

Engaging to Unlock Retention, Trust, and Innovation

*A Community
Roundtable, 2019
State of Community
Management eBook*



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About this eBook

This eBook is a collaboration between The Community Roundtable and Khoros and includes data from the 2019 State of Community Management research.

The focus of this eBook is engagement. Its purpose is to take a deeper look at what drives engagement, the dynamics of engagement, its impact, and how it is being measured and reported.

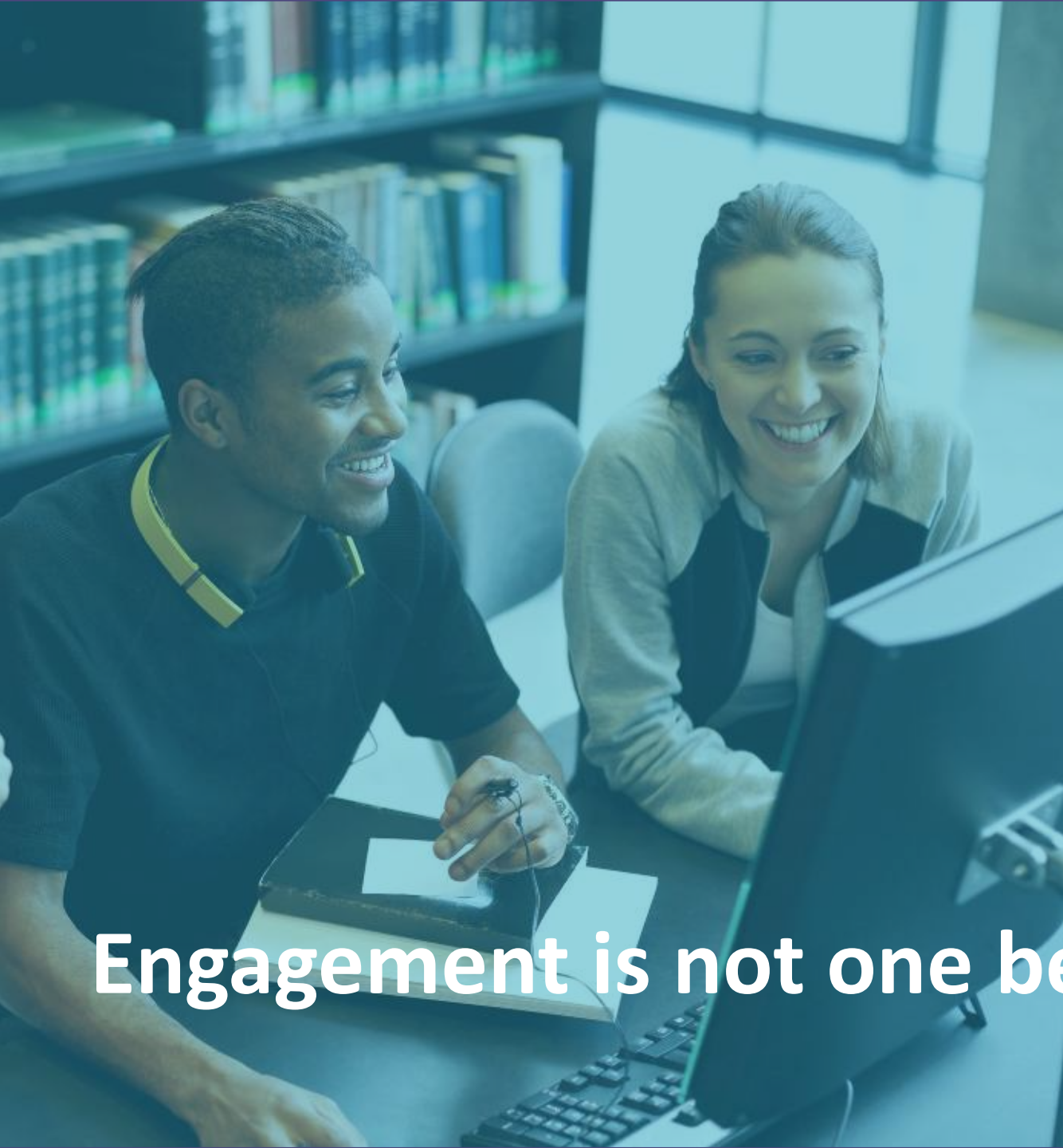
This eBook covers three topics:

1. Empowerment and Engagement
2. Impact of Engagement
3. Metrics and Reporting



What is Engagement?

