

Agile Journey discussion series:

("Sharing is Learning"):

Community of/in Practices (CoP)

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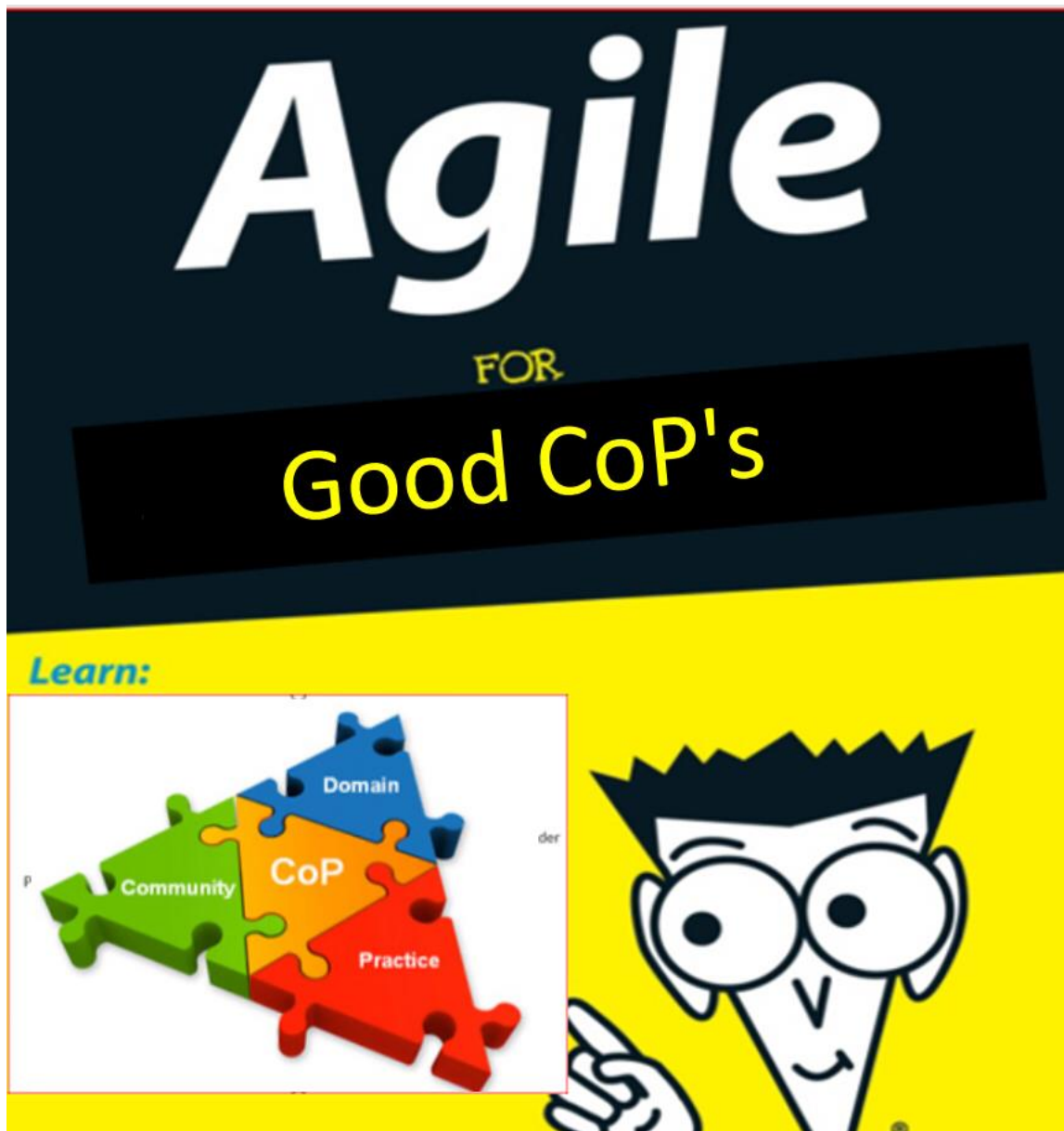


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01 Introduction:

Welcome to one of my Articles of Agile and other practices and this time on the so called “Communities of Practices” (CoP).

