

SUCCESS CASE

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE PAVING THE WAY TO A DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE-BASED TRANSFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

EDP Group is investing in innovative ways to create a more flexible and knowledge-based ecosystem, leading the organization to a new digital reality – and the Virtual Communities of Practice are a great example of that.

The idea first came up during EDPx, the initial acceleration project that happened between November 2017 and June 2018, but it would only take form later, in December 2018, as a way of reaching out to all people with expertise or interest in digital-related areas and promoting a knowledge-sharing culture.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Transformation to digital requires resources and knowledge; so, the main problems were where to find them and how to put them at the organization's service.

- **How to set a clear view** of all individual talents within the group.
- **The need to improve the knowledge diffusion of digital subjects** and change the idea of smart technologies such as Blockchain and AI being overly complex and specialized.
- **How to implement a cross-functional collaboration method** to overcome existing silos between business units and across different geographic locations, especially regarding similar problems and adopted solutions.

SOLUTION

After mapping the leading specialists with advanced know-how during EDPx and identifying subject matters critical to the group's digital strategy, it was time to create virtual communities to foster peer-to-peer learning and leverage the potential of networks of employees with a common interest and practice. The idea was to bring a group of experts in a set of digital subjects, regardless of their rank, position or service area at EDP, to exchange good practices, ideate together, and cultivate know-how – ideally engaging employees from all EDP group's geographies.

There are currently 7 virtual communities - Robotics & Automation, Analytics, Big Data & AI, Agile Product Development, Digital Platforms, Mobile & Social Media, IoT & Drones, Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality, and Design Thinking.

750

Individual members

240

Active members

106

Documents shared

6

Workshops & Expert Forums

14

Show cases

40

Online certification

About Digital Global Unit (DGU)

Digital Global Unit (DGU) was born to help EDP Group drive transformation to digital by developing outstanding ideas that improve and optimize processes, simplifying both clients and employees' journey. Comprised of a multifaceted team of developers, engineers, designers, data scientists, and other experts, DGU works every day to turn impossible ideas into successful business projects at EDP Digital Factory.

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VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES: HOW THEY WORK

STRUCTURE

Although most virtual communities thrive in a mix of virtual and physical environments, they all have the same structure, principles, and tools, but grow to have distinct dynamics. Microsoft Teams serves as a platform for all virtual experiences, either discussions, training, or showcasing.

MEMBERS

Communities have three levels of participation - leader, boosters, and experts. The leader is chosen every 6 months by the boosters, a group of recognized specialists on digital subjects with relevant networks selected for their charisma to encourage the rest of the experts.

PARTICIPATION

Participation is not limited, but advisable and beneficial – it offers innumerable possibilities from peer-to-peer learning opportunities to advanced & certified training, events and conferences, and, mostly, recognition throughout the organization. There is only one rule: if enrolled in a certification or training, the expert must finish it before starting a new one.

AGENDA

Discussion topics are influenced by the members' daily routines and leadership – the communities' setup is wide enough to encompass almost any subject. Hot topics and cross-cutting themes like RPA (Robotic Process Automation) are more prone to discussion due to their relevance for different business units.

ACTIVITIES

- **Exchanging good practices** with initiatives such as a bulletin board (virtual feed), virtual showcases (use-cases), and a yearly networking event (Get2gether) aimed at sharing knowledge and best practices exchange.
- **Ideating together** through activities intended at promoting collaboration and cocreation. Such activities include virtual ideation challenges to source new ideas and design thinking workshops to develop early pilots or include their execution into the business units' roadmaps.
- **Cultivating know-how** by offering several opportunities to hone individual knowledge with virtual learning (MOOCs), onsite training sessions, and participation in expert forums (attend/host conferences with internal and external subject specialists).

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

Developing a knowledge sharing culture requires resources, dedication and appropriate tools, and technologies. But most importantly, it is time-consuming. Participating in a Virtual Community of Practice is an extra activity added to each member's work routine – and that imposes certain constraints. The lack of time and availability are often seen as the main difficulties and end up compromising the quality of participation - many people accept to join the communities but fail to engage. Participation is not mandatory rather advisable, and employees can decline the invite due to work overload or personal limitations.

To overcome these difficulties, DGU is bringing additional value to virtual communities by showing its members and all employees that there is an enormous difference between being inside and outside - besides feeling special, participants have the top management support, greater visibility, and fast access to learning opportunities like specialized courses, which would be a challenge to obtain otherwise.

RESULTS

Virtual Communities have been acting as mechanisms of talent mapping and knowledge promotion. While in the beginning, the focus was more strategic, like needs assessment and mapping, mature communities are now becoming more operational and looking after best practices and ideas outside the organization. Here are some of the results so far:

- The Robotics Automation community has mapped all RPAs solutions – a piece of relevant information for the management team and sustainable report.
- The Analytics, Big Data & AI community is already sharing code that can be applied to different areas/units.
- An ongoing open call for relevant topics – like, for instance, auditing with robots, and possible solutions to address them.
- A Design Thinking initiative is afoot to help map the experts' level of knowledge and experience of the subject and process.