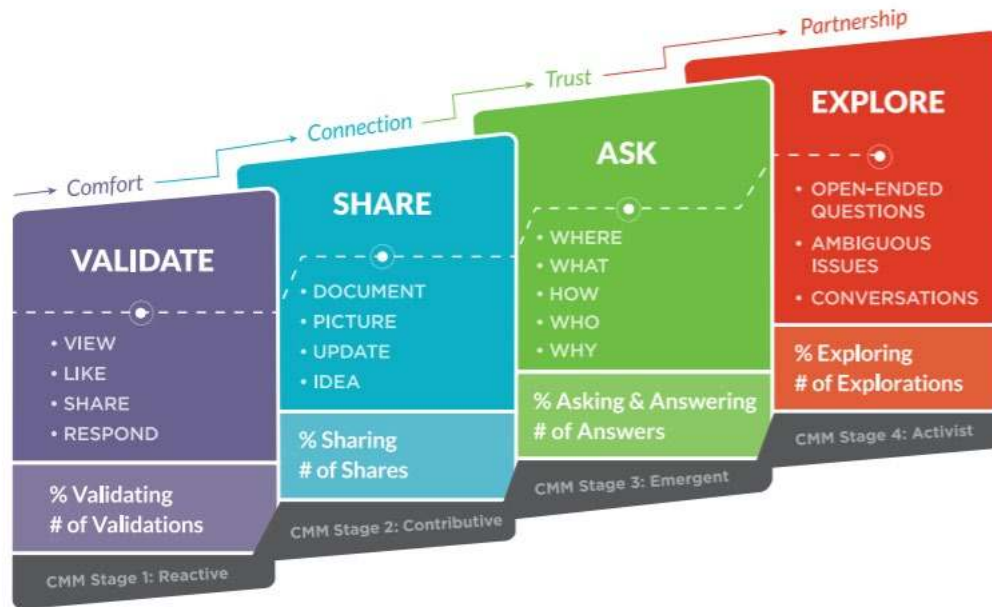




Engagement is not one behavior, but many

All engagement is not the same...

Community Engagement Framework™



Engagement is challenging to measure because engagement is not a single action, but a range of behaviors. Without getting more specific about what kind of engagement is meaningful – and what is meaningful changes based on the objective of your community initiative – it is impossible to measure and connect to business value.

The Community Roundtable’s Community Engagement Framework is designed to help categorize, measure, and understand the impact of different types of engagement. We break engagement behaviors down into the following categories:

- Validate
- Share
- Ask
- Explore

These categories require different levels of connection, motivation, and cultural maturity and produce different outcomes.

...and different engagement behaviors generate different outcomes

How engagement impacts community members



Explore

Members develop a sense of partnership when they participate in open-ended discussions, are able to discuss different perspectives, and are open to brainstorming.



Ask

Members begin to trust the community when they ask for help and get relevant, useful responses.



Share

Members feel connected by commenting on threads, sharing their own content and thoughts – and receiving validation by the reaction of others.



Validate

Members become comfortable by browsing, viewing, liking, and sharing content they find in the community.

