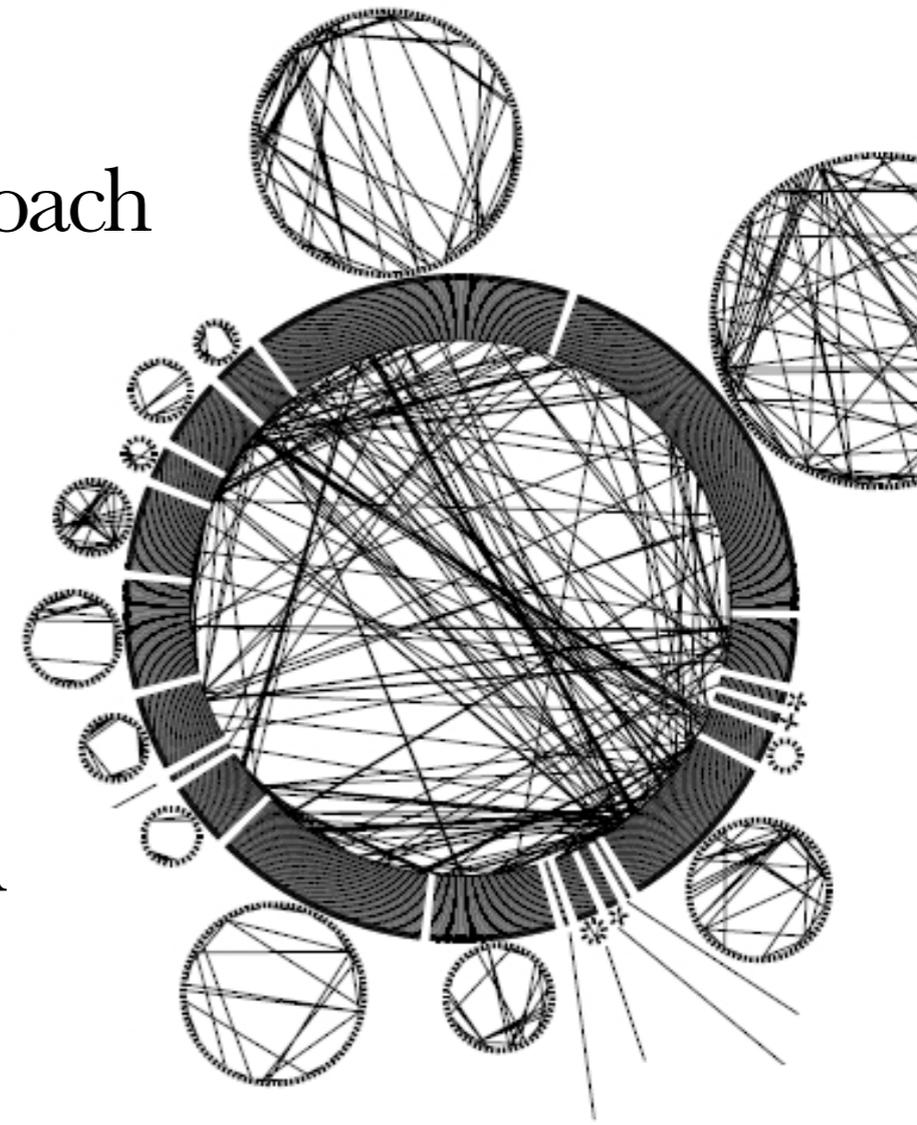


# Alternative structures of knowledge management and production

*A community-of-practice approach*

By Francis Gosselin  
Ph.D. Candidate, BETA



# Planning

- Communities | Concepts
  - A brief history of the CoP approach
  - The specifics of ‘guided’ communities
  - How ideas move : a dynamic approach