In this article I’ll give you a very simple overview and address the W-Question and share some practices and tips and tricks for CoP’s.

The articles are inspired by my journey as Agile Coach, but primarily inspired by my daily experience of driving and joining CoP’s.

So, this should be considered as Simple Best Practices Checklist and the intention is not to teach theory, but simply to share CoP concept with the hope this could also be useful for you.

This article is divided into 4 chapters:

- 01 Introduction – This chapter
- 02 Community of Practices - Overall description of concept
- 03 Source/References – Inspiration for future reading
- 04 Appendix – Supplementary material

Cliff hangers:

1. My hope is that you will understand why CoP is so important. Especially in our disruptive and fast changing world. Where key is effective and self-improving Communities for knowledge sharing and innovating is key to survive.
2. Actually - the first version of this article is indirectly written by you and others in our global “World CoP”. How? This is the cliff hanger 😊

02 Community of Practices (CoP)

This chapter will give you an introduction and Overview of **Community of Practices** and for each question this is divided in two sections:

- *Theory* – Describing the theoretical angle to the question.
- *Practices* – Some practical things/tips/tricks to consider when implementing the practices in practices.

- 1) **What is a CoP?**
- 2) **Why CoP?**
- 3) **When to use CoP?**
- 4) **Who to include in CoP?**
- 5) **Where to use CoP?**
- 6) **How to do CoP?**
- 7) **Good/Bad CoP**

1) What is a CoP?

Theory:

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common concern or interest in a specific domain or area, and who come together to learn from one another and improve their collective understanding and skills.

The members of a CoP can be from the same organization or from different organizations, and can be located in the same geographic area or be dispersed across different locations.

The focus of a CoP can be on a particular industry, profession, or technical area, and the activities of a CoP can include sharing information and best practices, collaborative problem-solving, and developing new ideas and innovations.

CoPs can be informal, self-organized groups or they can be established and supported by an organization. They often rely on the informal interactions and relationships among the members to share knowledge, experiences, and practices.

Practices:

CoP is not just a meeting construction and group of people, but people with need and passion to improve practices and learn. So, the “Why” part of the “Working Agreement” (See Appendix01) is actually quite important.

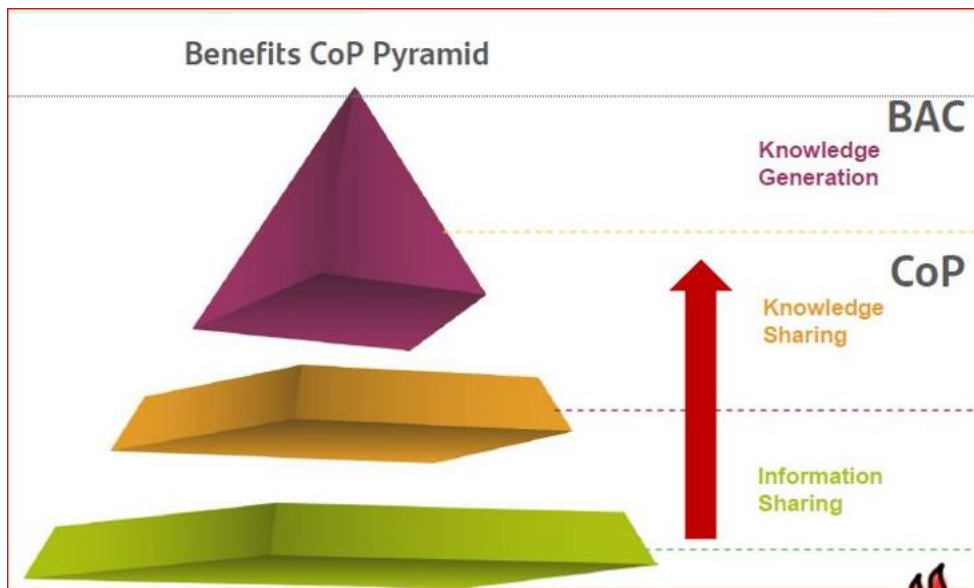
CoP could also be considered as “the missing brick” connecting the “Domain” with “Community” and “Practices:



To keep and drive this passion the definition of scope and common interest is also important.