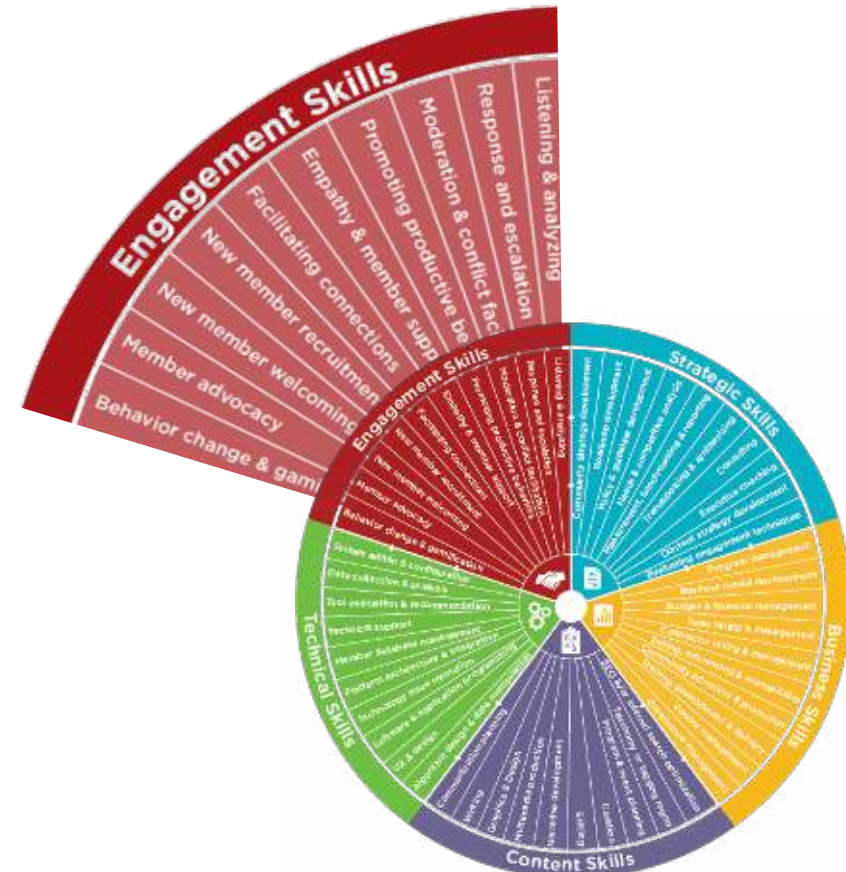
Explore more engagement resources

Community managers who develop strong engagement skills can better engineer collaborative environments.

Architecting a Collaborative Culture Using TheCR's Working Out Loud Framework

May 4, 2016

Rachel Happe, Co-Founder and Principal
The Community Roundtable



Communities empower people...

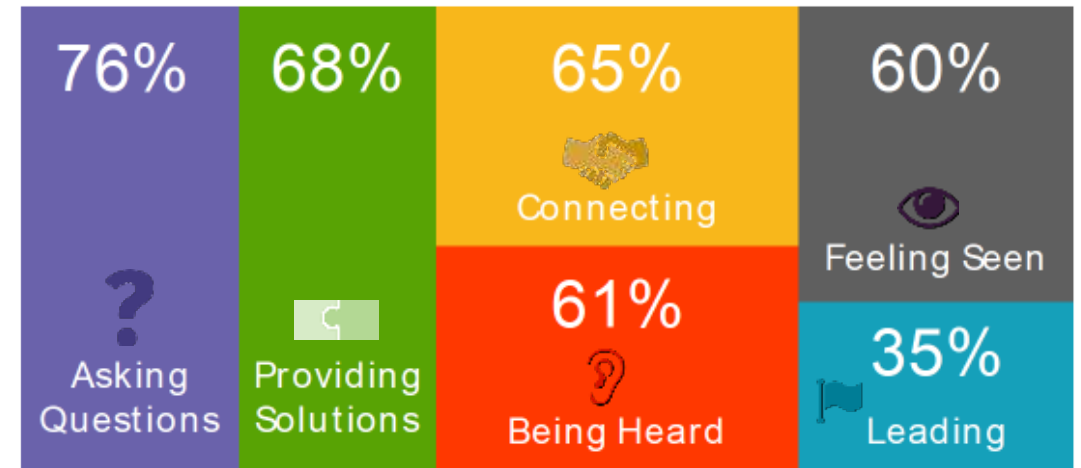
Communities help individuals feel seen and heard, which is the foundation for feeling empowered to ask questions, solve problems, and take leadership initiative. When people feel like their voice matters – they use it.

Empowered individuals are engaged, constructive, and highly productive, all of which contribute positively to the culture around them. Because communities empower members, community approaches lead to high-trust, adaptive, and engaged cultures.

How well communities are led and managed, whether by leaders assigned explicitly or by volunteers, impacts the success of the entire community and every individual in it.

There is a tremendous opportunity for organizations to explicitly recognize the communities in their markets and intentionally nurture them – connecting them in ways that generate exponential shared value.