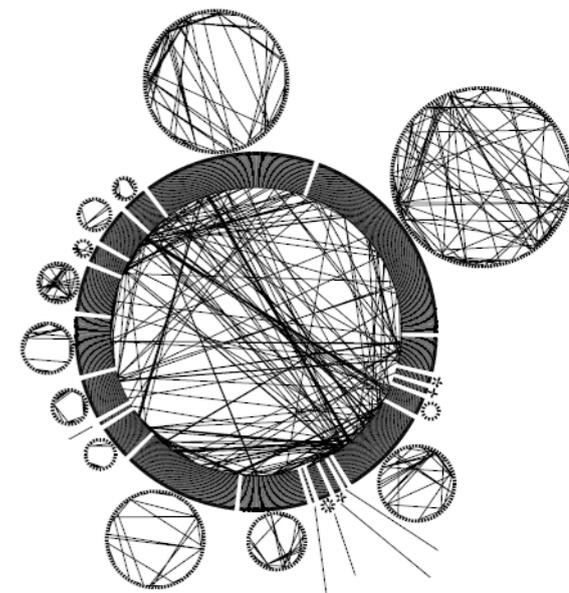
[break]<sup>15mins</sup>

- Organizations | Knowledge
  - Bureaucracy
  - Case studies

[break]<sup>15mins</sup>

- Firms | Spaces
  - Leveraging creative organizations
  - Cities and cases

- Conclusion



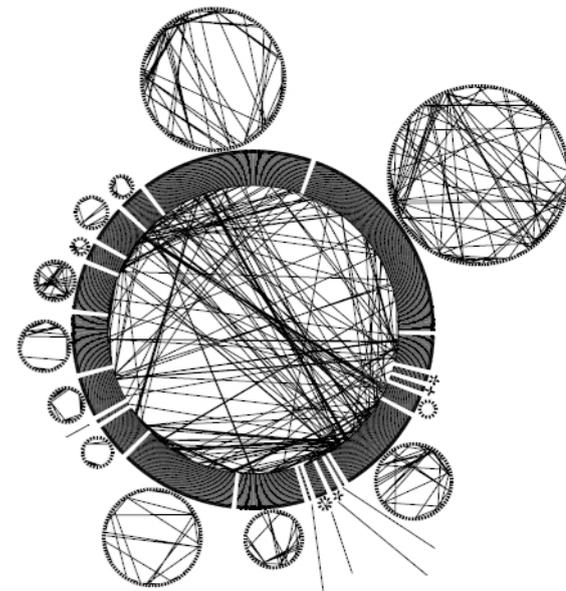
# **Communities | Concepts**

# Communities

## Defining communities

“A system of relationships between people, activities and the world ; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice [...] an intrinsic condition to the existence of knowledge” -J. Roberts

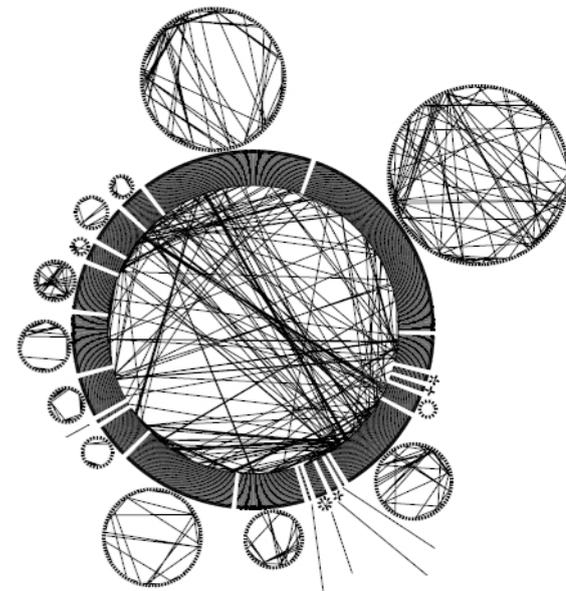
- A cognitive key to understanding learning [Lave & Wenger, 1991]
- Explored as ‘*spontaneous groups*’ of individuals
- Based on a practice, a problem, a question
- Learning | legitimate peripheral participation (LPP)
- *Peripherality* as a positive term
- Forging common *languages, meanings and understandings*, through a ‘codebook’



# Communities<sup>2</sup>

## A short history

- Initially a generic | ‘communities-are-everywhere’ approach
- Case studies developed throughout the ‘90s [starting with Brown & Duguid, 1992]
- Introduction of virtual CoPs | open source
- Communities of users [von Hippel, 2001]
- Operationalized by consultants [notably E. Wenger]
- Increasing interest towards ‘guided’ CoPs

