

Information Management Resource Kit

Module on Building Electronic Communities and Networks

UNIT 2. UNDERSTANDING NEEDS AND ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON 4. SKILLS AND RESOURCES FOR AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

NOTE

Please note that this PDF version does not have the interactive features offered through the IMARK courseware such as exercises with feedback, pop-ups, animations etc.

We recommend that you take the lesson using the interactive courseware environment, and use the PDF version for printing the lesson and to use as a reference after you have completed the course.



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Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- recognize steps needed to assess capacity of your organization and stakeholders, and
- identify cost considerations to be made at the assessment stage.



Introduction

In this lesson we will discuss the **capacity building assessment**, one of the needs analysis activities.



Defining your idea: building up your team and identifying goals



Needs assessment: assessing the needs of the potential online community members



Capacity building assessment



Analysing technical, financial, institutional and social barriers

What is capacity?

Do we have enough skills and resources to carry out our community building project?



As you know, it is very important to focus your needs analysis so that you use your time wisely and also answer the right questions to know how to build your online community effort.

What is the capacity of you and other stakeholders to build and sustain an online community?

What is capacity?



When we talk about 'capacity' we are referring to **anything that an individual, organization or an entire community needs to fulfill its goals.**

It could mean either the **skill or time** to handle activities such as production of an electronic newsletter, management of a Web site, development of case studies or simply logging on to an online community Web site to post a question for others to answer.

How to assess capacity

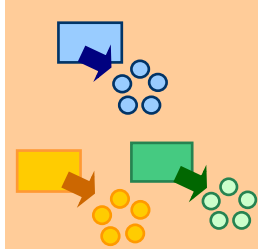
Since most online communities rely upon distributed responsibility to share information and communications, it is helpful to think about capacity on several levels.



What is **your capacity** to implement the project?



What is the capacity of **leaders in the community** to stimulate and facilitate the generation of content and conversation?



What is the capacity of **other major partners** to market the online community to their communities?

How to assess capacity

The Keper communication team is assessing the capacity to build and sustain the online community...

Our first objective is **to contribute to extend information channels** offered by Keper.



See the **interactive lesson** to have a look at the Keper objectives

Interaction technology offers a large number of channels that can be used to let the members of a group communicate and exchange messages, content and every kind of knowledge.

Channels must be selected, and the communication flow must be created and maintained.

How to assess capacity

Imagine we choose to create an electronic newsletter as an instrument to enhance interaction.

What would this mean?



Choosing an electronic newsletter would involve a series of related activities:

ACTIVITIES
• Production of a monthly electronic newsletter
• Distribution of the monthly electronic newsletter
• Development and maintenance of the e-mail list of online community members
• Archiving information on the Web site

How to assess capacity

Let's start from the first activity: who would be responsible for the **production of a monthly electronic newsletter**? And what is his/her capacity to handle this activity?



The team identifies the Alfa radio station as possibly being responsible for this specific activity.

ACTIVITY	Who is responsible?	What is the capacity of the stakeholder to handle this activity?
Production of a monthly electronic newsletter	The Alfa Radio station ↑	


How to assess capacity

The Alfa Radio station



The team has identified the following capacity of the selected stakeholder:

- they have excellent writing skills, and
- they are well connected to the community so they should have no trouble getting good content.

ACTIVITY	Who is responsible?	What is the capacity of the stakeholder to handle this activity?
Production of a monthly electronic newsletter	The Alfa Radio station	

The major challenge they will face is in formatting the electronic newsletter for text and html based e-mail to community members, and finding the time to manage the activity.

How to assess capacity

By doing this analysis, the team identifies the available resources in terms of people, knowledge and skills, and the resources that still need to be developed.

Can you summarize the method they use?

- Identify who is responsible for each activity b
- Identify the capacity of the stakeholder to handle the activity c
- Develop a list of activities a

Put the steps in the correct order

How to assess capacity

How to identify the capacity of stakeholders in a realistic way?

You should start by looking back at the information gathered during other assessment activities to review what the needs are of the online community members and others involved in the effort.



There are three primary ways to gather information about the capacity of an individual, organization or community:

- 1) look at the **past habits and performance** of the stakeholder in question,
- 2) ask the stakeholder **what they think** their capacity is to handle the specific activity,
- 3) ask **others who work with** the stakeholder in question about their capacity.

Capacity of individuals and small organizations



Particularly for very **small organizations** with 3 or 4 employees, or for individuals who are leading an online community building effort, building and sustaining an online community can be a daunting activity.

Along with the many questions you decide to answer by collecting information from your potential online community members, there is a **specific set of questions related to your capacity** that you must answer before moving forward with the building of your online community.