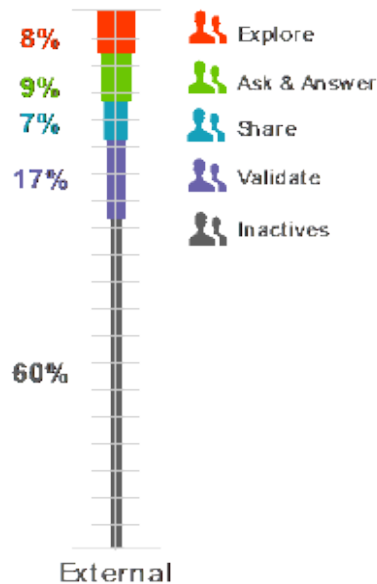
Percent of communities that empower people either often or very often in the following ways



...a key factor in propelling engagement

Communities effectively generate engagement

Average Engagement Profile for External Communities



There is a lot of discussion around what ideal engagement looks like in communities and the most often cited engagement rule of thumb is the [“90-9-1 Rule” originally purposed by the Neilson Norman Group in 2006.](#)

There has been a significant amount of subsequent research that has both confirmed and debunked that ratio. In reality, there are many of factors that impact engagement rates, including:

- Community strategy
- Community age
- Management and moderation
- Size and membership requirements
- Member characteristics
- Infrastructure, integration, and functionality

The State of Community Management research has consistently shown communities can generate much higher rates on average, but these rates still fluctuate considerably based on the community’s use case and management.

What is true? Every community program can determine its ideal engagement rates given its goals, knowing that more of one of engagement behavior is not *always* better than another. It is critical to align engagement rates with business and member objectives.

What Is The Impact of Engagement?



The background is a solid light green color with a pattern of concentric, slightly blurred ripples that resemble water droplets or sound waves. The ripples are centered on the right side of the image and spread out towards the left.

Engagement changes people

The Impact of Engagement

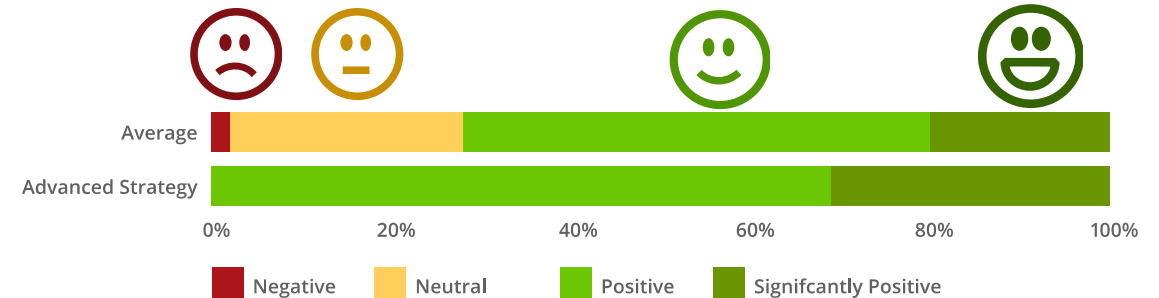
Empowered Communities Propel Business Growth

Individuals join communities primarily to connect with peers – people who share similar values, challenges, interests, or experiences. When well-defined, that shared connection creates a sense of belonging that engenders trust, making it easy to share perspectives and ideas.

For organizations, that connection leads to customer retention, lowered support costs, and innovation. Communities are effective at delivering on these complex goals because they are complex systems that adapt and evolve as needs and ideas do. These systems allow organizations to stay in lockstep with their customers, increasing their ability to stay relevant and trustworthy.

All of this results in an overwhelmingly positive impact on brands.

Communities Have an Overwhelmingly Positive Impact on Brand Sentiment



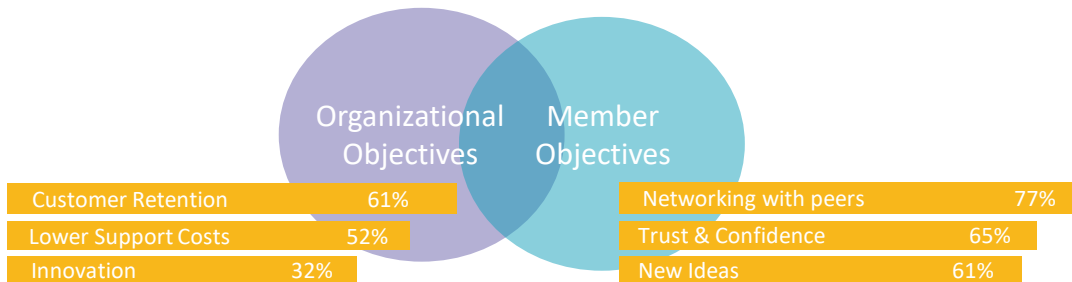
For community programs with advanced strategies (those that are approved, operational, and measurable), there is no negative or even neutral impact – the impact of the community on an organization’s brand is 100% positive. This is not to say there is no negativity in communities but the overall impact is a positive one.

