

Establishing Engaged Social Learning Communities: Formation and Sense-making

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ABSTRACT

Formal learning takes place in classrooms, using organizationally owned assets and technologies. Social Learning takes place beyond classrooms -- facilitated by collaborative technologies, it involves learners creating assets, and collaboratively narrating their learning. Despite being outside classrooms, it can still be a guided, reflective journey, taken over time, with real world applications to the learner. Social Learning is a distributed, co-creative and highly dynamic learning design methodology, where extensive sense making takes place within a community due to being a functioning part of that collaborative experience. The design of effective Scaffolded Social Learning maps out specific activities, techniques, and opportunities to be leveraged by the learner engaging in this dynamic. Central to the design is the notion of an effective 'Learning Community': not simply a space, but a high functioning entity, providing knowledge, context, challenge, and support to individual learners.

In this paper, we will consider Engaged Social Learning Communities as holding a specific capability to support learning effectiveness. We consider mechanisms of community formation, explore what can be done to practically assist in this formation stage, and how formation carries later implications for effectiveness. To do this, we consider eight elements that contribute to the effectiveness:

1. **Rituals of Engagement:** how members join a community.
2. **Tribes and Trust:** the granular social structure of a learning community.
3. **Identity and Ownership:** how communities gain engagement through identity and self-determination.
4. **Rules and Consequence:** implicit vs explicit rules, and the ownership of consequence.
5. **Totems and Tokens:** artifacts of membership, and trading in the reputation economy.
6. **Interconnectivity:** between individuals, and diagonally through segregated social structures.
7. **Segmentation of Spaces:** learning, rehearsal, and performance.
8. **Currencies of Vulnerability, Gratitude, Reputation and Reward**

Understanding each of these gives us a stronger foundation for design. We will share research exploring how these are used in practice in a range of international organizations.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Julian Stodd B.Sc M.A is an author, and the founder of Sea Salt Learning, which helps organizations get fit for the Social Age. He writes widely around the Social Age: including social learning, social leadership, on aspects of social technology, equality and social justice, and co-created organizational change. Julian was awarded the Colin Cordon award for services to learning, 2016, by the Learning Performance Institute in London. He has authored ten books, including Exploring the World of Social Learning, and A Mindset for Mobile Learning, as well as his most recent 'Social Leadership Handbook', which explores the role of social authority within formal hierarchies. He is currently working on 'The Change Handbook: Building the Socially Dynamic organization'. He has written over 1,700 articles around the Social Age. He is a proud global mentor with the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, and a trustee of Drake Music, a charity that works to break down disabling barriers to music through education and research.

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INTRODUCTION

Formal learning takes place in classrooms, using organizationally owned assets and technologies. Social Learning takes place beyond classrooms -- facilitated by collaborative technologies, it involves learners creating assets, and collaboratively narrating their learning (Wenger, E, 2001). Despite being outside classrooms, it can still be a guided, reflective journey, taken over time, with real world applications to the learner.

Social Learning is a distributed, co-creative and highly dynamic learning design methodology (Banduras, A, 1971), where extensive sense making takes place within a community due to being a functioning part of that collaborative experience. The design of effective Scaffolded Social Learning (Stodd, J. 2015) maps out specific activities, techniques, and opportunities to be leveraged by the learner engaging in this dynamic.

Central to the design is the notion of an effective 'Learning Community': not simply a space, but a high functioning entity, providing knowledge, context, challenge, and support to individual learners (Noveck, B. S. 2015). In this paper, we consider Engaged Social Learning Communities as ones which hold a specific capability to support learning effectiveness. We consider mechanisms of community formation, from the places where communities meet, to the rituals of engagement that are established and shared (Holloway, R. 2009). We explore what can be done to practically assist in this formation stage, and how formation carries implications for effectiveness.