Capacity of individuals and small organizations

Questions to be answered include:



- What **time constraints** do you have that will prevent you from handling your online community building responsibilities?
- Are there **particular times** of day, the week, month or year where your capacity changes?
- How will this affect your ability to handle the ongoing needs of the online community?



- How can you engage **other people** to fill in for you?
- What **training needs** will these other people have?
- Is there a single person who can back you up and operate as second in charge of the online community?
- What will happen if you have to permanently **leave your role** as a leader of the online community?

The total cost of use



Considerations about costs and time related to the building and maintenance of the online community will be an important part of your planning effort.

Is the assessment stage the time to think about them? With which of the following opinions do you better agree?

- We should begin to budget for the project: costs for hardware, software and various activities...
- At the moment we should only consider costs for hardware and software we will use.
- It is not yet the time to think about costs: we should consider them in the planning stage.

Click on the answer of your choice

The total cost of use

During the capacity building assessment it is helpful to look back at the data you gathered to develop a general sense of cost areas, and a list of these. We call this "total cost of use" (TCU).

The total cost of use includes both the **time** and **financial cost**.

Combining the financial and human resources necessary in each of the categories listed will give you a sense of the total cost of use of your online community.

The following are some of the cost areas the TCU can cover.
See next screens to learn more.

TCU – Cost Areas

Assessment & Planning	Software
Training	Hardware
Technical Support	Connectivity

The total cost of use

Assessment & Planning

- Hiring consultants to help you do assessment and planning.
- The time of the team members and yourself to do assessment and planning.
- The time of any stakeholders who you are gathering information from.
- Planning for general implementation and maintenance of the online community, privacy issues, security and other concerns.
- Marketing efforts both through electronic and non-electronic means to solicit participation.

Training

- Hiring training specialists to develop any training curriculum you need, do training assessment and/or development of a training plan.
- Hiring trainers to conduct training.
- Bartering cost related to partnerships you form to deliver training.
- The time you yourself might need to get trained or conduct training.
- The time of those being trained - key stakeholders as well as those who take a leadership role. Training may be needed on the use of online tools like e-mail discussion lists, content posting tools, facilitation or moderation and content development.

Technical Support

- Technical support related to planning, training, tool purchasing, maintenance, marketing, etc. This is often provided by skilled community members in a volunteer or paid capacity. It could also include consultants or other organizations with expertise that does not exist in your organization or community.

The total cost of use

Software

- Purchasing of software tools for e-mail management, blogs and other online community functionality you need to provide
- Operating system software
- Content management software
- Database software
- Virus protection software
- SPAM prevention software
- Web site software
- Digital video and/or photo imaging and editing software

Hardware

- Scanner
- Digital Camera
- Server
- Desktop terminals
- Handheld computers
- Cell phones
- Replacement/upgrade of hardware

Connectivity

- Web hosting
- Wiring needed to bring sites online
- Wireless tools
- Internet connectivity. Any online community relies on the Internet as the backbone of information sharing and communications. Whoever hosts the online community tools will need to provide adequate bandwidth.

The total cost of use

Thinking about the costs is helpful as the assessment process is not just about gathering data, but also **getting stakeholders invested in the project**.

You should have discussions with them in order to:



- begin to list the resources you will need,
- begin to budget for the project,
- generate questions you need to answer,
- identify people or resources you need to get more information from, and
- allocate responsibilities to keep the TCU budgeting process moving forward.

Job aids

From the interactive lesson you can download and print documents that can help you in your work.



Online Community Capacity Building Assessment form

Use this form to structure your information gathering.



TCU discussion form

Hold a discussion with your team and use this form to analyse the implications of TCU for your project.



Summary

“Capacity” is referred to as anything that an individual, organization or an entire community needs to fulfill its goals.

Capacity includes skills, human resources, time and costs required to set up and maintain the online community.

Capacity assessment can be carried out by following these steps: review the goals, identify the relevant activities, identify who will be responsible of each activity and determine his/her capacity to handle the activity. Particularly for very small organizations or individuals, the capacity to handle the project must be carefully checked.

Even if detailed budgeting will be part of the planning stage, at the assessment stage it is very helpful to develop a general sense of all the costs for the project.

If you want to learn more ...

- Managing the Mosaic, Winter 2003 Carl Sussman – Nonprofit Quarterly Volume 10, Issue 4,
<http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/section/463.html>
- The Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits Free Management Library, Capacity Building Section
http://www.managementhelp.org/org_perf/capacity.htm
- ONE Northwest Activists Toolkit
<http://www.onenw.org/bin/page.cfm/secid/5>
- ASSESSMENT TOOL: ICT & development- help or hindrance?
<http://www.developmentgateway.com.au/ict/assesstool/index.html>
Contains two sets of assessments tools for ICT-driven project or mainstream development project w/ICT support.