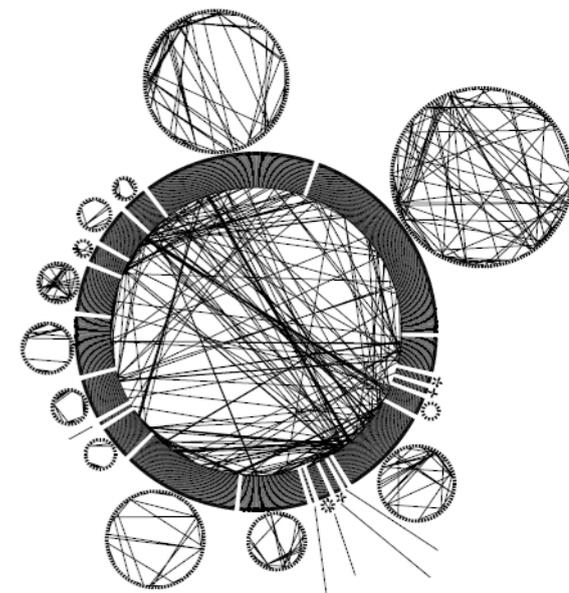


# Communities<sup>3</sup>

## Creating CoPs

“One must distinguish ‘intentional’ or ‘guided’ communities - those formed by formal hierarchies, from their *spontaneous* counterparts, which emerge without the help of any pre-existing structure ” - transl. from Gosselin et. al., forthcoming (2010)

- CoPs are somewhat antithetical to a rational, task-based approach
- The firm must create *spaces* to ‘favour emergence’
- Avoid the *temptation of the hierarchy* [Josserand & St-Léger, 2004]
- A balancing act ; b-up | t-down
- Different actors, different roles [CEFRIO, 2005]
- Uncertain returns ...



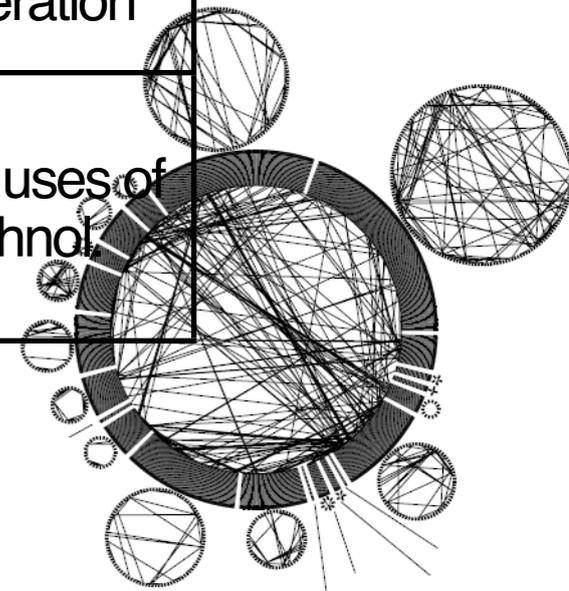
# CoP models

Evolution | like Darwin

but not quite.

	Potential	Building	Engaged	Active	Adaptive
Definition	Forming	Definition, operating principles	Execution and improvement	Understanding, demonstrating, benefiting,	Using knowledge for competitive advantage
Fundamental functions	Connection	Memory and context	Access and training	Collaboration	Innovation and generation
Typical tools	Messaging, forums, etc.	Systems of classification	Portals, yellow pages	Collab. tools, Team work roms	Pilots uses of technol

