drive accountability for behavior changes that deliver results.

Bill is a certified Prosci Change Management professional and is one of the few Prosci Authorized Training Provider Certified instructors in the world. He is the author of several articles, white papers and videos on the topics of learning and change management. You can reach Bill at bwilder@LCE.com.

Learning is Change.



Learning is Change. Change is Learning.®

Those who learn and adapt faster have a competitive advantage. Organizations with a structured change management process and an organizational change management competency have the ability to learn and adapt faster with greater results.

A 2008 McKinsey & Company global survey of over 3,000 executives revealed that nearly 70% of all organizational change initiatives fail. What makes the other 30% successful? According to Prosci's 2012 Best Practices in Change Management benchmarking report five factors determine the success of change efforts:

- > Visible and active sponsorship
- > Frequent and open communications
- > Structured change management approach
- > Dedicated resources
- > Employee engagement and participation
- > Engagement with and support from middle managers

In a culture of empowerment, ownership, and accountability people will embrace change as long as they are part of the change.

Life Cycle change management consultants can guide your organization through culture change, process change, software implementation and reorganization. We can provide your staff with the strategy, tools and processes you need to succeed through change.



The Life Cycle Institute is proud to be the first Prosci Authorized Training Provider in the United States. As a Prosci Authorized Training Provider, we offer the most comprehensive options for change management training.

Prosci is the world leader in change management best practices and research. Prosci's methodology has become one of the most widely used approaches for managing the people side of change in corporations and government. Build competency in change management by participating in a top-tier training program which utilizes best practices research from more than 2,000 companies worldwide.

Change Management Services:

Change Management Planning

Create a change management strategy to proactively manage the people side of change and to create the knowledge and skills necessary for supervisors and managers to be effective change agents.

Scope of Services:

- Risk Assessment
- Change Management Strategy
- Change Management Training
- Communications Plan
- Risk Plan
- Training Plan
- Coaching Plan

Change Management Implementation

Training and coaching for your implementation team to create an integrated project plan. Collaborate with the project team to effectively manage the people side of the change.

Scope of Services:

- Structured change management strategy and plan
- Knowledge transfer of change management best practices to the project team
- On-site coaching for sponsors, project team and process teams
- Change and communication effectiveness assessments

Enterprise Change Management Competency

Build the internal organizational change management competency to consistently apply change management processes in organizational change.

Scope of Services:

- Prosci Change Management Certification Training
Learn to apply Prosci tools/methodology and earn an individual license to apply the Prosci tools
- Consulting (two weeks) – Support in applying learning to achieve specific goals within 90 days
- Results Engine – Web-based tool to encourage accountability and document progress