Just like “In Scope” for the CoP the “Out of Scope” is just as important – since this is the “gasoline” for the passion.

If you look at this agile pyramid the CoP is somewhere between pure “Knowledge Sharing” and motivation for Business Agility Community (BAC) and “Knowledge Generation”



2) Why CoP?



Theory:

Communities of Practice (CoPs) can be beneficial in a number of ways, including:

1. Sharing knowledge: CoPs provide a platform for members to share information and best practices, which can lead to improved performance and efficiency.
2. Professional development: CoPs can provide opportunities for members to develop their skills and advance their careers.
3. Innovation: CoPs can foster creativity and generate new ideas by bringing together people with different perspectives and experiences.

4. Solving problems: CoPs can be used to tackle complex problems that cannot be solved by individuals working alone.
5. Driving organizational change: CoPs can help to align the actions and activities of different departments and teams within an organization, leading to a more cohesive and effective organization.
6. Building relationships: CoPs can foster relationships among members, which can lead to increased trust and collaboration.
7. Encourage informal learning: CoPs often promote informal learning and knowledge sharing as it allows members to learn from each other, by sharing their experience, skills, and knowledge.
8. Supporting new hires: CoPs can be a great way to support new hires and help them to get up to speed quickly by providing them with access to a network of experienced professionals.
9. Cost-effective: CoPs can be a cost-effective way to share knowledge and improve performance, as they do not require a significant investment in terms of time or money.
10. Adaptability: CoPs are adaptable and can be created or dissolved as the need arises, they also can be formed around a specific project or a specific period of time and be dissolved once the project is completed.

Practices:

As described above there are a lot of good reasons for making a CoP, but it's important in practices to be very clear of the aim/goal (Anchored in e.g. "Working Agreement" - Appendix01) for the CoP and not try to cover all.

It's also my experience if the CoP turn out "just" to be another delivering unit with deadlines etc. The informal magic disappears.

If CoP's are used as part of an organizational change the timing is even more important and that the scope is set according to the actual maturity of the organization. For example, the focus (inspired by the ADKAR Change Management model – See Appendix04) could be on creation Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability or Reinforcement depending on maturity.

The most frequent "Why" is in my experience "Encourage informal learning" and "Sharing knowledge" and for good reason since knowledge is key in a changing market.

3) When to use CoP?



Theory:

A Community of Practice (CoP) can be a useful tool in a variety of situations, including:

1. Sharing knowledge: CoPs can be used to share information and best practices among members, which can lead to improved performance and efficiency.
2. Professional development: CoPs can provide opportunities for members to develop their skills and advance their careers.
3. Innovation: CoPs can foster creativity and generate new ideas by bringing together people with different perspectives and experiences.
4. Solving problems: CoPs can be used to tackle complex problems that cannot be solved by individuals working alone.
5. Driving organizational change: CoPs can help to align the actions and activities of different departments and teams within an organization, leading to a more cohesive and effective organization.
6. Building relationships: CoPs can foster relationships among members, which can lead to increased trust and collaboration.
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8. Supporting new hires: CoPs can be a great way to support new hires and help them to get up to speed quickly by providing them with access to a network of experienced professionals.

Practices:

For obvious reasons there are more similarities than differences between “Why” and “When” - so the “Timing” part is probably the most interesting.

My experience is that the best timing is when the maturity of the practices is not too low - meaning that focus is more on sharing than on learning the basic.

But a CoP could also be good to keep the continuity after an education program and could then support most of the “Why’s” and “When’s”.

Another situation where and when a CoP could make the difference is when innovation and solving a complex problem is time-critical; the CoP could kickstart a sort of taskforce.

4) Who to include in CoP?



Theory:

A Community of Practice (CoP) should ideally include individuals who:

1. Share a common concern or interest in a specific domain or area.
2. Have a willingness to learn from one another and improve their collective understanding and skills.
3. Have a desire to share knowledge, best practices, and resources.
4. Are committed to actively participating in the CoP and contributing to its goals.

5. Represent a range of roles, levels, and perspectives within the organization or field.
6. Are willing to collaborate on projects and initiatives.
7. Are open to change and willing to experiment with new ideas and approaches.
8. Are able to communicate effectively and work well in a team.

