

Information Management Resource Kit

Module on Building Electronic Communities and Networks

UNIT 4. DESIGNING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

LESSON 2. IN-HOUSE ROLES AND COMPETENCIES REQUIRED

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.

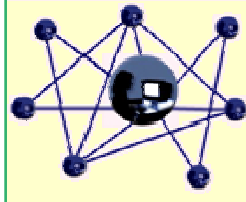


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Objectives

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

- understand the role of the coordinator of an online community project; and
- identify the other roles involved in the project.



Introduction



In this lesson you will find a description of the roles and responsibilities involved in an online community project, focusing on the role of the project coordinator.

It is important to distinguish between the role of the project coordinator and the roles of other people working in or with the project.

However, in small projects, or at the first stages of a project, one or two people can cover various roles.

The project coordinator

The coordinator of an online community project is the **person who is primarily responsible** for the online community.

Let's find out how Amina, the coordinator of the Keper online community project, talks about her job.



Amina, Project coordinator

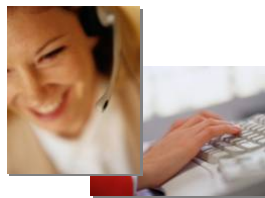
I'm responsible for overseeing and managing all aspects that sustain an online community.

Having joined the project at the beginning, my tasks included the conceptualizing and planning of the project.

Amina is involved in the project from the inception of the idea to establish an online community.

However, a project coordinator is usually appointed after the project plan - which includes identifying the roles and competencies of the project coordinator - has been developed.

The project coordinator



In your opinion, do tasks of a project coordinator include facilitating communication in the online community environments?

- Yes
- No

Please click on the answer of your choice

The project coordinator

First, I deal with project overview and management.



Project overview and management include:

- schedule work-plan;
- implement and monitor project work;
- ensure that the project remains on schedule;
- ensure that the project remains on budget;
- and
- oversee staff, contractors and volunteers involved with the project.

The central position of the project coordinator makes it possible for them to see where possible problems may develop in the implementation of the project and to anticipate these problems before they occur or to take corrective action.

The project coordinator

Moreover, I carry out **project documenting and reporting**, that is documenting the implementation of the project and reporting on it.



Documenting the implementation of the project provides...

- Material for project reports: **anecdotes, examples, and other stories** to illustrate your reports.
- Material for the 'life-story' of the project (**creating a common history** is part of building an online community).
- Material for monitoring and evaluation of the project: participant stories, **statistics** on community activities and membership.

Reporting on the project provides...

- Project funding agencies and other stakeholders with regular project updates. This keeps the stakeholders informed and it will **secure ongoing support to the project**.

The project coordinator

Building an online community involves coordination and regular communication with the key stakeholders in the project.

For each of the key stakeholders the project coordinator needs to develop a **liaison plan**:

- exchange contact information;
- develop an appropriate format and schedule for providing project updates or to report problems.



Amina is writing an e-mail about project updates. She is sending this information to:

- the external funding agency,
- key members of the community,
- Project Internet Services Provider.

The project coordinator

The traditional roles and tasks of a project coordinator can be **expanded** in several ways.



The project coordinator is responsible for tasks particular to an online community project, such as:

- coordinating training in the use of the online community;
- coordinating the technical development of the online community;
- promoting the online community among non-participating organisations;
- coordinating evaluation and continuous improvement activities.

As in Amina's case, the project coordinator can be involved in the conceptualization and planning of a project.

In small projects, a part-time project coordinator may play other roles in the project, such as online facilitator or technical support.

The project coordinator

SAMPLE PROJECT COORDINATOR JOB DESCRIPTION: TASKS

AgriPak Community Services is a service provider for local and regional agricultural organizations in rural Pakistan. In order to strengthen the coordination and collaboration between rural agricultural organizations, AgriPak has initiated the Agricultural Community Partnership, an Internet based support network for rural agricultural organizations. It is seeking a Project Coordinator to oversee and facilitate the implementation of the network.

