Learning and Organisational Resources for Communities of Practice

Type of resource: Choosing and (individually and collectively) appropriating tools, supporting CoPs in conceiving scenarios of tools uses
Type of scenario: Debate & Decide

ChoicesTools: Negotiating, discussing and making decisions about the choices of tools

Summary

One CoP is not another: when (and if) its members need software tools or services to help them, these tools have to match their unique needs precisely, at the risk of being useless or even an hindrance to the CoP.

Objectives

Helping CoPs in choosing the right tools and services, PALETTE or not, that may help them in their everyday work.

Scenario

1. A CoP decides it will need tools for its activities – a new CoP, or a CoP with the desire to modernize its practices. Its core members first establish a list of the CoP usual or potential activities – for doing so, depending of the size and internal organization of the CoP.
2. They either do it vertically (the core members are sovereign) or horizontally (by polling all the members of the CoP). As for the next points, this can be done either in plenary meetings or at a distance, with the help of
   o A forum engine (phpBB, for instance)
   o A mailing-list
   o Instant Messenger (Google Talk, Windows Live Messenger or compatible free clients)
3. The negotiation, discussion and decision-making process itself is by nature hard to generalize, but some guidelines can be given: split the problems in as little parts as possible and brainstorm questions according to this process, for instance:
   o I need a tool that I can come to grips with in less than one hour;
   o I need a tool that can do most of what I do with my word processor (or any other software);
   o I need a tool that can access various file formats;
   o I have the time to learn a tool, and I want to learn a tool that can help me to do [...];
   o I need a tool that works well with the other tool I use, [...];
   o I need a tool that will amaze my audience;
   o I need a tool that is often used by mathematicians;
   o I need a tool which respects ISO/W3C/ECMA/[...] standards;
   o I need a tool which is free software/closed source software;

- o I need a free software tool, and its license must be (compatible with) the GPL, the BSD license, the CC license, etc.;
- o I need a tool that can produce documents readable by my target audience/by as a large audience as possible;
- o I need a tool that produces documents readable only by itself in order to promote its use.
4. Once the tool are chosen (with the help of the resources found in "**ActivitiesToolsScenarios**: Matching different types of activities with types of tools and scenarios"), trials of the tool, with real CoP members and must be conduced in order to see if it can help modernize the CoP activities – not for the sake of modernization, but for the sake of efficiency.
5. If more than one tool has be chosen, the trial should help verifying that there is no overlapping between the tools. For instance, if two tools were pre-selected with the same goal in mind, the trial should help choosing which of the two tools is the most adequate for the CoP need.

Tools to support activity
- A forum engine (phpBB, for instance)
- A mailing-list
- Instant Messenger (Google Talk, Windows Live Messenger or compatible free clients)

Further resources
- "**ActivitiesToolsScenarios**: Matching different types of activities with types of tools and scenarios". This LOR allows choosing tools regarding the activities to carry out with the CoP.
- The PALETTE services gallery can help in choosing tools for CoPs: http://palette.ercim.org/component/option,com_alphacontent/Itemid,119/