Scaling Tech Work with Community Principles

Katherine Payson

PACIFIC NW SOFTWARE QUALITY CONFERENCE

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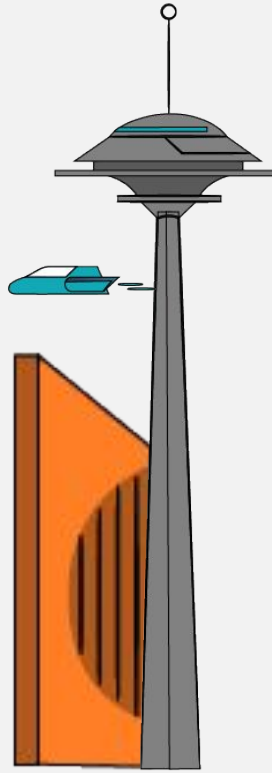
Rapid Growth in Gig work

- What is the gig economy?
  - Independent contractors
  - Flexibility & ease of entry
  - Internationally gig offers promise for women and youth in developing countries.

- Think outside of Uber and Doordash

- Gig Economy generated $204 billion in 2023 and set for 17% growth this year.

- My work with ~450 independent workers

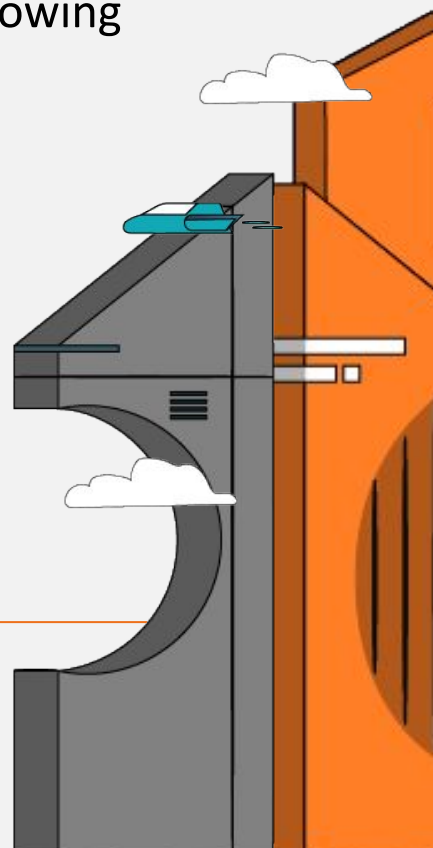


Pentesting As a Service (PtaaS)

What is Community Management?

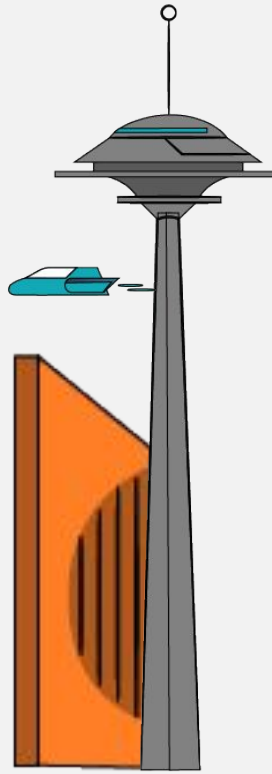
- Community management is a discipline that focuses on building and maintaining relationships with a group of people who share common interests.
- The rise of Community-Driven Business
- **Support** - goal is to improve customer support and satisfaction, reducing support costs, and allowing members to answer questions for each other.
- **Acquisition** - goal is to increase brand awareness, grow market share and drive sales traffic.
- **Contribution** - where the goal is to motivate and accelerate contribution of content
- **Engagement** - where the goal is to increase customer retention.

Typically a marketing function but how can community principles apply to scaling operations, development and technical teams?



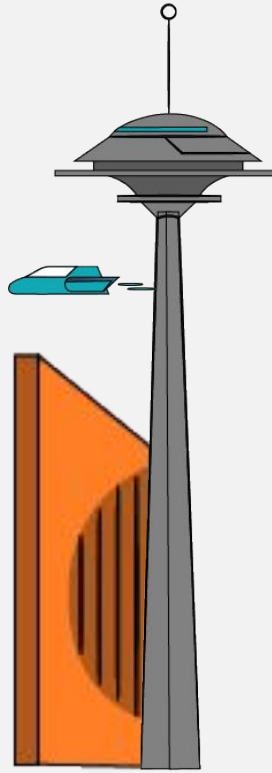
Why is community important?