It is important to note that the composition of a CoP may evolve over time as members come and go, and the focus and goals of the CoP may also change. It's also important to consider the diversity and inclusivity aspect when selecting members for the CoP.

Practices:

As mentioned above it's critical you staff the CoP with people that are REAL passion about the practice and for REAL "bring and take something from the table".

To keep the momentum and continuity it's also critical to include people, that can and will use the practices in practices in their daily work. Since the real improvement of the practices is often "Learning by doing".

Just like starting the CoP with right people is also important to adjust members if there is a miss-match. To support this a proper "Working Agreement" with principles for membership could be beneficial.

It's also important to underline the real capability of doing knowledge sharing since this is the driver in this kind of community.

5) Where to use CoP?



Theory:

Communities of Practice (CoPs) can be used in a variety of settings, including:

1. Business organizations: CoPs can be used to share best practices, improve performance, and drive organizational change within a company.
2. Non-profit organizations: CoPs can be used to share knowledge, build relationships, and improve the effectiveness of non-profit organizations.
3. Educational institutions: CoPs can be used to support the professional development of teachers, staff, and administrators, and to improve the quality of education.
4. Government agencies: CoPs can be used to share information, improve performance, and drive change within government agencies.
5. Industry associations: CoPs can be used to share information and best practices among members of an industry association.
6. Professional associations: CoPs can be used to support the professional development of members of a professional association.
7. Online communities: CoPs can be formed online, where members can communicate and collaborate remotely.
8. Project teams: CoPs can be used to support project teams and to share information, knowledge, and best practices among team members.
9. Geographically dispersed organizations: CoPs can be used to connect and collaborate with people who are working in different locations and time zones.
10. Multi-disciplinary teams: CoPs can be used to connect and collaborate with people from different disciplines and backgrounds, to share knowledge and work together to achieve common goals.

Practices:

The short answer for this is anywhere, but only if the prerequisites as described in “Why”, “When”, “Who” above are fulfilled.

It's especially important to consider "Who" can join when you consider "Where". For example, making an On-line CoP could be challenging if "building relations" and do real work together in practices is key.

When considering "Where" it's also important to consider the community maturity especially when done in multi organisations. Normally, too big a gap in maturity level could be challenging for multi way knowledge sharing.

But if the key purpose for the CoP is innovation or/and creation a cross-functional practice, the diversity could also be beneficial.

6) How to do CoP?



Theory:

Here are some steps that can be taken to establish and maintain a successful Community of Practice (CoP):

1. Define the purpose and goals of the CoP: Clearly define what the CoP will do, what problem it will solve, and what benefits it will bring to the organization or field.
2. Identify and invite potential members: Identify individuals who share a common concern or interest in the CoP's area of focus, and invite them to join.
3. Establish communication and collaboration channels: Set up channels for members to communicate and collaborate, such as a mailing list, online forum, or instant messaging group.

4. Encourage active participation: Encourage members to actively participate in the CoP by sharing their knowledge, best practices, and resources, and by collaborating on projects and initiatives.
5. Facilitate knowledge sharing: Host regular meetings or webinars to share information and best practices among members.
6. Foster relationships: Encourage members to build relationships with one another by organizing social events or other activities.
7. Provide resources and support: Provide members with access to relevant resources, such as books, articles, or software, and offer support to help them overcome any challenges they may encounter.
8. Monitor and evaluate progress: Regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of the CoP, and adjust the focus and goals as needed.
9. Recognize and reward participation: Recognize and reward the members who actively participate and contribute to the CoP.
10. Continuously improve: Continuously gather feedback and improve the CoP to keep it relevant and productive.

Practices:

The Best Practices in How to start and drive CoP's and to make this a Good or Bad CoP is depending on context as described in chapters above.

But generally, it's a "Good Practices" to initiate the CoP by well-planned kick off (See Appendix03 on my P-Model) and create a "Working Agreement" / "Team charter" together (See appendix01).

This should at least include the 3P's Purpose, Principles and Practices and answer the questions in this article (Why, When, Where, When, Who and How).