Social Learning is a distributed, co-creative, and highly dynamic, learning design methodology, where extensive sense making takes place within a community. We will consider eight elements that contribute to an effective learning community:

1. **Rituals of Engagement:** how members join a community.
2. **Tribes and Trust:** the granular social structure of a learning community.
3. **Identity and Ownership:** how communities gain engagement through identity and self-determination.
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7. **Segmentation of Spaces:** learning, rehearsal, and performance
8. **Currencies** of Vulnerability, Gratitude, Reputation, and Reward

We will share research from global organizations on how these elements are practically used in Social Learning design.

CHANGES TO LEARNING

Both the context and mechanisms of learning have changed, leading to a paradigm shift in how organizations to provide content, support sense making, and nurture the communities within which learning takes place (Walcutt, J.J. & Schatz, S., 2019). There are a range of factors that have led to this change, including the following:

1. **Emergence of socially collaborative technology at scale, and in depth:** The proliferation of collaborative technology has not just been in one domain (e.g formal organizational productivity and control infrastructure), but across many (e.g. social media, crowd funding, collaboration platforms, informal expert networks, review networks, chat rooms, etc.) (Noveck, B. S., 2015). The net effect of this has been to open up spaces for learners to share challenges, and contribute cognitive surplus to solve them (Shirky, C. 2010). Within these spaces, there

is a range of information shared, and a far broader range of validating and qualifying strategies employed. This technologically aligned shift in access has, at a very practical and pragmatic level, changed how we learn. That new learning is most often facilitated by social collaborative technology, and takes place within informal social learning communities.

2. **Distribution, and interconnection of segregated expertise:** Socially collaborative technology has had a secondary effect, in that it has fractured the limitations of geography and scale. People are now connected across boundaries into many different inter-personal networks. A recent research project, Project Lift Scotland, had 140 participants provide information on how many communities they belonged to; that number ranged from 1 to 100, with a median of 20. (Stodd & Boyle, 2019). This interconnectivity impacts learner led learning in two key ways: greater access to knowledge, and greater variation in quality. However, it is a mistake to believe that moving away from established formal knowledge automatically correlates to lower validity: socially moderated knowledge tends to evolve faster and can demonstrate high levels of validity. Open source programming sites such as Github demonstrate the immense practical use and the power of peer validation in a community. People who create intensely useful programs for free -- because they get gratification out of the cooperation/competition with likeminded members of their community (Marlow, Dabbish, & Herbsleb, 2013; Borges, Hora, & Valente, 2016). There is also a question of just how much knowledge an individual needs to know, versus how much an individual needs to be able to access; in that context, greater interconnectivity may trump direct knowledge, and hence lead to the need to understand the conditions under which knowledge may be shared within these interconnected communities.
3. **Erosion of historic taxonomies of education provision and qualification:** Despite the relative newness of these technologies, a breakdown of historic taxonomies of education provision has already begun in parallel with emergence of new (rapidly evolving) models. These models are often low cost, low barrier to entry, distributed, online, and often expert led (either formally recognised experts, or peer validated ones) (Azua, 2009) Most formal funding and recognition still sits in the old hierarchy, but that may not be the case forever: crowdfunding is a well-established approach for R&D, manufacturing and even journalism, and there is nothing stopping it from becoming an approach for education. Medically oriented research initiatives are already seeking crowdfunding; other research communities may soon follow (Ducharme, 2016). Projects like SETI@Home had already demonstrated a broader public propensity to engage outside formal settings. As new areas have developed for communities to form around, similar or better community-run collaborative entities have sprung up, such as SNPEDIA, a wiki-pedia-like cross referencing of research on the impact of portions of the genetic code (Nelson, S. C., & Fullerton, S. M., 2018).
4. **Fracturing of long tenure social contract around employment:** As the concept of career has fragmented, the loci of engagement has shifted away from employer towards community (Amundson, 2005). In this context, Social Learning communities are not simply learning and development ones, but social entities of belonging and self-actualization. Learners 'belong' to tribes that increasingly hold the knowledge that they need to perform.
5. **Evolving sociology, particularly in terms of privacy, community, sharing, reward, validation, and context:** Historically, much social change has been driven by evolved communication and transport technology, and the context of the Social Age has been no different. Printing led to a slow democratization of learning, and eroded the ability of organizations and governments to control a message; so too our newer social collaborative technologies are changing things again (Silverman, 2016). The ongoing debates around privacy, ownership, reward, validation, etc., will all take time to resolve.