Membership	Influence	Integration and Fulfillment of Needs	Shared Emotional Connection
• Feeling of belonging • Boundaries - who is in and who is out? • Logo/ Branding	• Sense of mattering • Members need to have influence over the community direction	• Needs are met in order to make investment worth the return	• Shared experiences & stories • Genuine shared emotional connections



The Foundations for Scale

- Skills at scale - Rigorous vetting process
- Barriers to entry creates stronger social identity and belonging
- Independent Contractor Agreements
- Courses/Guidebook/ Handbook
- Top Tier onboarding experience



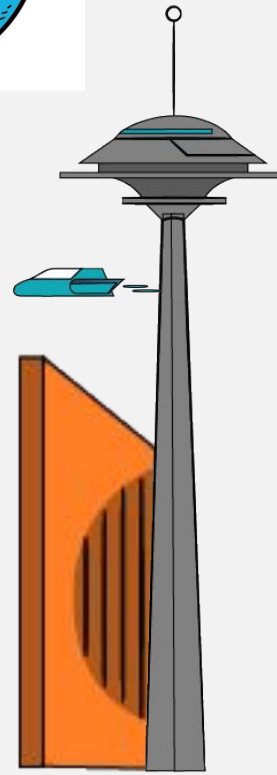
Community Identity

Clear Identity is Essential

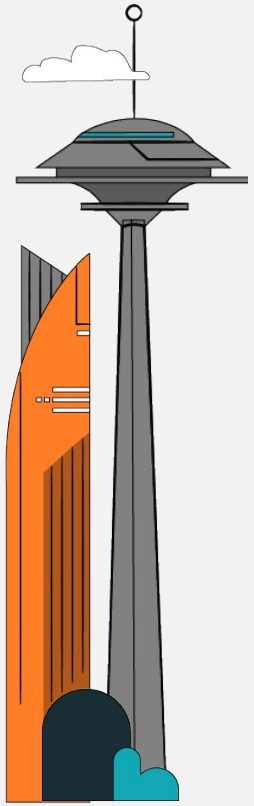
- Fosters a sense of belonging, shared values, and attracts like-minded individuals.
- Clear identity guides decision-making and ensures alignment with community goals.
- For Cobalt, this shared identity is a passion for securing customer assets and making the internet safer, while fostering continuous learning and growth in a rapidly evolving technology landscape.

Rewards

- Earned vs Gifted
- Genuine & Authentic Gamification
- Focus on intrinsic motivation
- Proof of a members investment and status
- Peer Celebration
- Swag
  - Milestone
  - Community specific



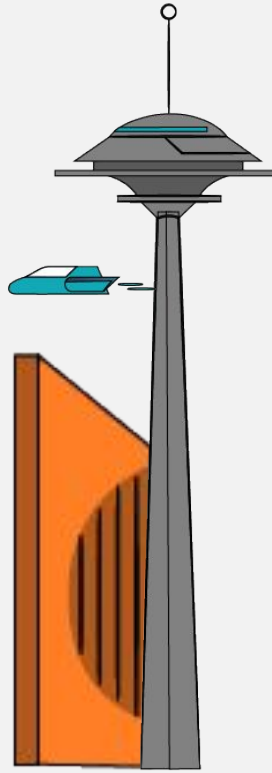
Collaboration & Community Champions



- When individuals feel like they have a say in the direction and development of the community, they are more likely to be engaged and invested in its success.
- Creates sense of ownership
- Ensures Values are aligned with the needs of members
- Constant feedback cycle
- Feedback requires action
- Motivating to be nominated a representative

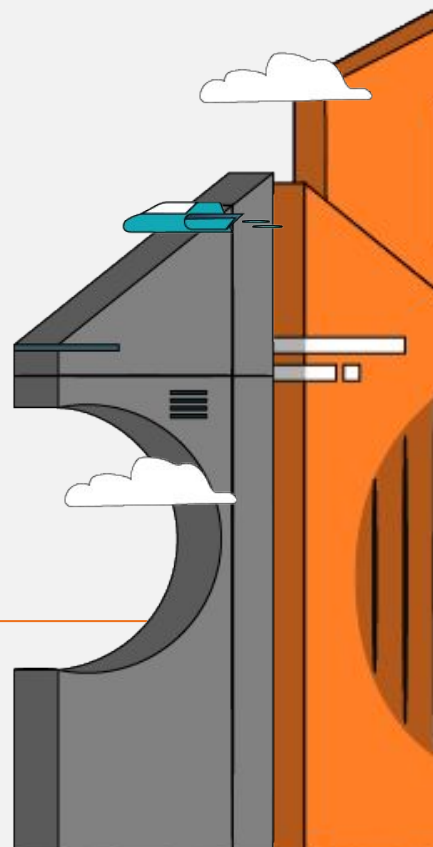
Conflict Resolution & Policies

- **Conflict Resolution**
  - Essential for a positive and respectful community
  - Prompt and fair resolution prevents escalation and damage
  - Builds trust, collaboration, and inclusivity
  - Members feel safe and valued, contributing to long-term success
- **Clear Policies**
  - Ensure fairness and transparency
  - Build trust and faith in community leadership
- **Cobalt's Approach**
  - 3-strikes rule with escalating sanctions
  - Immediate offboarding for severe violations
  - Proactive performance management
  - Data-driven and peer-reviewed assessments
  - Increased feedback and improved community experience



Networking Adoption & Support

- **Industry Engagement:** Encourage participation in events like DEFCON and B-Sides conferences.
- **Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate in-person meetups for networking and discussions on industry trends and best practices.
- **Content and Recognition:** Partner with marketing for content creation and social media recognition.
- **Sponsorship and Community Building:** Sponsor events, meetups, and meals to foster connections among community members.



