TRANSCRIPT

Community Conversations - #83 – Anne Larsen on Community Culture

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

culture, community, working, company, reach, data, suddenly, experience, managers, management, colleagues, talking, metrics, face, area, numbers, networks, measure, consideration, denmark

SPEAKERS

Anne Larsen, Anne Mbugua

Anne Mbugua 00:00
We can, hi, and if you can introduce yourself and what you do.

Anne Larsen 00:08
Of course, my name is analyzing, and I'm working with conference holding, which is an a production company. In Denmark in Bangkok. It's a family run business with about 20,000 employees globally, I'm working within our Information Solutions department, with super user community management, and also with user adoption. So those are my two primary functions within my, my, my department

Anne Mbugua 00:43
right now and tell us how thinking about culture affects your community work.

00:51
Being a global company, it is really important to take culture into consideration from my point of view, because you know, my culture Nordic, Scandinavian culture is so much different from, from your culture from, from European culture in general, we, I'm amazed at how different working cultures are just within the European Union. And then we have companies that are located in in a lot of Asian company countries, and also in North and South America. So if I do not take culture into consideration, when I'm talking about community management, then I will end up and I have experienced some, you know, misunderstandings, where I thought that everything was good, we had had agreed on something and apparently, that was not an agreement. So, the difference in cultures is, especially in a global company, you need to take that into consideration. And that's one part of it. And culture is not just the country's culture, but it's also the culture on how you are the working culture. So is it a top down structure or a flat coat culture, I come from a very flat run a company, organization, but I can see just going south of

Denmark, in Germany, they what I experience with my colleagues there is that they have a much more top down culture in working culture. So I need to take that into consideration whenever we need to get new members and new super users, how do we approach them? So for me, culture is a vital part of of community management, and community work. Because we are a global company,

Anne Mbugua 03:00
break rides very interesting to think about the differences in culture, and how culture language affects our work right. Now, I wouldn't like to know what jumped out at you in the culture data from this year's SOC M.

Anne Larsen 03:21
Definitely 2021. When I'm looking at the data, you can see, you know, we are comparing 2020 with 21, and 22. But when I'm looking at 51, which is basically for me, and the way that I've read it is a view an image of what happened during 2020. You know, we were hit full force with the pandemic, from from the things that I've seen in a right now is that definitely that community is empowered, right, in general, that that it is suddenly everyone was sitting at home. Going from, of course, not our production sites, but our office sites, our sales companies, we were forced to stay at home, how can we? How can we reach out? So suddenly, we had to find the tools or if not find them, but use the tools that we had the digital tools that we had. And I can definitely see that when I'm looking at the different aspects of culture because before it was more face to face meetings, were just talking about working culture. You know, our salespeople, they went out to our different customers. It was face to face meetings. So you have that relationship and now suddenly you needed to have a digital relationship and from from my experience And what I suddenly saw was that people were much more considerate from before, whenever I chose to, to invite someone in for a digital meeting and online meeting was like, Oh, can't we just meet up, you know,

Anne Mbugua 05:16
face to face, right?

Anne Larsen 05:18
Because we want to have that, you know, the physical relation, where you also, you know, it's the way of reading each other, you know, the body language, everything. So here, we suddenly needed to, to use our digital tools. And what I see is that I was actually reaching many more people than I did before, because we will all phones to use the digital world. So, and this is what I can see that that people are getting more effective. They're getting more, you know, they're using online networks and communities much more. And this is what I see with the numbers, but it's really during 2021, which relates back to 2020. But it's basically you know, COVID, hip, we were all sent home. And then suddenly, we had to, you couldn't say, Oh, can't we just meet face to face? Can't you just travel here, everything from from a global company, we had so much travel, because people really love that we had that physical interaction. But what I find is that I actually reach many more people online, because we were all forced to do it. Of course, in the beginning, I would say, no camera, no. Because you were suddenly sitting at home, you had to think about where you were sitting. But it became the new norm. And reaching out to many more people. And also, cultural wise, we got to know each other, much better. When I was talking to colleagues from China, from from Manila, from Australia, South, South Africa, suddenly were in their