This counteracts perhaps the biggest myth of online engagement, which is that it inevitably devolves and becomes a risk to the organization. Good strategy, management, and moderation can mitigate that risk and generate immense positive brand impact.

The Impact of Engagement: Strategic

46% of community programs can prove their value

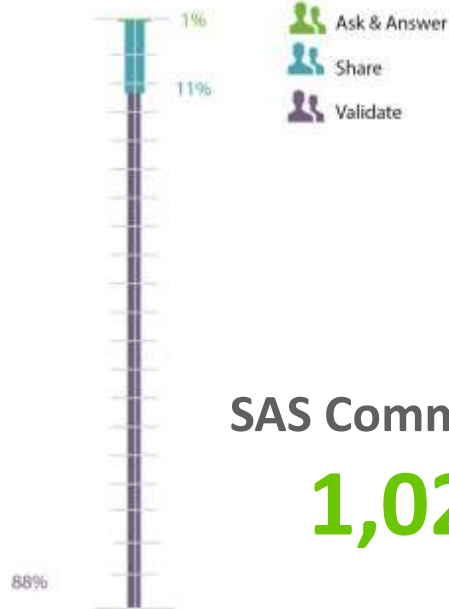
69% of external communities have seen an increase in engagement over the last year. Because communities can increasingly connect engagement to business impact, this is garnering executive attention and support. 68% of all executives are now supportive of community initiatives driven by the ability to improve customer retention, lower support costs, and generate innovation – all of which will enhance the customer experience.



Picture This:

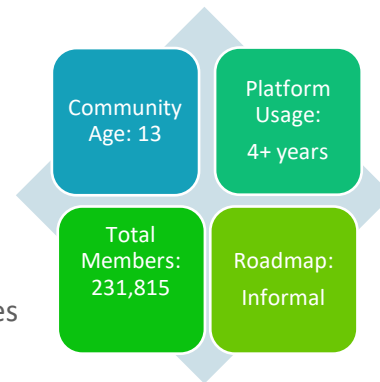
A new executive is given a performance goal to reduce customer churn. Without prior experience, they need to understand the issues causing churn. By digging into community conversations they can pinpoint and prioritize a few different issues – some with the product itself and some with how the product is sold and serviced. By digging into community conversations, they can understand issues in the customers' own words and in real-time.

SAS: Strategic impact



SAS Community ROI
1,026%

“Our customers succeed in everyday tasks with help from the community.”



Name: Chris Hemedinger
Position: Head of Online Communities
Use case: Customer Support
Industry: High Tech

SAS has a mature customer community that delivers significant value throughout the customer experience. While its roots are in customer support, the community also drives customer satisfaction, brand awareness, and increasingly, a leading source of information on new solutions and innovation.

The community has become the hub of SAS expertise online and complements other channels like GitHub and YouTube. The community’s search results, in turn, inform and prioritize marketing content, which brings even more people into the SAS ecosystem.

As a mature community with a lot of captured knowledge, its rate of successful searches is a remarkable 74%. When combined with a monthly search volume of 17,000 inside the community – and 9x that comes from Google – the SAS community creates a pull that is hard to replicate with more traditional marketing approaches. This performance results in an impressive ROI of 1,026% even without accounting for public search referrals.

As the SAS community evolves, it is in a great position to extend the relationships it has cultivated into deeper sources of innovation and advocacy. Much of that work involves integrating community engagement into core functional processes, inspiring more collaboration between customers and the organization.

The Impact of Engagement: Operational

59% of communities improve the speed of issue resolution

Done well, community engagement reduces the cycle times of workflows across the business, helping organizations operate more efficiently and effectively. Questions can receive multiple, trusted answers in less time and with less resources, which significantly improves productivity.