Within this new context of learning, we will need to adapt the ways we structure learning, and the ways we build and support the communities within which it takes place.

ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY EFFECTIVENESS

It is not our intention to provide a finalized version of a framework, but to indicate a range of areas to consider to help build appropriate guidance and policy in the future.

1. **Rituals of Engagement:** how members join a community.

In early 2018, we carried out research in the National Health Service (NHS) in the North West of the UK, exploring Conditions for Community (Stodd & Boyle, 2018). This work allowed participants to share their understanding of,

and reflections on, the communities that allowed them to be effective, be they formal communities, set up and owned by the NHS, or social ones, which were set up by people outside any formal structure.

One result from a survey of 88 was particularly interesting: for their most valuable community, a third of the respondents believed that they were invited in, and that the most important factor in their future success and value was the choreography of their welcome and engagement.

The choreography of a welcome into a community is something that can be planned for, rehearsed, and can form part of a broader organizational methodology. But it is not just a matter of saying ‘hello’ and organizing a greeting. The rituals of engagement should move beyond welcome, to consider group identity through logos, badging, and team ‘colors’. Factors which may be considered purely functional for creating an orderly environment, or frivolous in terms of display, may in fact have a central role to play in group identity and, hence, engagement. Being in a ‘team’ really counts.

We (accidentally) shone a further light on this in research at the end of 2018, with a self-selecting group of NHS leaders across Scotland, UK (Stodd, 2019). In this work (called the ‘Project Lift Community’), we asked participants to share perceptions of ‘what leadership meant to them’, and to respond to how others described it. The activity was carried out using graffiti, so they could ‘tag’ their definitions, and graffiti what others wrote. We then analyzed both the ‘tags’ and the words used to deface them, as well as analyze additional imagery used.

Broadly, we saw two effects: in terms of the words used to describe ‘what leadership means to me’, people used positive words (‘collaborative’, ‘compassionate’, etc.), and words that indicated belonging. When responding to what others had said, they used a higher proportion of negative, or cynical words (‘selfish’, ‘exclusive’ etc.), and sometimes a sentiment of cynicism or exclusion. One interpretation of this is that leadership is described as ‘belonging’, when we value it, and ‘excluding’ when we don’t.

When describing ‘what leadership means to me’, people described an aspiration of what they like, enjoy, or aspire to. But when responding to what others had written, they ground their thinking back into lived experience, and comment on how they feel they have experienced it, including a greater proportion of negative feelings. Participants need to feel the values and purpose they identify with are shared at least in aspiration with other members. It may be impossible to have effective social learning communities without this: if we don’t belong to them, if we are not welcomed, then we may inherently be excluded or opposed. We may need to actively consider the style of leadership that plays out well in these spaces.

This is early work, but there are dynamics of broader society that would indicate that we should focus on the choreography of engagement if we wish to build effective communities. Specifically consider:

1. Pre-engagement display: what community rituals make the community desirable to uncommitted individuals before there is a commitment to be a member.
2. The role of rituals in membership in e.g. frat house hazing, religious confirmation, the Oscars, graduation, retirement, elections, etc.
3. The rituals of exclusion e.g. being ‘struck off’ as a doctor, for malpractice, being excommunicated, being disbarred etc. All of these indicate removal from a community, and all are governed by ritualistic behavior.
4. The gifting of uniforms or badges, security passes, etc. as part of the rituals of on-boarding or recruitment.

At a practical level, we can all script and choreograph rituals of engagement, and support and recognize the value of spontaneously emergent ones that are valued by the community itself.