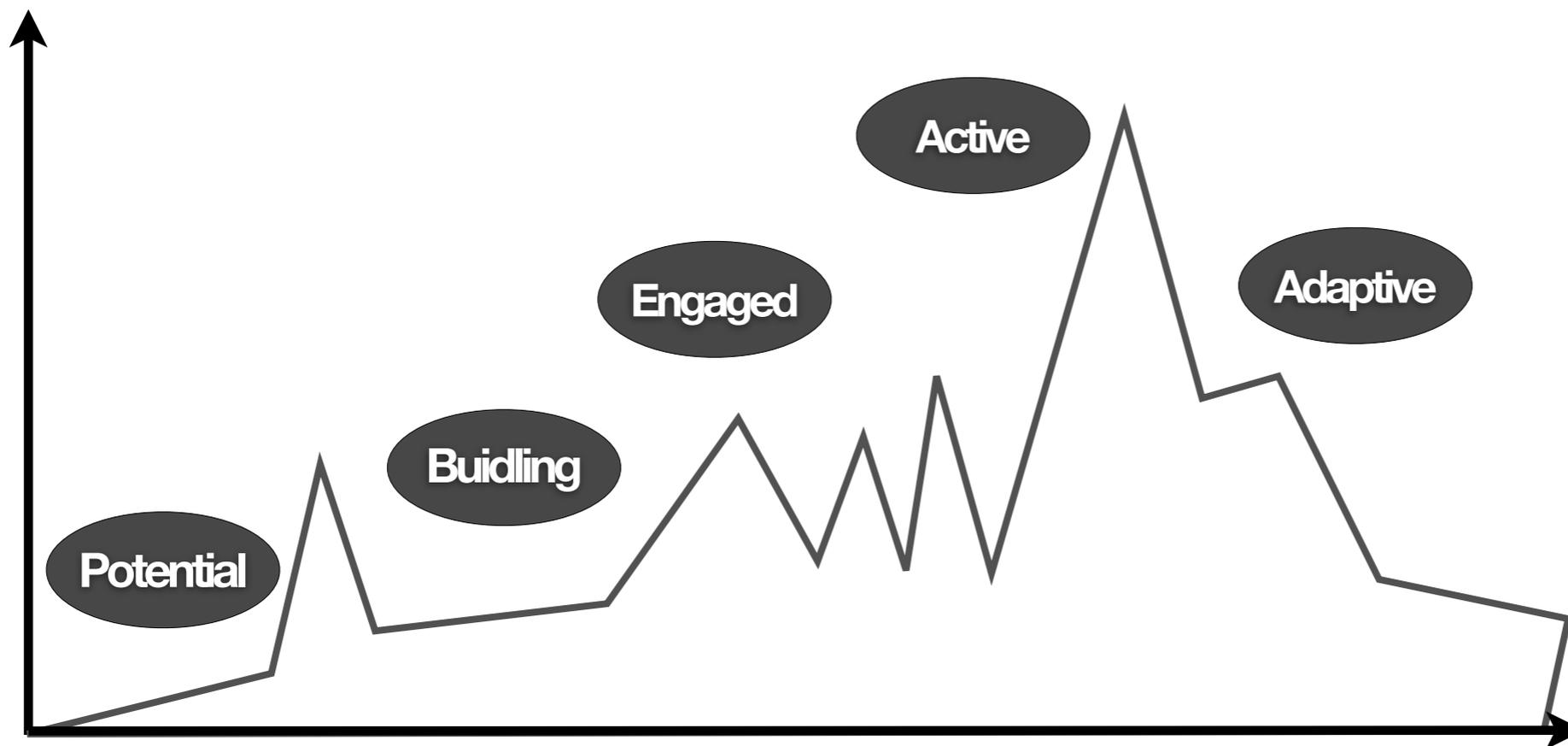
From Gongla & Rizzuto, 2001



# CoP models<sup>2</sup>

Evolution | or Lamarck

kind of.



