


The Strategic Power of Community
 A Roadmap for Veterinary Medical Association Executives

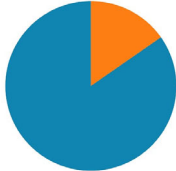


ThinkWORKS 2026

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Audience Input / Survey Findings
 What you told me...

- Community is discussed—but not clearly defined
- Biggest challenges: Resources + Engagement
- Biggest needs: Strategy + ROI + Actionability



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Session Framing




This Session Is:
Strategy • Practicality • Leadership

This Session Is Not:
Technology • Theory • More Work

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Participation Expectations

Polls • Chats • Reflections • Breakouts



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Poll



How confident are you that your association is building meaningful community?

- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Unsure
- Not confident

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Poll


Debrief



Confidence + Uncertainty

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Chat




Where are members connecting without you...
...without formal association involvement?

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Chat

Debrief



Where are members connecting without you?

8

Key Insight



Community Happens With or Without You

Members Will Connect
With You or Without You

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Defining "Community"

A common word that's commonly misunderstood

Value Created Between Members

Connection • Identity • Continuity



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Why Community Matters More Than Ever

Community Creates Strategic Advantage

- Trust is shifting peer-to-peer
- Relationships drive retention
- Community is hard to replicate



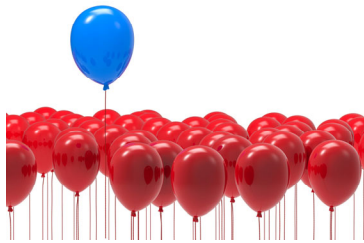
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Content vs Connection

The New Differentiator

Content = Expected

Connection = Differentiator



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Engagement Reframe

Rethinking Engagement Challenges

Engagement Problem ≠ Participation Problem
Engagement Problem = Design Problem

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The Real Question

The Goal Is Not...
Do We Have Community?

The Goal Is...
How Intentionally Are We Building It?

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Community Maturity Model

PROGRAM-CENTERED Community is Incidental Delivering value to members	CONNECTION-ENABLED Community is Designed Designing value between members	COMMUNITY-DRIVEN Community Shapes Strategy Creating value with members
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The Community Maturity Model

Stage 1: Program-Centered

Community Is Incidental

- Focus on delivering programs
- Interaction is secondary
- Success = attendance/activity



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The Community Maturity Model

Stage 2: Connection-Enabled

Community Is Designed Into Experiences

- Programs encourage interaction
- Connection becomes intentional
- Engagement beyond attendance



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The Community Maturity Model

Stage 3: Community-Driven

Community Shapes Strategy

- Connection informs decisions
- Members help create value
- Community drives innovation/loyalty



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Where Are You, Really?

What Stage Best Reflects Your Current Reality?

Community Maturity Model

The diagram illustrates the Community Maturity Model with three stages:

- PROGRAM-CENTERED:** Community is Incidental. Delivering value to members.
- CONNECTION-ENABLED:** Community is Designed. Designing value between members.
- COMMUNITY-DRIVEN:** Community Shapes Strategy. Creating value with members.

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Poll

Where Do You Think You Are?

- Mostly Stage 1 (Program-Centered)
- Mostly Stage 2 (Connection-Enabled)
- Mostly Stage 3 (Community-Driven)
- Mixed / Unsure

Community Maturity Model

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- CONNECTION-ENABLED:** Community is Designed. Designing value between members.
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Poll

Debrief

Most Organizations Are In Transition
Progress Is More Important Than Perfection

Community Maturity Model

The diagram illustrates the Community Maturity Model with three stages:

- PROGRAM-CENTERED:** Community is Incidental. Delivering value to members.
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- COMMUNITY-DRIVEN:** Community Shapes Strategy. Creating value with members.

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Where Does Your Association Stand Today?

Understanding Community Maturity Begins With Honest Assessment

Most organizations are stronger in some areas than others

Community maturity is rarely uniform across the organization

The goal is progress—not perfection

Community Maturity Model



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Community Health Assessment (CHA)

Assess Your Organization Across Five Dimensions

- Value Creation
- Experience Design
- Member Participation
- Leadership & Strategy
- Measurement & Learning



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Scoring Instructions

Scoring Instructions

For each dimension, choose the statement that best reflects your **current** reality:

- 1 = Program-Centered
- 2 = Connection-Enabled
- 3 = Community-Driven

Be honest. The goal is insight—not perfection.



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1. Value Creation

How is value primarily created in your organization?

- 1: We primarily deliver value **to** members through programs/services.
- 2: We intentionally create opportunities **for** members to connect and exchange value.
- 3: **Members** actively help create value for one another and shape the organization's offerings.



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2. Experience Design

How intentionally are experiences designed for connection?

- 1: Experiences focus primarily on content / program delivery.
- 2: Some experiences intentionally encourage networking/interaction.
- 3: Experiences are consistently designed around fostering meaningful connection and belonging.



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3. Member Participation

How do members primarily engage?

- 1: Members primarily consume what we provide.
- 2: Members occasionally interact or contribute.
- 3: Members regularly contribute, collaborate, and support one another.



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4. Leadership & Strategy

How integrated is community into leadership thinking?