2. Tribes and Trust: the granular social structure of a learning community.

While we talk about Learning Communities, we have started to consider how far these ‘communities’ can be subdivided: this has led to adopting the language around ‘Tribes’ and ‘Trust’. Broadly speaking, people describe joining a tribe, a group which acts as a trust bonded unit. Learning communities are then made up of members from one, or multiple, tribes, but may not themselves be ‘trust bonded’. The significance of this for Social Learning is to understand that when we talk about joining a community, we may in fact be joining a tribe, a sub-group that operates within the community. We may never ‘join’ the community itself (because ‘joining’ is more than just having a user account, or being present).

To flip the model around, it may be that our challenge is to find ways to help people to join a learning tribe, and then to provide spaces and opportunity for those tribes to come together in community spaces, as meta-tribal structures.

An example of how this can impact in practice lies in the Project Lift work in the NHS in Scotland: the aim of the government funded initiative is to “unlock the power of the community”, but there are a number of overarching ‘tribal’ contexts. In our fieldwork, we operated in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, and Aberdeen, with ostensibly identical, self-selecting, cross functional leadership teams. And yet a defining feature of the conversations was that they defined the other locations by geographical stereotypes e.g. there was a sense that Glasgow would be difficult, that Perth would be ‘anti Edinburgh’, that Aberdeen would be quiet, because the ‘islanders’ don’t like to speak up, etc. Even within an organization as formal and structured as the National Health Service, the dominant modes of language used to describe what should have been one community were tribal and local (Stodd & Boyle, 2019).

On top of this were laid other social structures. When we surveyed to ask about how people may have been excluded from participation, the top reason given was the perception that we were missing a cohort of people who were too junior to confidently say that they needed to attend. In other words, we had a tribe of senior people with ‘confidence’, but lacked junior ones without it.

There was also a divide between ‘clinicians’, ‘managers’, and ‘politicos’, three tribes that all exist within an overarching formal structure, and within this ostensible same community. As is often the case, people tended to sit within their tribal structures. They know the expectations, language, and context of the social rules within their tribes, having specialized in those areas.

While this may not give a clear view of ‘what we should do about this,’ it does present a clear view that simply relying on formally defined structures will not be enough: in the language of the taxonomy as presented above, we may well be able to create and run ‘communities’, but we cannot create and run the tribes that they are built out of, and we do not own the currency of trust itself. But we can encourage it, based on some of the outcomes of our research:

1. Create a system where despite the ‘normal’ hierarchy of the community, the same consideration is given to what a novice says as someone higher up.
2. Remove some of the power play barriers, and foster a sense of person centered equality while maintaining job structure hierarchy

Practically speaking, this means that we have to consider how trust forms, and how it flows, as well as building a detailed understanding of the friction points when formal and social systems collide. What do we do that erodes, or builds, conditions for trust to grow? The literature shows varied and sometimes conflicting views of this reflecting the fact that there are probably multiple competing and opposing forces at play here (Covey, & Merrill, 2008; Gower, 2016).

3. Identity and Ownership: how communities gain engagement through identity and self-determination.

Building upon the notion that we are held within tight social structures, a strong mechanism of engagement for learning communities can be to control group identity, and to own the space and conversation.

Within a leadership development program in a global petrochemical company, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, we were able to generate higher initial engagement simply by getting sequential cohorts to create the name, badge, and identity of their cohort, as opposed to being given all of these things. While functionally there was very little freedom (they could not control actual membership, or the timeline of training activity), a veneer of self-determination seemed to count. This would make sense in the broader context of the Social Age, where we frequently ‘curate’ our identity for a specific channel, be it by selecting a specific photo for LinkedIn, or choosing an avatar on the Xbox. It is not necessarily the outcome that matters, but the execution of a choice.

If identity is important, then ‘ownership’ may be more so: in the Landscape of Trust research, we discovered that if the work that people do within communities adds financial value to the organization, then over 50% of people want to earn more money as a result. But if the engagement simply helps the culture to thrive, the figure was under 10%. The distinction seemed to be between ‘Trusted’, and ‘Valued’. Valuable work should be rewarded financially, but work that results in trust is a reward in itself. This indicates a sense that conversations have value, and hence the

ownership of that conversation counts. This will be increasingly relevant as organizations seek to deploy machine learning to trawl, scour, and analyze underlying social chatter to support innovation and change.