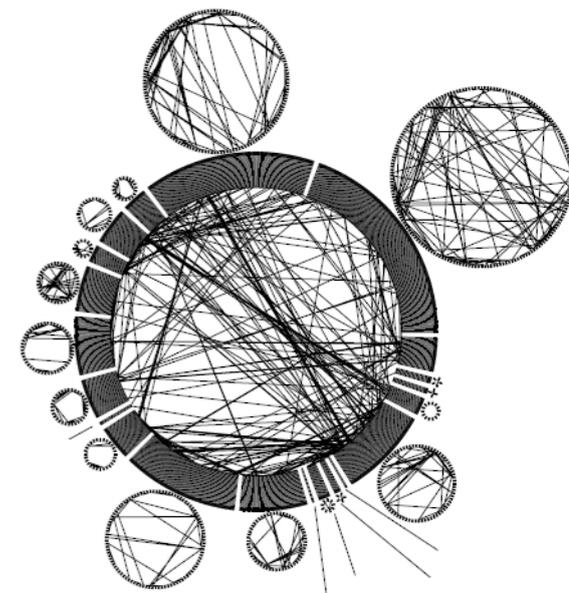
Common ground

Long-term viability

Common identity

Recognition

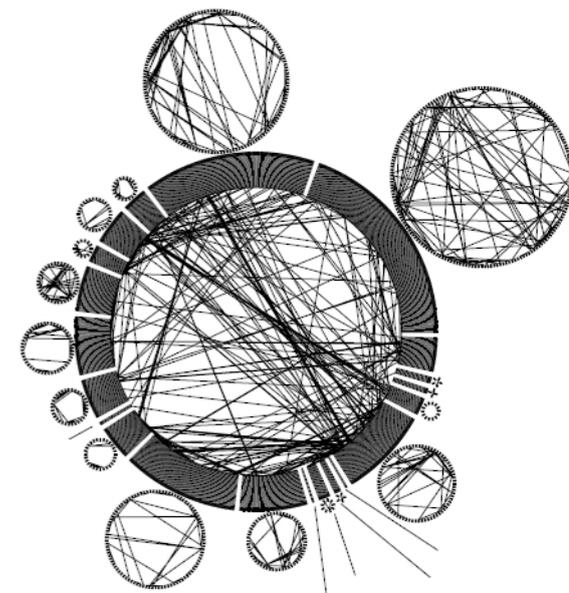
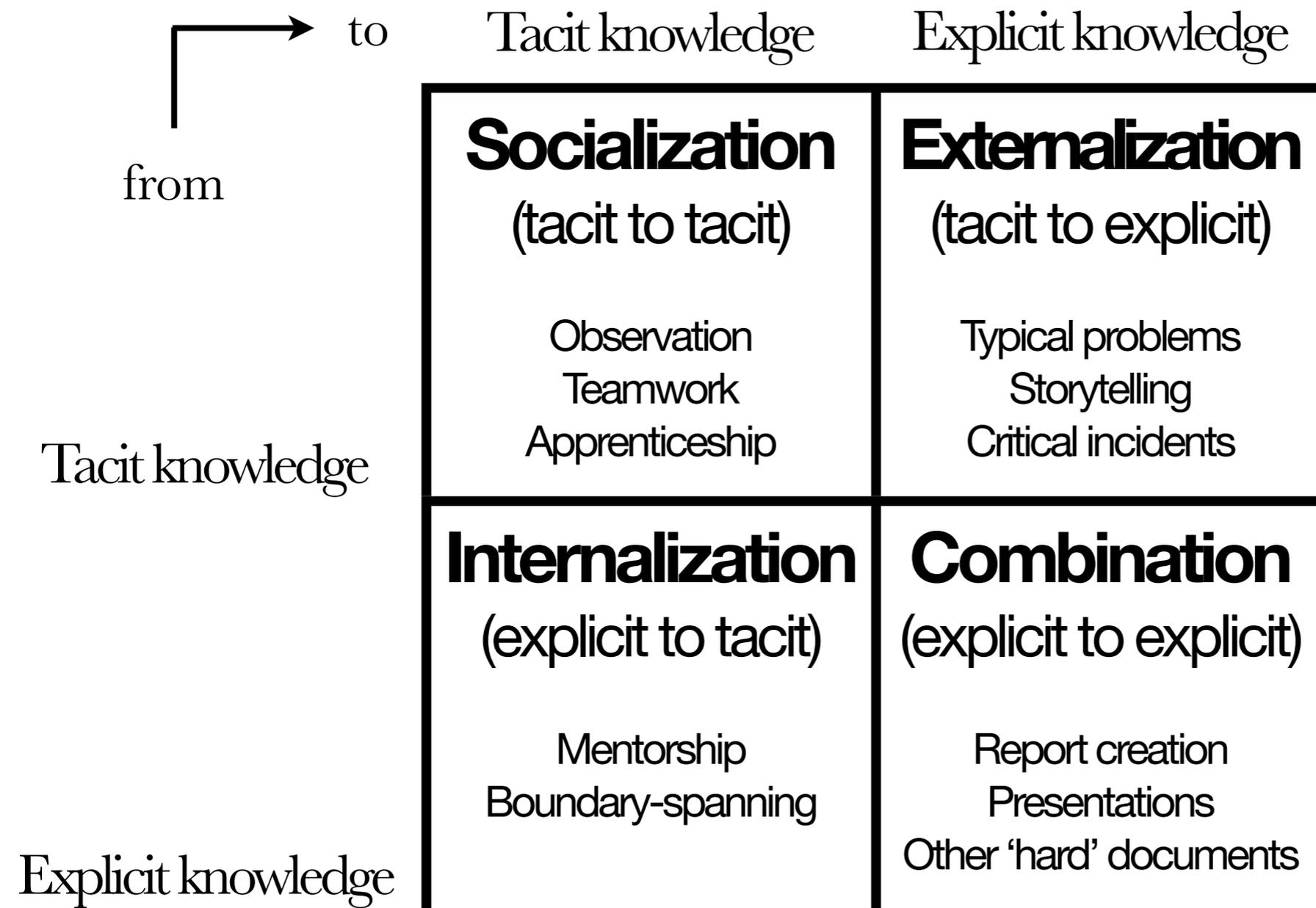
Ongoing legacy