The self-sufficiency fostered through community creates the opportunity to enhance operations and further business goals once hindered by the cost of formally supplied support and training. The ecosystem created by community becomes more complex as it matures. As more engagement data is integrated deeper into the skeletal structure of the organization, business processes shift towards a community-focused approach.

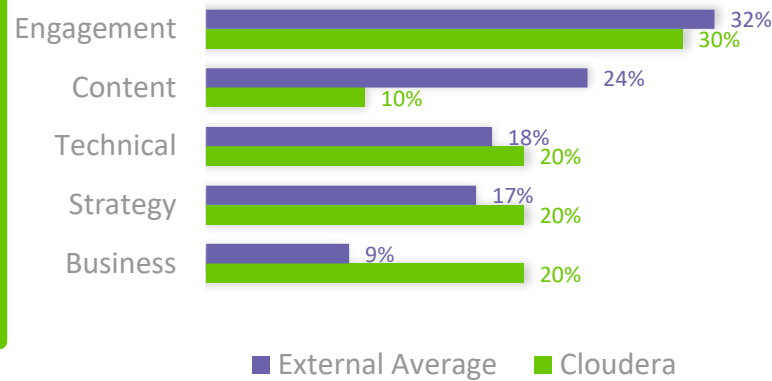
Picture This:

A publishing community is considering making changes to how customers receive order updates. A community manager shares the idea in a community thread. The post receives significant feedback and confirms that customers in the community want a more streamlined process for order details. The community and customer support teams work together to shift the process for order notifications based on customer input.

Cloudera: Operational Impact



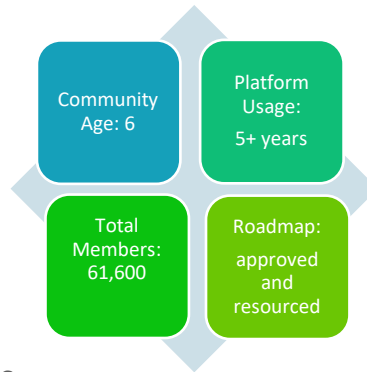
Where does the community team spend their time?



“Having a vision based on shared value and purpose helped us get to the next level of credibility and funding.”



Name: Claire Flanagan
Position: Community Business Owner
Primary community use case: Customer Support
Industry: High Tech



The Cloudera community has 1200 answers contributed monthly and the community sees hundreds of thousands of searches – 95% of which are successful. Because Cloudera has a complex product stack, which requires deep and broad business and technical skills, the average value of an answer is high – well above the industry average – making the value of the program impressive and compelling.

Now Cloudera’s community program has scaled beyond the support model and is also delivering on marketing-centric objectives; communications effectiveness, customer retention, and revenue growth. This is driving the need for business integration that often accompanies mature communities and suggests the community is a key enabler of the customer experience more holistically. Cloudera has achieved this maturity thanks to investments in both strategy and business management, which differentiates it from many of its peers.

The investment in strategy and business management has allowed Cloudera’s community team to diagram key workflows, collaborate internally, and develop ROI projections for their program, all of which resulted in a significant increase in executive support and budget, which in turn, is generating more investment and value.

Picture This:

A company with a mature external community is rolling out a significant product upgrade, which will impact their customers in a variety of ways. Sharing becomes critical as the engineering and support teams work to address and resolve deployment issues. Because they can do this transparently, for many customers at once, the community succeeds at getting customers information and answers more quickly – all of which reduce frustration and decrease repetitive calls, leaving staff free to resolve issues instead of repeat themselves.

Impact of Engagement: Tactical



All organizations have customer communities, regardless of how explicitly they are fostered and managed. When those communities are ignored, the customer experience is often left to chance.

Well-managed communities nourish a sense of belonging, learning, and connection for customers. They reduce friction and negative emotions that can hinder progress, renewals, and more sales. When communities can significantly reduce frustration and wasted time, they encourage customers to return and engage - knowing they will get their needs addressed.

National Instruments: Tactical impact



"We've built a strong foundation at National Instruments and now we're nurturing our next cohort of super users."