In the Landscape of Trust research, we saw that people ‘trusted’ formal technology, owned by the organization, less than they trusted social technology (open source, or owned and implemented by the community e.g. WhatsApp). This ‘trust’ may relate to ownership, and has real impacts on engagement due to the often appropriate suspicion that company run communities are monitored. Inhibition degrades trust (Harcourt, 2015).

4. Rules and Consequence: implicit vs explicit rules as moderators of engagement, and the ownership of consequence.

In the research on trust, we saw that the social consequence applied by the community counts for more than the formal consequence held within the community’s rules. While this is doubtless contextual, it is clear that formal rules alone are not the absolute moderator of individual, or collective, behavior. If they did, and rules determined behavior there would not be issues such as the upsurge of sexual assaults reported in the US military, or indeed any law-breaking whatsoever.

When considering the effects that moderate behavior, or the forces of consequence that apply, it’s worth noting that the judgement or censure of peers have more impact in changing behavior, or encouraging it (Wenger, E. 2001). If an individual gains satisfaction from a behavior they will continue to do it, even if the consequences are negative reaction, or consequences. The tension then comes from the fact that consistency is a key part of establishing a community based trust, so the rules must include a means of having flexible approaches. If someone delights in causing uproar, the system of consequence must be seen to be followed to maintain trust across the learning community. Unilateral response without regard to visible rules and inconsistent application can have a massive impact.

One dimension of this is well understood: echo chambers, a confirmation bias effect whereby views are self referentially reinforced by learners, although generally it is used in a derogatory term for a view or community that we wish to diminish. The reality is that virtually all of our knowledge and understanding of the world is held in self-referential constructs, piled one on top of the other. There is a reason we do this: because unity of the group is important and because we fear being outcast. Because a moderated view, where we silence dissent in favor of conformity and membership, is a way that we keep our social structures together. We can differ in some ways, but not in every way. Pragmatism is both a toxic force (when we tolerate toxic behavior) and a binding one (when we silence minor differences, in service of greater unity) (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Membership requires a level of conformity and a willingness to accept compromise in an effort to find a harmony of function, not necessarily a unity.

5. Totems and Tokens: artifacts of membership, and trading in the reputation economy

Let’s start with a simple definition: tokens are transactional, a currency, while totems have imbued meaning (almost spiritual meaning). Rituals are stylized patterns of activity, typically highly contextual, and gifts are a manifestation of generosity. Totems and tokens support the impact of identity, trust, and rituals of engagement, and weaken them when deployed poorly.

Consider tokens and totems. When you order from Amazon, you receive a ‘thank you for your order’ email, but when you give a family member a present, you may get a hand written ‘thank you’ card. The email from amazon is a token, transactional in nature. The hand written card is a totem, it represents something more than the thing itself. It has additional imbued value. Many of the interactions we have within organizations are token based: transactional receipts and currencies that permit direct recognition, or transfer. Nothing wrong with that: tokens are valuable and valued, but they are not the whole picture. They are the grease of social cooperation that are generally noticed only by their absence.

A totem represents something more: it is invested with value, imbued with meaning, which can only be understood if both parties understand the context. A birthday card sent to a wrong address will have little emotive element to the recipient, even if it was handwritten and embellished by the sender. A challenge coin passed in thanks or a title gifted on a forum can be token if performed transactionally and with little investment, or as a totem with approached with the correct level of aplomb for the community. Do not dismiss the impact of totems and tokens in learning environments, both as a motivational factor for learners in and of themselves, and as a way to bestow status and enhance community reputation.

We can take much from economic theory, especially considering the relative values of honorific versus financial
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currencies: if we are able to trade in both, we are most likely engaging in the more radical and multi dimensional markets that are enabled by the connectivity of the Social Age (Posner, E. and Glen Weyl, E. 2018).