# CoP models<sup>3</sup>

Circulation | move it

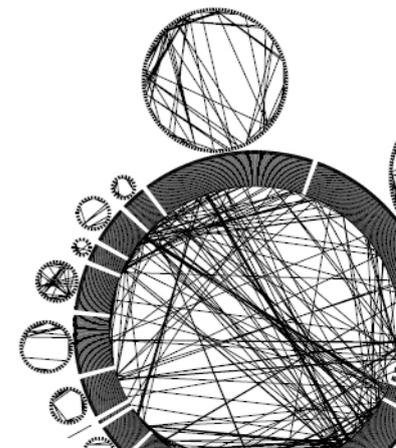
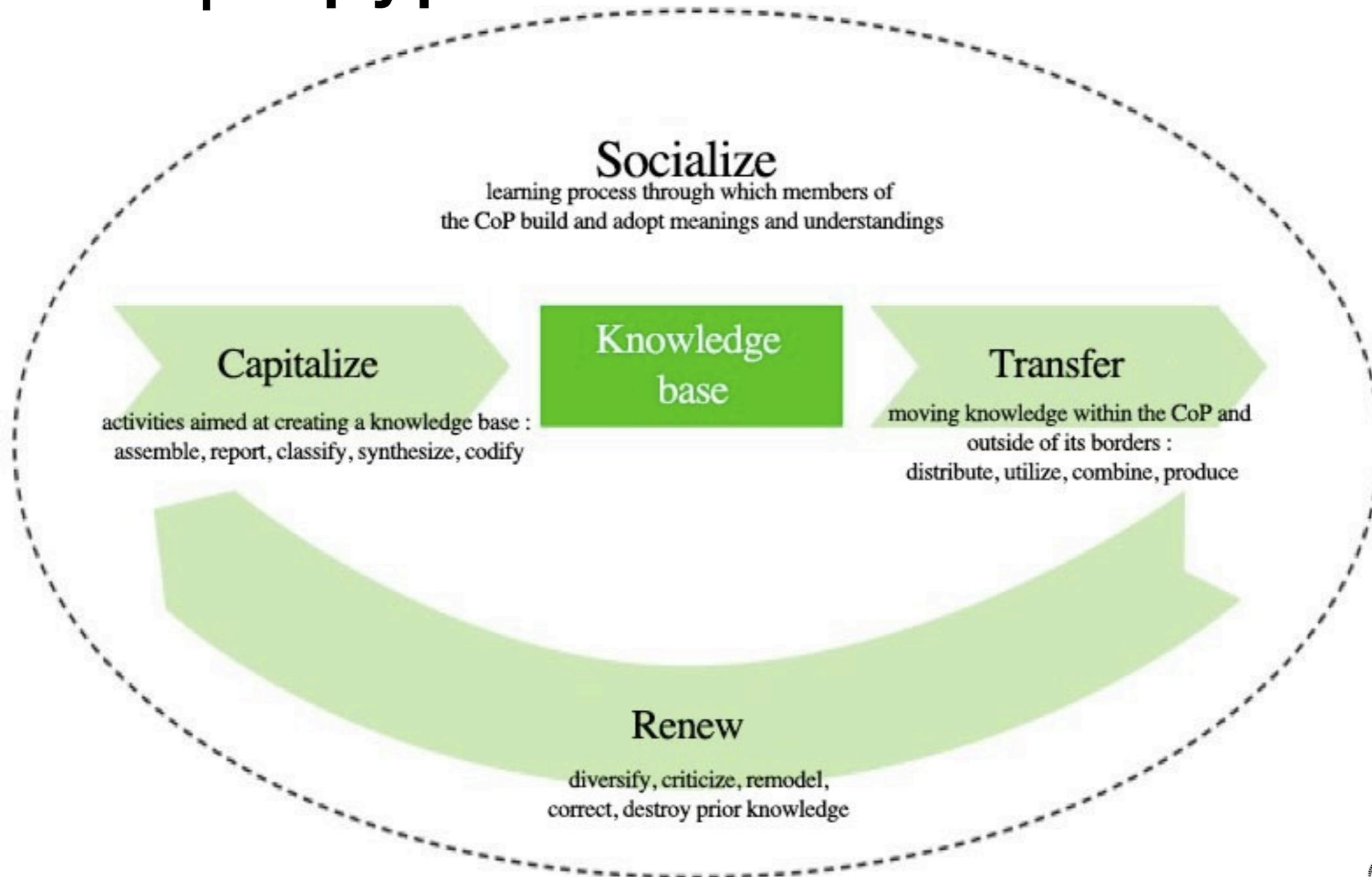
do it. ✓