living room, you know, or I was actually at their home, and a lot of our talk to begin with was about, you know, did you have any, do you have any animals or the kids were running around, so it became much more laid back and much more personal. And I think that whole culture moving from especially for, I would say, four Nordic countries, where you tend, you have your work and you have your private life. So it got much more complete, not that, that you change your work life balance, because of course, you need to have that. But the the race or increase in the numbers for 21. Again, any it actually visualizes what I was experiencing. So I would say that, you know, increased engagement, large and personal networks, because they also some, you know, you had your your company, official communities where you were talking about products about services, reporting, but then you also got the personal aspect, because we needed that interaction. So we started seeing networks, or communities, digital communities popping up. And this is also what I can see from from, from the, from all the data that made, you know, more larger Personal Loan networks for employees you saw, you know, there was a huge number of that. So, so, it basically, for me, it provided a very valid image of what I was experiencing.

Anne Mbugua 09:11
That's a really good point, you know, coming to really think about that it's important to think about what, you know, what, how COVID affected, you know, culture and also affected us, as, you know, community managers, and basically, even the employees, right, and how all that comes together. And I love that whole idea of how you could see the differences within that that data when you when you're comparing the offering to yours, right. So I'm curious what advice then would you give a community professional, starting to dig sort of into culture at their organization now that we've talked about, you know, the differences in in how you know, your company, you know, the differences in culture, what What would be your advice to them?

Anne Larsen 10:03
Definitely, if you are a global company, if you are in a position where you are working cross countries, right, definitely take the time to, and reach out and listen to your colleagues. If you are in doubt about a specific culture in, in, if you don't understand why do I never get any reply from from this area experienced with South? No, not South Africa, South America, without companies there, and I couldn't understand why I never got a reply. So So I actually reached out to one of our community managers from that area, and he said, Well, actually, I think one of the reasons is the language barrier. And it never occurred to me that that's South American countries, that they do not speak as much English as we do in Europe, is Spanish and Portuguese, of course, and then the local languages. So, so reach out and listen to your colleagues to understand and appreciate the cultural differences, right, and work within that framework. So so you don't push someone where, you know, cultural wise, they would be very reluctant to to, you know, stand up and speak out loud, right? It's not that they're not listening, it's not that they're not doing what you expect of them, it is just a matter of culture. So if you don't, if you don't appreciate that, and respect that, right, you will meet a barrier, within within your organization from from those areas. In some cases, it's very subtle, that you're meeting these barriers, but they are definitely there. Even, you know, even though I didn't think about that, during the years, I've been working with community management, but it's getting more and more clear for me that I actually see that. And don't be afraid to ask, you know, whenever I don't think you know, it's also because of the person that I am, that I'm not afraid to ask, but always ask

Anne Mbugua 12:22
with respect to braid, right.

Anne Larsen 12:25
So you don't, you know, end up offending someone. Because you don't want that, but always do it with respect. And in my experience, I've had people are so grateful that, that I'm reaching out and say, Oh, it's because of this and this, and then they open up in on a one on one basis, and then you can start acting from that thing. Okay. Now, I know, maybe I did this was community members from from this area of the world, maybe I should try and tweak it a little bit. So I accommodate their culture and both, you know, personal, but also work culture. And then I think you will definitely maximize your output and your feedback from from both areas.

Anne Mbugua 13:13
I really liked that. And because it's true, you know, every culture is very different. I like the idea that, you know, you take it and you tweak it for a different culture and a different part of the world. So I'm wondering, how have you used the state of community management research research in your community work?