6. Interconnectivity: between individuals, and diagonally through segregated social structures.

The formal structure of our organizations are clear to us as we function within them: teams, branches, divisions, domains, all regulated by formal power, consequence, and communication, but the social structures differ in key ways. Beyond the formal hierarchy, the predominant level of social organization is tribal: smaller collections of people, bonded by trust, pride, respect, often local to each other, or able to claim private space to engage in those rituals of sharing, gifting, exchanging, that help the social structure to bond. Any global organization is made up of many different, overlapping, tribal layers, which hold it segregated., because they are, themselves, separate, and their identity is reinforced by that separation. Being able to interconnect between these disparate units is our key aim.

Interconnectivity produces emergent effects that are game changers. Emergence is a scientific and sociological concept that describes properties or behaviors that occur when parts interact with the wider whole (Conte, Andrichetto, Campenni, & Paolucci, 2007). Through different tribal memberships as well as the organization based membership, emergent properties result. Encourage interconnectivity within a community by facilitating any other technologies or platforms that your community is already using; encourage learners to draw on their own experiences and stories, and apply them to the topic at hand.

Organizations are already connected, through the formal layers, and social connections, but we can do more: the notion of 'interconnectivity' is that we can actively build connection that breaks through this hierarchically imposed, or self imposed segregation. Not simply those people held apart by formal structures and reporting, but those separated by gradients of power, influence, opinion, or location. Tribal structures tend towards consensual connections, but a truly interconnected organization will include fractious connection, which exist beyond consensus, but which are still held with respect (Steare, R. 2013). In other words, an interconnected organisation will not be one with a unified culture, or one that lacks conflict, but rather will be one that is able to connect despite that (across that conflict). The resilience of such an organisation will lie in the fact that it's cohesive forces do not rely on conformity.

7. Segmentation of Spaces: learning, rehearsal, and performance

In learning design, we have to provide the space to rehearse, be that in workshops, in permissive and safe simulation environments or in social learning groups. Rehearsal is about pressing against the walls, testing our boundaries, working out what is fixed and what's movable, as changed behaviors require new boundaries. Effective opportunity and support for rehearsal leaves us ready to perform.

Performance is about our ability to carry the newly acquired skills through to our everyday reality, about our ability to demonstrate our learning, and it is supported through performance tools and a framework of coaching and mentoring. But performance itself is not enough: we need to include structured approaches to review what we did, and how we did it.

Review is the write up: the eagerly awaited but somewhat dreaded first night review. This is about taking time for reflection, but also about garnering and responding to feedback, both positive and negative.

The challenge in online communities comes from the merging of all of these spaces into one arena. Testing a skill, practicing and learning, rehearsal, performance, and finally review all can occur in the same forum, social media thread, software release. There may be utility in your community with providing layers of control for those learners who are valiantly attempting to use a platform, while providing for segmentations of space of their own choosing – an initial idea shared to the other learners in the community they work closest with, sharing a developmental product to a larger self-defined group, prior to bringing it before their 'classroom' environment, whether that is a formal blackboard-like space, or by launching a series of videos teaching a skill.

8. Currencies of Vulnerability, Gratitude, Reputation, and Reward

This item is woven into the fabric of all proceeding items. Formal systems may operate on financial currency, but social ones do not: when people help an organization build a culture that is 'better', only ten percent want more money for their efforts. Most want further opportunities to help; they want to contribute. On the whole, most people do not want to change and will only change communities when they feel all social currency is depleted. Social currency, whether it is publically marked, such as with Reddit Karma, or not publically marked, is vital to a healthy thriving community. Within learning communities, flexibility in experimenting with types of currencies, both marked and unmarked, is important.

We are almost certainly moving from a historic single currency model of engagement, to the model of the Social Age, which recognizes multiple currencies, some of which are traded in open markets, and some of which are honorific and closed. This adds a complexity for organizations: they are used to owning the central bank, they trade financial currency for time and utility, but in a more social transaction we trade invested engagement for trust, and there is no central bank. Organizations can trade in these new currencies, but must recognize the diminishing return of the old, and the truth that they cannot own and control the new.