Process-wises you could get inspired by Agile models like Scrum for example Do Plan, Review/Demo, Retrospectives, meet regularly and use a Subject-Backlog (See Appendix02). But again, it depends on the context.

To keep the agility/flexibility/informality the strict processes could be combined with methods like "Lean Coffee", "Open Space" (See Reference) etc.

To keep the dynamic and not make this just another presenter/teacher meeting it's also good practice to make sure the CoP Host/Driver/subject is made rolling roles.

The same goes for the setup/form – so switching between e.g. Presenting, Workshopping, Discussing, “Hot Chair/Real cases”, External input etc. could be beneficial.

Depending on the “How” Part of the “Working Agreement” it's also important to consider how to document and share practices. Often some sort of on-line sharing tool like MS Teams, Miro etc. could be beneficial (See Appendix05).

Part of the “How” is also expectation on preparation before and between CoP's.

My experience on the types of CoP's is to limit the expectation for preparation to the content-driver and for others just to consider input/examples for “Today's subject”.

But again, it depends on the context and mandate.

Just like regular review and retrospectives of CoP/Working Agreement is good practices and more data-driven (e.g. Assessment) could also be recommendable to consider.

7) Good/Bad CoP's



Theory:

A good Community of Practice (CoP) is one that:

1. Has a clear purpose and goals: The CoP has a clear understanding of what it is trying to achieve, and its goals are aligned with the needs of the organization or field.

2. Has engaged and active members: The CoP has a core group of members who are committed to actively participating in the CoP and contributing to its goals.
3. Facilitates knowledge sharing: The CoP provides opportunities for members to share information and best practices, and encourages active participation in knowledge sharing activities.
4. Fosters relationships: The CoP encourages members to build relationships with one another, which can lead to increased trust and collaboration.
5. Provides resources and support: The CoP provides members with access to relevant resources, such as books, articles, or software, and offers support to help them overcome any challenges they may encounter.
6. Is continuously improving: The CoP regularly monitors and evaluates its progress, and makes adjustments to its focus and goals as needed to keep it relevant and productive.
7. Is inclusive and diverse: The CoP is inclusive and encourages the participation of members from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives.
8. Is adaptable: The CoP is adaptable and can evolve over time to meet the changing needs of its members and the organization or field.
9. Has a sense of community: The CoP has a sense of community and fosters a sense of belonging among its members.
10. Recognizes and rewards participation: The CoP recognizes and rewards the members who actively participate and contribute to the CoP.

Practices:

As a supplement for the “How” part this section is considering some characteristic of ‘Good/Bad CoP’s’.

The simple answer (from a consultant 😊) to this question is “It depends”. But the prerequisites for the success of an CoP in my opinion is a clear purpose and real working “Working Agreement”.

On the practical level a Good CoP’s can be recognised by the real dynamic in communities' sessions by activity and sharing by all and use the agreed Purpose/Principles as natural “Guiding Star”.

Another indication is that the CoP evolve over time, addresses the changing needs and at least the core team joins regularly.

A prerequisite for and Good CoP is also full management attention and real support.

Another kind of strange, signal of a Good (and Bad) CoP's is that it's dropped when the purpose is full-filled or not relevant anymore.

03. Wrap up

First of all, thank you for joining me so far in my reflection journey on CoP's and other Practices.

Just like me, I hope (Cliff hanger 01) you see the importance of Communities and other fora's to structure and embrace real and important knowledge/practices sharing/improvement in a disruptive and changing world?

I also hope you see the great variety of context CoP's can be beneficial and that this is not "just a walk in the park" and demands hard work and engagement to make it work.

Now wrapping up on Cliff hanger 02 – as promised ☺

Because as you know you are part of a great Global internet community, we could call it "World CoP" ☺

This doesn't fulfil all the nice CoP prerequisites we have covered in this article – but the core of knowledge sharing.

To make a PoC (Prove of Concept) this article is made partly by the "World CoP" and thereby you ☺

Because the *Theory* part of chapter 2 is nearly purely generated by asking the CoP questions at "[ChatGpt](#)" – the new AI generation of e.g. Google.

Did you recognize this ? If not this this a sort prove of the the future benefit of "World CoP's !