Anne Larsen 13:31
Primarily, I have, especially for the past five years where I've been working, not full time, but, you know, half of my working day is for working with community management, is that to see that I'm on the right track, that what we are doing is actually visualized in the data, as I also said before, that I can see okay, what I've experienced is actually also not just us, in our company, you know, we are a fairly small company, when when you are comparing to to especially large American companies. But we are actually facing the same challenges. We are facing the same questions. And we are seeing the same trends. And not just within Europe, but globally. And I think that is really good for me, in my work with communities that I can see that I'm on the right track. Track, sorry. Because it's basically you know, a one woman job. So I'm the one responsible, we do have community managers for you to our communities, because I don't have the knowledge, that data knowledge to run all of those communities because they are support communities should be great communities. but just being the only one who can provide, you know, different suggestions on on community engagement, on on, how can you tweak someone or not someone's more engage. That's where I'm alone. And this is where I can see and use the state of community management research to, you know, both get ideas, and then implement that. And I have to two meetings a year with my community managers, where I actually try and use, you know, the research and the data to say, this is what we're seeing. So, especially when a community that, you know, you don't get a community within six months, right? If you do that, I would take off my hat and bow to you. I would definitely that that would be amazing. And kudos to those who have actually succeeded. But from what I see, it takes from you have the official implementation with all the framework in place, and you have the members to getting an engaged community where it's not always the community managers who are proactive, that you get that from the members that they start, you know, getting engaged in the community. And that takes time. And this is what I also can see in the research that it doesn't happen overnight. And we need patient Yes. I also always look at the matrix, this is a blind blind area for me, because I find it so difficult to to measure something where you cannot

see numbers. No, how engaged? Are my my members in the different communities? Yes, I can see, we have x number of posts, right, but I cannot see how engaged they are locally, to the support locally. So all of that. That's blind data for me. So I'm always curious about, you know, reading about metrics and hearing about the metrics, because I find that so difficult. It's such a difficult area.

Anne Mbugua 17:39
I think that's true of any community metrics. You know, it's easy also to get into vanity metrics and, and also measuring how do you measure some things, you know, how do you really measure engagement? Right, you know, comments, posts, there's so many things you can think about, and they're difficult to measure, right? How do you measure people's contentedness or happiness? So, I think that is that will always be, I think, for communities a challenge, right. But you know, we still do metrics. And we hope that you know, that the data that we get is going to help us to sort of move forward. And I think we get better with time as we as we figure out our communities. Which brings me to, what else are you excited about? To read in this year's report?

Anne Larsen 18:27
Again, I have to just see if we found the golden Yes, it is always so exciting for me to see if there's anything new about MIT. And right now, I would say it's been a changing world for the past two and a half years. They make everything going on, you know, we have to work in a different way. We have to think in a different way. What impacts our company, what impacts our communities. So all of this, I'm really excited to see also, you know, I could see the effect of culture, that suddenly we do see some, some some changes in the research and some, you know, spreads, increases that that we can see in the research. So I'm really interested to interested in seeing what about the other areas, you know, and also for me working with internal communities, what does it look like for the external communities? Do we actually see some of the same trends? You know, I assume that my colleagues working in sales that of course, you know, we couldn't I've had the biggest year last year in terms of sales as in ever, if they hadn't reached out and you know, to our customers and to sell our pumps, you know, that is really I'm very curious about seeing if we are seeing the same things with in concert in the same with the externals. Communities.

Anne Mbugua 20:31

Yeah, it will be interesting to read more. And I think, you know, as you're talking about metrics is the thing here. Right. It's, I think it's a challenge for most people. I don't think anyone has really nailed it down. And there's always there's always tweaking of metrics in your community and security groups to write the always measuring something different and then working on this and measuring that. Yeah, absolutely. So it is exciting to see more about what that that that entails. For sure. So thank you so much, and for, you know, sharing about culture. I've learned quite a bit there, you know, and how important it is to understand, you know, different regional cultures, not just personal culture, but also you know, even at work and how that affects our community work.