CONCLUSIONS

As we engage in Social Learning, we discover that our formal power does not carry through into social spaces within these learning communities. It is social authority, peer approval, and an individual's own reputation which counts the most. In the course of adopting social learning, we inadvertently erode the power of the formal organization.

Our ability to lead, learn, and be effective, is largely rooted in our ability to engage with many and varied communities. Since communities are complex social structures, our views towards them should be nuanced, and move beyond simple control. For every piece of energy, every conversation, every activity of learning that a community owner sees, the majority will go unseen. The communities research highlighted a sophisticated set of behaviors and competencies that lead to the 'high-functioning' nature and social value of these types of communities. These are factors that we cannot take for granted, but can optimize and improve on. Eight suggestions follow on how to improve on learning community performance:

1. **Rituals of Engagement:** how members join a community. Put deliberate effort into scripting and rehearsing these: consider especially the first point of contact, and 'membership as experience', not simply as registration, or utility. Be visible and aspirational before potential new members join the community. As well as having rituals of membership, consider rituals of leaving, and exclusion.
2. **Tribes and Trust:** the granular social structure of a learning community. From the start, recognize that you are not building a learning community, but rather a meta tribal structure: a community of learners, maybe, but each housed in separate tribes. The social structure of a learning community will self evolve, as smaller groups develop their own structure, language, and rules. To encourage these sub- groups to share with the rest of the learning community, foster a sense of person centered equality while maintaining formal hierarchy. Rules will not force sharing: it is an invested effort, with trust as a foundation.
3. **Identity and Ownership:** how communities gain engagement through identity and self-determination. Encourage a sense of ownership and identity creation within the community. It is not necessarily the outcome that matters, but the execution of any choice at all.
4. **Rules and Consequence:** implicit vs explicit rules as moderators of engagement, and the ownership of consequence. Consistency is a key part of establishing a community-based trust, so the rules must include a means of having flexible approaches. If someone delights in causing uproar, the system of consequence must be seen to be followed to maintain trust across the learning community. Unilateral response without regard to visible rules and inconsistent application can have a massive impact.

One dimension of this is well understood: echo chambers, a confirmation bias effect whereby views are self referentially reinforced by learners, although generally it is used in a derogatory term for a view or community that we wish to diminish. The reality is that virtually all of our knowledge and understanding of the world is held in self-referential constructs, piled one on top of the other.

5. **Totems and Tokens:** artifacts of membership, and trading in the reputation economy. Do not dismiss the impact of totems and tokens in learning environments, both as a motivational factor for learners in and of themselves, and as a way to bestow status and enhance community reputation. But differentiate between things that have intrinsic value, and those with imbued value: an iTunes gift card has value bestowed by Apple, but a 'thank you' card has value imbued by our friendship and respect. We highly value socially imbued value, so make this count.
6. **Interconnectivity:** between individuals, and diagonally through segregated social structures. Encourage interconnectivity within a community by facilitating any other technologies or platforms that your community is already using; encourage learners to draw on their own experiences and stories, and apply them to

the topic at hand. Focus deliberate effort not simply on established lines of communication, but to open up new ones. Bringing groups together to document their 'stories of difference' can help them find new connectivity, not founded upon consensus, but rather a shared perspective of difference.

7. **Segmentation of Spaces:** learning, rehearsal, and performance. The challenge in online communities comes from the merging of testing a skill, practicing and learning, rehearsal, performance, and finally review all can occur in the same space; providing for users to have the ability to segment their spaces themselves will increase impact.
8. **Currencies** of Vulnerability, Gratitude, Reputation, and Reward. Currencies in the context of a learning community can be tangible and publicly known or they can be non- tangible. As a formal organization interacting with a less-formal organization, this must be done with care, but properly executed, it can greatly increase performance and learning that occurs within the community.

The behaviors exhibited in the above items, the ways that people engage, their approach to consequence, the impacts of technology etc., are learned over time, often through mistakes, and are not equally held. Some people are more successful at finding and accessing communities, partly through intrinsic nature, and partly because they fit the dominant, normalized model. Some people are disenfranchised and discriminated against in this new world because they lack the capability, or permission, to engage.

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