Tasks of the project coordinator:

1. Establish the Agricultural Community Partnership (ACP):
 - a. identify and secure support of key stakeholders
 - b. establish steering group
 - c. work closely with, support and strengthen the steering group to carry out the project
2. Gain Community Involvement
 - a. identify local and regional organizations and networks
 - b. contribute to widening participation in the ACP, particularly ensuring that traditionally excluded organizations and sectors are involved
 - c. organize and facilitate ACP presentations and training workshops in use of the ACP online community
3. Coordinate ACP service providers:
 - a. liaise with IT service providers
 - b. work closely with the ACP online community facilitator
4. Other:
 - a. provide administrative services to the project
 - b. manage project budget
 - c. provide AgriPak Community Services with regular progress reports

Project coordination competencies

What competencies are required to do your job?




Michael, a trainer

Now we are looking at the **competencies** needed for coordinating an online community project.

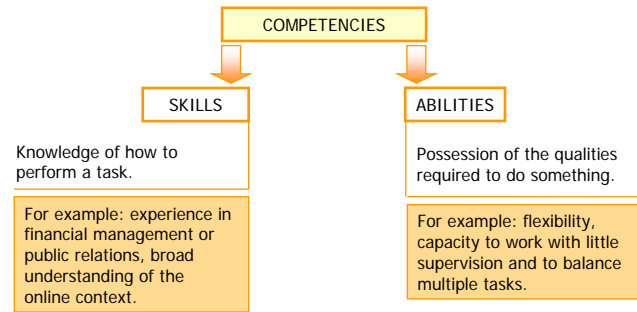
Competencies are the skills, abilities, knowledge, credentials and experience required for a specific job task.

Some competencies are **essential**, that is indispensable, for a job. Others are not essential but **desired** surplus to the requirements of the job.

 What skills and abilities are

Project coordination competencies

Competencies can generally be divided into skills and abilities, as follows:



Skills can be assessed in several ways: on the basis of diplomas, certificates, references, the written application forms, answers in the job interview, and in tests.

Abilities are more difficult to assess. Good sources are descriptions of experiences and answers on specific questions during the job interview.

Project coordination competencies

As online project coordinator, Amina has general project coordination skills, plus the **specific skills** for coordinating an **online community project**, which are...



- Good online communication skills.
- Public relations skills for presenting and promoting the online community.
- Broad understanding of the online context: online communities in general and the online community project in particular.
- Good end-user computing skills and basic familiarity with range of online community tools.
- Ability to present usage data and statistics in user-friendly formats.

General project coordination skills

General project coordination skills are...

- **Communication skills** refer to competence in expressing oneself in writing, in public, in relationships with colleagues and clients, and in teams.
- **Writing skills** refer to competence in writing project reports, presentations, etc.
- **Analytical skills** refer to competence in interpreting and organising data, statistics, and information.
- **Management skills** refer to competence in organising a workload, coordinating a team and tasks, managing budgets.
- **Technical skills** refer to the competence in using or operating a machine in a specific manner. In project coordination they often refer to **computer and Internet skills**.

Project coordination competencies

What do we do: publish or not publish this report on the community?



We should talk about a misunderstandings among the key stakeholders...

The server has crashed twice today! We must solve this problem as soon as possible!

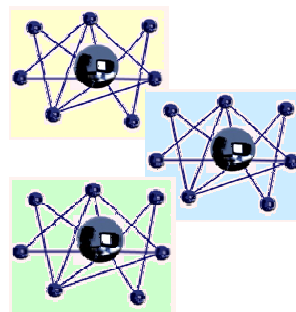
Some of the abilities of a coordinator of an online community project are...

- Ability to **balance multiple tasks**. You are always working on several aspects of your project at the same time, especially if there is an online component.
- Ability to **work with little supervision**. This is related to the ability to balance multiple tasks. Decisions are often made on the spot. This is definitely not a job for people who need constant guidance.
- **Flexibility**. Coordinating an online community project demands great flexibility and adaptability. It requires the ability to adjust positively to change, to cope well with unforeseen situations, as well as the ability to find appropriate alternative solutions.

Project coordination competencies

Coordination of an online community project may require some **additional skills or experiences** related to the specific project...