So even if this a computer/AI community this actually generated (or even maybe improved) all the human generated internet knowledge into structured material ready for human innovation and use.

So welcome to the:



“World CoP “ - We win together in Communities.

04 Source/References:

Ref. 01: My LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jesperbergerolsen/>

Ref. 02: Link for my Own coaching company www.yescoaching.dk

Ref. 03: Link for one World CoP : [ChatGpt](#)”

Ref. 04: Link for more Articles: <http://yescoaching.dk/agile-coaching/>

Ref 05: Open Space: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology

Ref 06: Lean Coffee: <https://agilecoffee.com/leancoffee/>

05 Appendix:

Appendix01: Working Agreement (Example)

Original ideas

1. **When** should we have this CoP's
2. **Why** do we need this CoP ?
3. **What** should we do in our CoP ?
4. **How** should we do it and work together ?
5. **Who** and what roles should be in our CoP ?
6. **What** should be **subjects** for our CoP's ?

Why:
On many requests we now shortly will invite one more Santander Nordic Community of Practice (CoP) for our key delivery of our products. This is motivated by the need to share basic daily challenges, but also to capitalize of all the great knowledge in our company. Both by "learning by doing" but also by the now more than 43 SAFe PM/PO educated colleagues.

What:
The idea of this CoP discusses, work and refine and share best practices meaning some of result/outcome should be faster and higher quality Products. The CoP, taking the allocated time into account is doing the actual work this is done by Po's in their agile teams outside CoP. The CoP can decide to work a real case and create directly useful solutions. The CoP could also be used as an advisory board for new initiatives.

How:
The idea of this CoP is simply in our busy daily work have regular touch point to in an informal and honest way discuss and share good and bad practices in our very changing company. This is not as such a decision forum, but strong advisory board of product experts for our continue improvement of our product management and New (agile) way of working

Who:
This is primary for Product owners, Product Managers, Tech. Po, Product Delivery managers etc. – but in principle ALL with interest in our Product delivery are welcome. The only prerequisite is that you bring and take knowledge/practices to/from the table and are willing to be the subject driver now and then. **This a working forum not a free ride status/information forum** Hope you like the idea and will join us.

Working Agreement agreed at 30/11 2022 at Kickoff

	Example	A) WHEN	B) WHY	C) WHAT	D) HOW	E) WHO	
		<p>A) Second wednesday every month at 14:00-15:00 (CET)</p> <p>Invitation in outlook and all accept series and potential adjust separate i dates a.s.a.p</p>	<p>A) We primary use CoP for Knowledge sharing/learn around the PO/PM role</p> <p>B) We discuss the PO/PM role in the SAFe and especially SCBN setup</p> <p>C) We build trust and an Po/PM network also to be used in our dailywork</p> <p>D) To improve and find better Way of working</p>	<p>A) Work with real problems/Cases/etais in a trustfull environment</p> <p>B) Do networking in and outside CoP to improve and align</p> <p>C) Include outside CoP SME's in meetings</p> <p>D) Do real work and workhopping in meetings to suggest and improve the "Santander Way"</p> <p>*SME = Subject Matter experts</p>	<p>A) Be present , active and prepared for CoP's</p> <p>B) Be honest, Transparent and eg. tell if what we don't think CoP make sense</p> <p>C) Include outside CoP SME's in meetings</p> <p>D) Use aad keep subject backlog (this whiteboard) updated and relevant</p> <p>E) Do retrospective of WA and CoP in each meeting and as seperate meetings</p> <p>*COE = Subject Matter experts</p>	<p>A) This CoP is primary for PO/PM's and people that have og have product responsibilities Technical or</p> <p>B) In the CoP meeting people i n turn do the Subject/case driving</p> <p>C) Special guests could be invited depending on subjects (Eg. RTE, SM, Test, SME)</p> <p>D) Host or facilitator for different CoP's also goes in turn of CoP Members. (Eg. motivate,invite,drive</p>	

Comments ?