- 1: Community is **not** a major strategic consideration.
- 2: Community is **discussed** but inconsistently prioritized.
- 3: Community is **embedded** in strategy, planning, and decision-making.

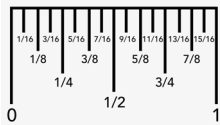


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5. Measurement & Learning

How is success measured?

- 1: We measure participation / activity only.
- 2: We track some engagement and relationship indicators.
- 3: We measure broader community outcomes and strategic impact.

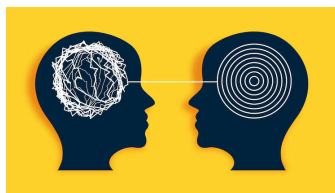


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Score Interpretation

What Your Score Means

- 5–8: Program-Centered
- 9–12: Connection-Enabled
- 13–15: Community-Driven



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Reflection / Debrief Questions

Consider:

Where did you score strongest?

Where did you score weakest?

What surprised you?

What might need to change to move one level higher?



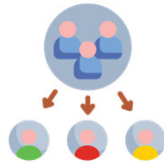
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Breakout

Discussion

Where are you today?

Biggest missed opportunity?



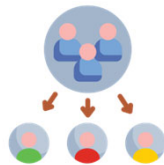
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Breakout

Debrief

Where are you today?

Biggest missed opportunity?



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From Understanding to Action

If Community Matters...How Do You Build It Intentionally?



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Start With What You Already Have

You Do Not Need More Programs

You Need Better Design



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Community Is Already Hiding In Your Ecosystem

- Events
- CE / Learning
- Volunteers
- Advocacy
- Committees



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Why Community Often Fails to Form

Experiences End At The Transaction

No Continuity

No Follow-Up

No Relationship Design



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Participation Alone Does Not Create Community

Participation Alone Does Not Create Community

Activity ≠ Connection

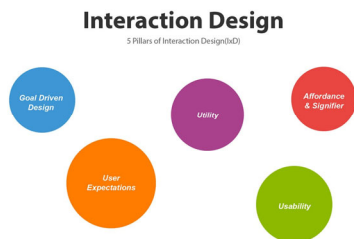


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Design Principle

Design For Interaction

- Before
- During
- After



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Practical Example

Rethinking CE

Traditional CE → Community-Driven CE



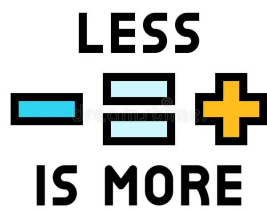
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Small Changes, Big Impact

Small Shifts Create Big Change

Do Less Creating

More Connecting



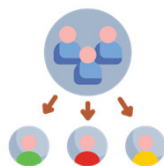
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Breakout

Discussion

Where Is Community Already Happening?

Where Is The Greatest Untapped Opportunity?



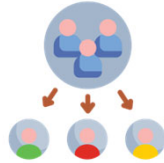
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Breakout

Debrief

Leverage Existing Assets

Better Design > More Value



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Transition Into Leadership

Community Requires Leadership

Community Does Not Scale By Accident



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Leadership's Role

Leadership Sets The Conditions

Vision

Alignment

Accountability



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Why Community Efforts Often Stall

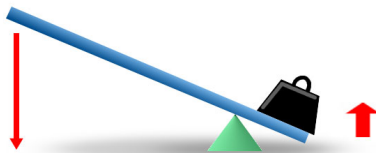
- No Owner
- No Alignment
- No Strategy



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The Executive Levers

- Governance
- Staffing
- Design
- Metrics



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Measurement Framework

Measuring Community Simply

Activity → Connection → Value

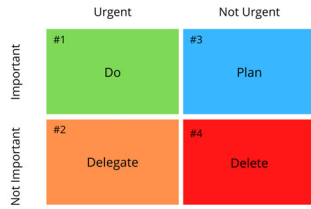


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Strategic Warning

What Gets Measured Gets Prioritized

No Measurement = No Momentum



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ROI / Business Impact

Community Drives Value

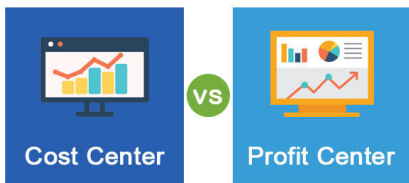
- Retention
- Revenue
- Insight
- Loyalty



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Strategic Reframe

Community Is Not A Cost Center



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Leadership Reflection

What Would Need To Change To Lead Community More Intentionally?



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Action Planning

30 – 60 – 90 Day Plan

- Immediate
- Near-Term
- Strategic



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Community Action Checklist

In the next 30 – 60 – 90 days, consider...

- Identify where community already exists in your organization
- Assess your current community maturity
- Align leadership around the role of community
- Identify 1–2 programs to redesign for connection
- Create at least one new member-to-member interaction pathway
- Define 2–3 metrics beyond participation
- Assign clear ownership for community outcomes
- Communicate community as a strategic priority



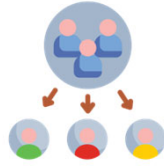
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Final Breakout (Optional)

Discussion

What Must We Stop Doing?

What Must We Start Prioritizing?



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Final Thought

Community Is How Value Gets Created



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Resources / Thank You


- Frameworks
- Diagnostic
- Checklist
- Resources



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