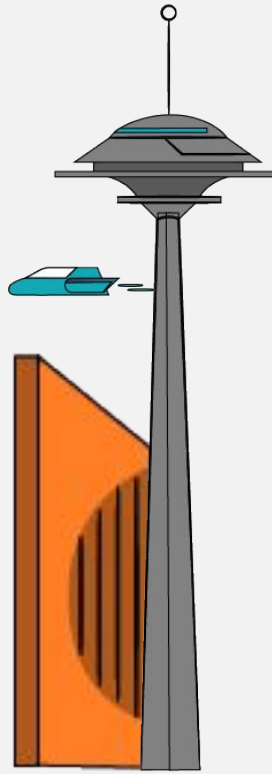
Establishing a Community Strategy

Building a Community Strategy for Genuine Motivation

David Spinks' "The Business of Belonging" outlines 3 levels for community strategy:

1. **Business Level:** Focus on how the community drives revenue and aligns with company goals. (e.g. Cobalt aims for top-tier customer experience leading to contract renewals and positive reviews.)
2. **Community Level:** Concentrate on community growth, health, and engagement. (e.g. Cobalt aims to decrease time to first test and increase training participation.)
3. **Tactical Level:** Specific initiatives and improvements to achieve business and community outcomes. (e.g. Cobalt plans quarterly and yearly, with actions ranging from increasing blog content to introducing new tiering models.)

Key Takeaway: Focus on initiatives that improve community health by improving business health.Each goal should have measurable metrics to track success and assess overall community health.



Measuring your Success

The Community Maturity Model

THE COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE

	1 Hierarchy	2 Emergent Community	3 Community	4 Networked
Strategy	Competitive	Reciprocal	Cooperative	Interdependent
Leadership	Directive	Engaged	Influential	Inspiring
Culture	Resistant	Contributive	Supportive	Collaborative
Community Management	Absent	Encouraging	Mentoring	Empowering
Content & Programming	Structured	Responsive	Emergent	Co-created
Policies & Governance	Rigid	Restrictive	Flexible	Inclusive
Tools	Ad hoc	Defined	Integrated	Adaptive
Metrics & Measurement	Transactional	Experiential	Behavioral	Strategic

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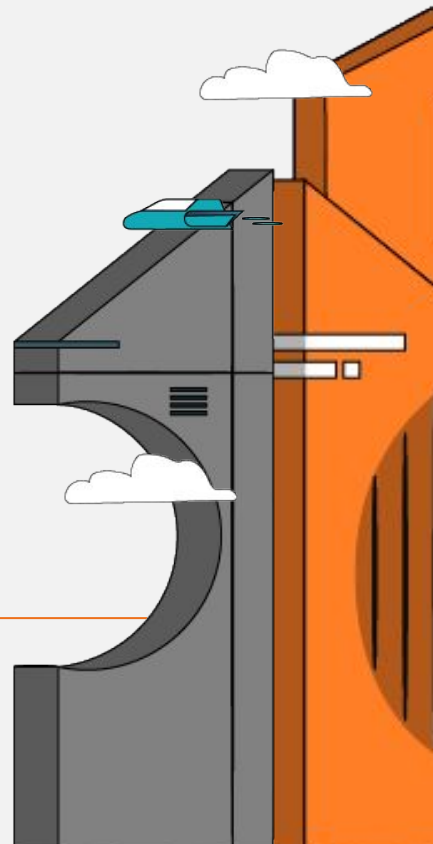
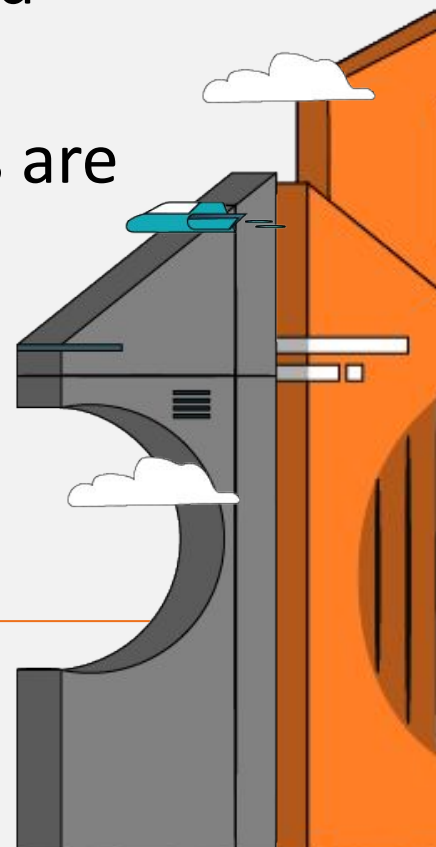


Conclusion

- Community management principles can effectively scale technical teams and foster innovation.
- Investing in community fosters belonging, unlocks potential, and establishes industry leadership.
- Continuous evaluation and refinement of community strategies are crucial for long-term success.



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