Name: Lili McDonald
Position: Digital Business Manager
Use case: Customer Support
Industry: High Tech



National Instruments' community is designed to provide its customers with scaled peer-to-peer support – a well-understood and highly successful application of community approaches. Looking at its engagement profile, it fits the high lurker/listener to active member model of many support communities. And, when we break down the 1% that are actively engaging, we can see that the vast bulk of the 5,360 active members are asking and answering questions- and driving value for over 500,000 others, who can solve their issues without ever having to ask a question.

The maturity of the community and the continuing engagement of 1% of it results in a 93% click-through rate on searches. Given that the value of an answer is well over \$100 – 50,000 searches a year results in millions of dollars in savings and opportunity for National Instruments – even if you assume only 5% of search results lead to a discovered answer.

One of the biggest opportunities National Instruments has is to integrate their successful community into more areas of the organization, moving from a tactical to a strategic asset that drives brand affinity and innovation. Employing its current roadmap, the community plans to begin this integration by cultivating new super users through a user recognition program.

Community orchestrates behavior change



Communities create shared value where the organizational and member objectives overlap

Podcast: SOCM 2019 Highlight – Communities Transform Organizations

By Shannon Abram

Welcome to the latest episode in our community management podcast series, "Conversations with Community Managers."

SPECIAL EDITION: State of Community Management 2019

Conversations with Community Managers

Peter Bradley Rachel Happe



Metrics and Reporting





Great metrics allow you to see more clearly

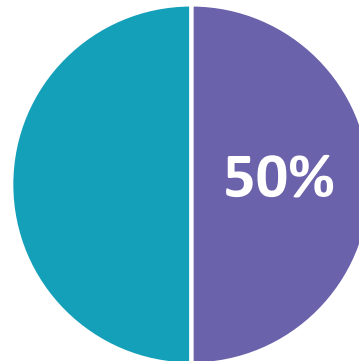
Metrics & Reporting in Community: Impactful Reporting

Great metrics and dashboards reveal the value of engagement.

Choosing the metrics that tell your community's unique story of engagement is crucial. What engagement activity is worth measuring? It depends on the strategic, operational, and tactical goals of community.

Community engagement metrics help to tie engagement to outcomes, and in turn, to business value. Particularly in organizations with advanced community strategies, engagement data is tailored to its audience, ensuring that community metrics are meaningful. For instance, a product manager and a market director may both be interested in the emergent product testimonials in a community, but they are interested in this data for different reasons – and are likely to use it in different ways.

Budget Increases for external communities 2018 to 2019



While the product manager may want to understand how the product is used in order to improve the product, the marketing director may be interested in what aspects of the product members are most excited about so they can share it with others.

Deciding what data to share, how to present it, and how often, is critical to telling the story of your community in a meaningful way.

More importantly, reporting data effectively is what leads to increased support and investment.

[Read TheCR's blog post on Advanced Community Strategies](#)

Metrics & Reporting: Strategic

Strategic metrics and reporting is focused on impact and value. How does the community further the strategic objectives of the organization? Why is it a better investment than a more traditional approach to addressing those issues?

Senior executives are responsible for budgets, which reflect how the priorities of an organization are expressed and changed. This is why measuring community ROI becomes important – because it demonstrates effective impact. If organizational change is a strategic goal, showing how communities address organizational change more effectively, for the same investment than another approach, is critical.

When reporting on the significant value community brings to company culture, executives who look beyond the revenue benefits will find that the complex problems community solves creates value not only for the bottom line but also for the brand, the employees, and the stakeholders. Community investments are an investment in long-term fiscal health, innovation, and a positive customer experience.

Average ROI for External Communities

8,932%

Online Community ROI Calculator

TheCR Community ROI Calculator

Communities are driven by answered questions. This simple calculator gives you a snapshot of your community ROI by asking you for a few variables.

Number of Answers in A Month*

100

The estimated number of answers to questions in your community in an average month.

Monthly Searches

The number of searches that are executed in your community in an average month.

% of searches "successful"

0

The percentage of searches that are successful in the community. (Use a number between 0 and 100.)