- A multilingual project may require a coordinator with particular language skills.
- A research network may require a coordinator with an educational background in the research specialization.
- A network of women's organizations may require a woman coordinator.
- A special interest community may require a coordinator who shares the special interest.
- A community covering a geographical area may require a coordinator who lives in that area.



Project coordination competencies

SAMPLE PROJECT COORDINATOR COMPETENCIES

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Competencies of the project coordinator:

1. Experience in working with rural communities is a must. Experience in working with communities online is preferable.
2. Understanding of the capacities, interests and needs of rural agricultural organizations.
3. Good interpersonal and teamwork skills. We need a patient listener and creative organiser.
4. Ability to work independently and to perform basic financial management.
5. Good end-user computing and Internet skills.
6. Excellent spoken and written Urdu and English
7. Excellent report writing and communication skills.

Other project roles

One of the most important tasks of a project coordinator is to coordinate the project tasks that are implemented by other people and organizations, such as...



the online facilitator



the Internet Services
Provider or other
technology vendors



project consultants

It is important to have a **clear division** between the role and responsibilities of the project coordinator and the roles and responsibilities of other people working in or with the project.

Other project roles

Possible project roles in your online community project are...




- Online facilitator
- Financial administrator
- Web developer
- Technical support and maintenance
- Programmer
- Trainer
- Promotions and outreach
- Researcher
- Project evaluation

[Click on the picture to read roles and tasks description](#)

Some of these roles, like promotions and outreach and financial administration, are often part of the tasks of a coordinator.

Technical maintenance and online facilitation need ongoing attention in large online community projects. Especially specific tasks such as organizing a conference or composing a joint report require intensive facilitation and technical support. Combining one of these tasks with those of a project coordination may be too much for one person.

 [See an example of organizational structure: the WOUGNET's secretariat](#)

Other project roles

Role	Summary job description	Summary of tasks
Online facilitator	Coordination of communication in online community project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate themes for discussion • Stimulate debate
Financial administrator	Management of project budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor project expenses • Produce financial project report
Web developer	Development of online community website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design multi-lingual website • Liaise with Project Coordinator and Promotions and outreach
Technical support and maintenance	Technical support to project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of website
Programmer	Design of information management system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of online database
Trainer	Training of new community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize training workshops in electronic networking • Write user manual
Promotions and outreach	Online community public relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop communication strategy • Organize presentations of community
Researcher	Provision of research support to online facilitator and project evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with online facilitator and project evaluator • Provide background materials for discussion themes
Project evaluator	Monitoring and evaluation of project implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design monitoring and evaluation plan • Write progress reports

Other project roles

Can you match the following project roles with the relevant tasks?

a

Project facilitator

Project evaluator

Project trainer

Writes user manuals

Writes progress reports

Develops discussion themes

1

Click on each option, drag it and drop it in the corresponding box.
When you have finished, click on the Check Answer button.

Other project roles

I'm the technical expert for the Keper project.

As you can see from my job description, I cover different roles: Web Developer, Programmer and Technical Support.



Job title: Programmer/developer

Job description:

- Design multi-lingual website
- Liaise with Project Coordinator and Promotions and Outreach
- Design of online database
- Maintenance of website

A job can consist of several roles. You have the option of combining some roles in one job description or allocating the different roles to different people.

Roles can be allocated in-house, to people in your organization or network, or they can be outsourced to project consultants.

In any case, clearly demarcated **job descriptions** will help you to build a strong project team in which everyone understands each others responsibilities.

Job descriptions are written on the basis of an assessment of the roles and expertise required for an online community project.

Summary

The project coordinator is the overseer and manager of project implementation and principal project liaison.

Project coordination competencies consist of skills, such as communication and management skills, and abilities, such as flexibility and being a team player.

Other project roles, such as online facilitator, web developer, and trainer, need to be assessed and clearly described.

If you want to learn more...

Specifying job and role competencies
<http://www.managementhelp.org/staffing/specify/cmptncys/cmptncys.htm>

The WOUNET website www.wougn.net