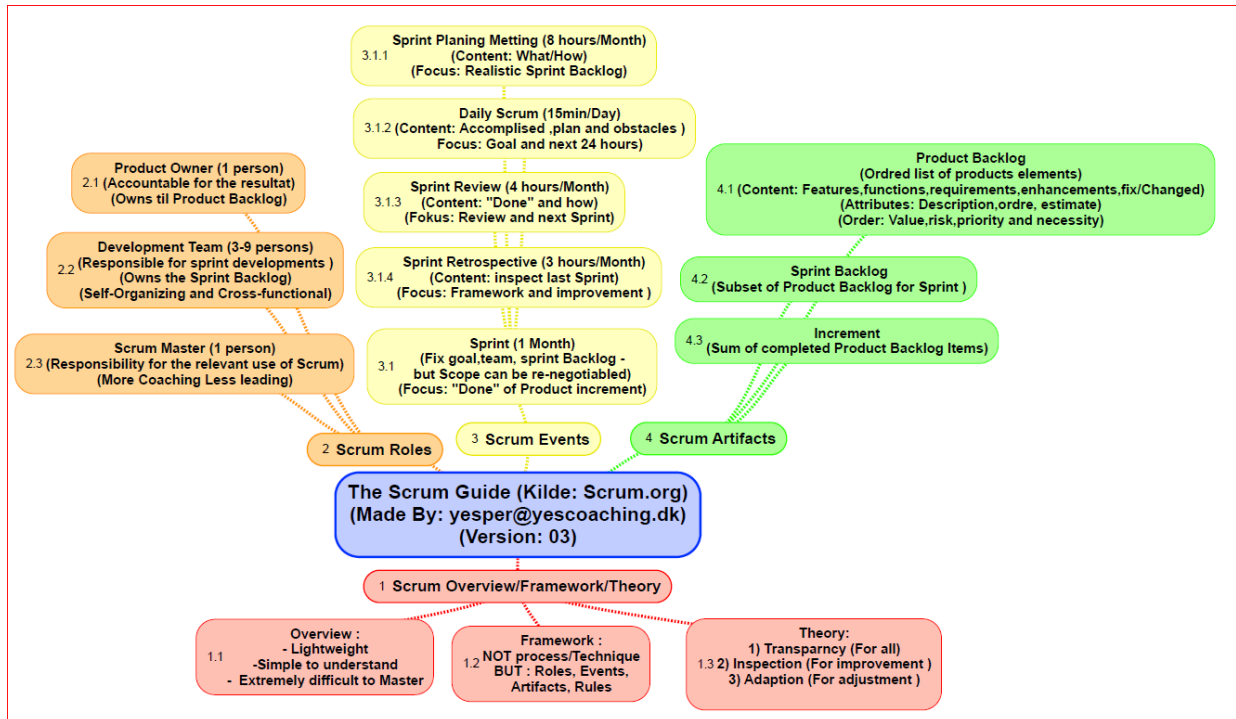
<Comments to WA>

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Appendix02: Scrum flow and One-page of “SCRUM (2017)”



Appendix03: Inspiration of other Agile Articles



1. **“Are you a real Agile coach?”**
 1. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_real-agile-coach-activity-6744575035144495104-tHJQ
2. **“Agile – Out of Control?”**
 1. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-out-of-control-new-version-20200108-activity-6753309571168686080-LrWj
3. **“Agile introduction made simple”:**
 1. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-introduction-made-simple-version-02-activity-6695996989156454400-pZL9
4. **“Does Agile Framework actual work?”:**
 1. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_does-agile-frame-actual-work-activity-6680542323400564736-ilpc
5. **“Product Owner – What do you Own ?”**
 1. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-product-owner-own-what-activity-6764517389682950144-0bOr
6. **Agile Party for NewCommers”**
 1. [https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6747087224568901632/?commentUrn=urn%3Ali%3Acomment%3A\(ugcPost%3A6747087223474200576%2C6750021231346536449\)](https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6747087224568901632/?commentUrn=urn%3Ali%3Acomment%3A(ugcPost%3A6747087223474200576%2C6750021231346536449))
7. **“Workshop – P model”**
 1. <http://yescoaching.dk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Workshop-P-model-at-202211.pdf>

Appendix04: ADKAR Change Management model

Link one ADKAR World CoP's : [Link](#)

ADKAR Change Model

ADKAR

Change Management Model



Appendix05: Example of working whiteboard for CoP