Value of an Answer: Dollars

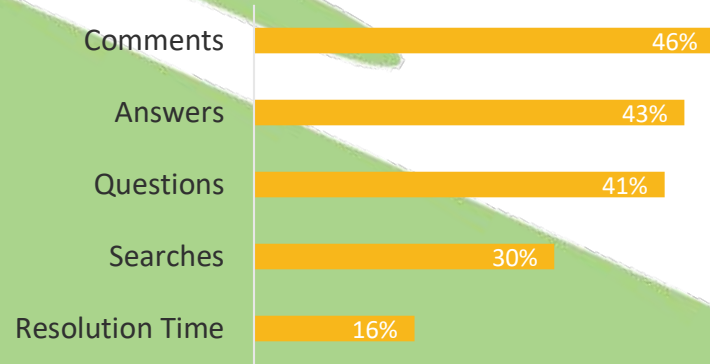
0

The value of an answer in your community. (Current range is whole numbers between \$0 and \$1,000.)



Metrics & Reporting: Operational

Percent of Community Programs Tracking Operational Metrics



Picture This:

Remember the company that was rolling out an upgrade? The community team tracks the number of questions, average speed of resolution, answers, views, and cost. Then they compare this data to the questions, resolution time, answers, and cost of those customers services through other customer support channels to see how the community is impacting the customer experience – and how it’s changed since the last upgrade.

Operational metrics are focused on how behaviors and workflows are changing. Behavior change is what collectively generates strategic value. Knowing which behaviors are changing, how fast, and in what areas of the community is critical to understanding how to encourage the spread of positive behaviors and discourage the negative ones.

Operational metrics help decision-makers monitor how well plans are working so they can learn and adjust as needed. If behaviors over a quarter don’t change, then it may prompt a change to how the community is being managed – or when looking at benchmarks over time, it may just signal a traditionally slow period in the life of the community.

Done well, operational metrics help:

- See the gaps and opportunities
- Probe deeper into whether a management approach is working
- Celebrate good performance and reflect on what is working well



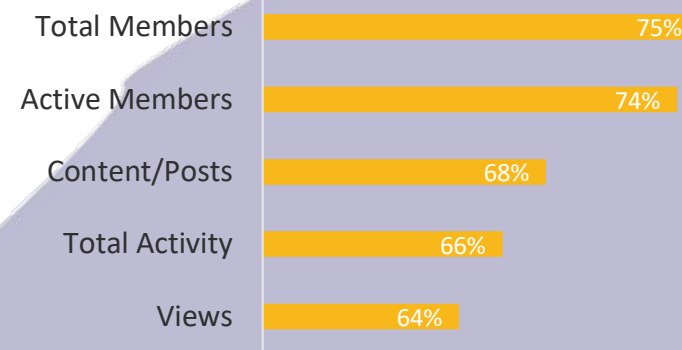
Metrics & Reporting: Tactical

Tactical metrics are the day-to-day activity measures that help community managers understand the direct impact of their actions. How many new comments happen after a question of the week is posted? What percent of the community comes back after newsletters go out? Are those metrics better or worse than prior periods, which can tell the community team if the quality of their efforts is improving?

Done well, tactical metrics help:

- Understand what content and programming works
- Identify times and periods that have different engagement levels
- See how changes in management influence engagement

Percent of Community Programs Tracking Tactical Metrics



Picture This: An IT community wants to measure engagement on an AMA program. The team creates a chart that records the participants, whether they attended, asked a question, made a comment or answered a question asked by the presenter. They then use this data to create an engagement profile for their event. Over time, the team notices that participants are most active on calls about upgrades. They decide to create a new program that addresses upgrades more in-depth.

A monarch caterpillar with yellow, black, and red markings is crawling on a green stem. In the background, a monarch butterfly with black and white wings is visible, along with pink flowers. The scene is set against a soft, green background.

Community is what supports organizational transformation...

...engagement is how this change takes place

Recommendations for more effective engagement

Measure

Engagement data is vital to understanding who, how, and when members engage. Identifying key behaviors when designing metrics will help the organization understand how engagement impacts work. Translating this impact into value makes it meaningful to the business.

Analyze

Combine data and member research to understand why members engage – and how it impacts their success.

Use this analysis to create user stories that resonate for both users and internal stakeholders so everyone can see the impact.

Act

Use your understanding of member activity and behaviors to build successful patterns into community programs, functionality, and management approaches.

Experiment to see what works.

About The Community Roundtable



At the Community Roundtable, we collaborate with clients to implement proven, practical strategies for better communities.

Clients rely on our models, research, and peer networks to take their communities to the next level.

Research



Frameworks, Benchmark and Community ROI Models



Community of Practice



Training



Advisory Services