# CoP models<sup>4</sup>

## Circulation | simply put

I prefer Adidas 

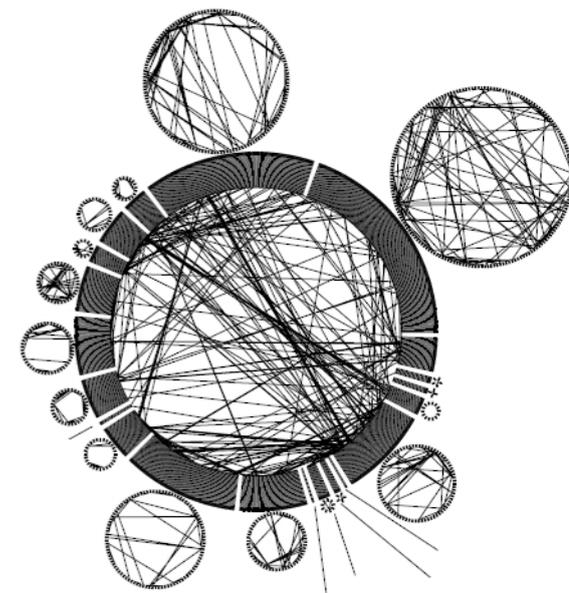


# **Organizations | Knowledge**

# Large organizations

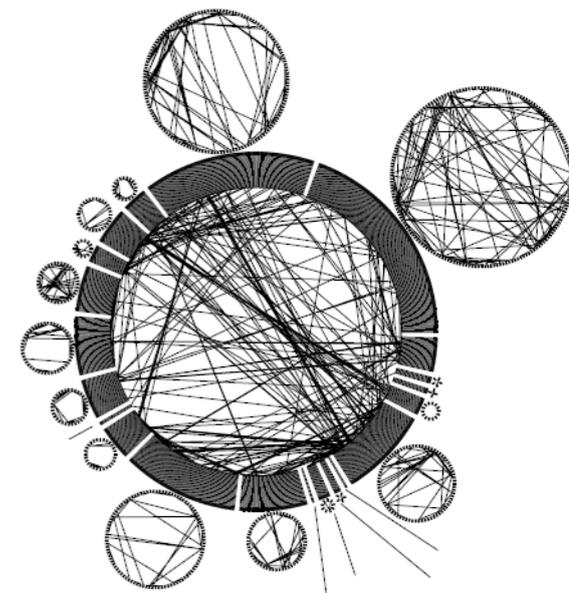
«The capitalist process, by substituting a mere parcel of shares for the walls of and the machines in a factory, takes the life out of the idea of property. It loosens the grip that once was so strong - the grip in the sense of the legal right and the actual ability to do as one pleases with one's own; the grip also in the sense that the holder of the title loses the will to fight, economically, physically, politically, for 'his' factory and his control over it, to die if necessary on its steps» - J.A. Schumpeter

- The impersonality of growing firms
- Praising bureaucracy for its rationality
- Routinizing innovation [marginally, perhaps]
- Without ownership, what incentives ?
- Adapting a XX<sup>th</sup> century model to XXI<sup>st</sup> century realities
- Informality, creativity, passion...



# Large organizations<sup>2</sup>

- What types of structures are most successful ?
- What fields / topics yield best results for CoP-type initiatives ?
- Can we test some parameters ?
- The informal nature of CoP initiatives makes measurement difficult
- True results are hidden under the bureaucratic surface

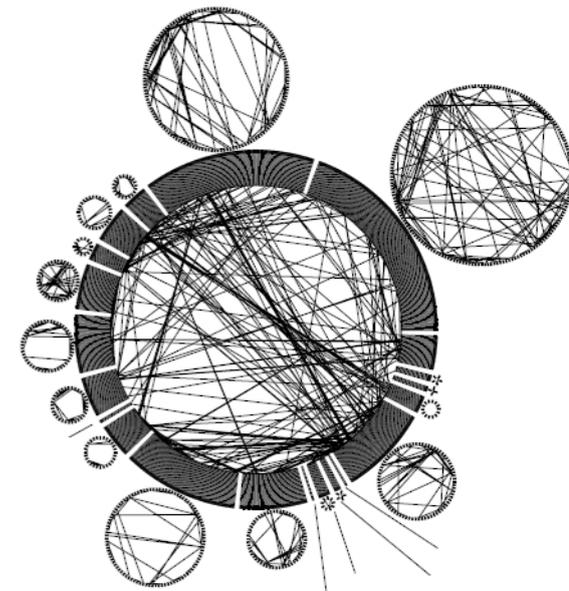


# Case studies

## IBM

business machines.

- Montreal-based manufacturing plant : implementing *lean* production
- Strategic CoP of *lean* coordinators
- Reciprocal objectives - theoretical / practical
- Analyzing processes / roles through time
- Convincing the hierarchy to let go...

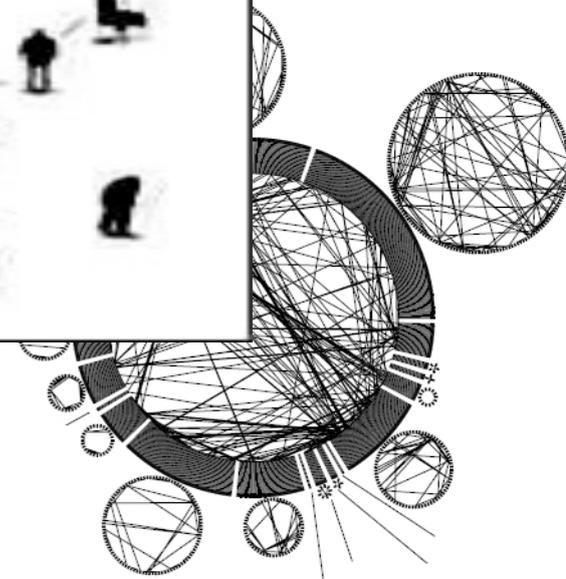
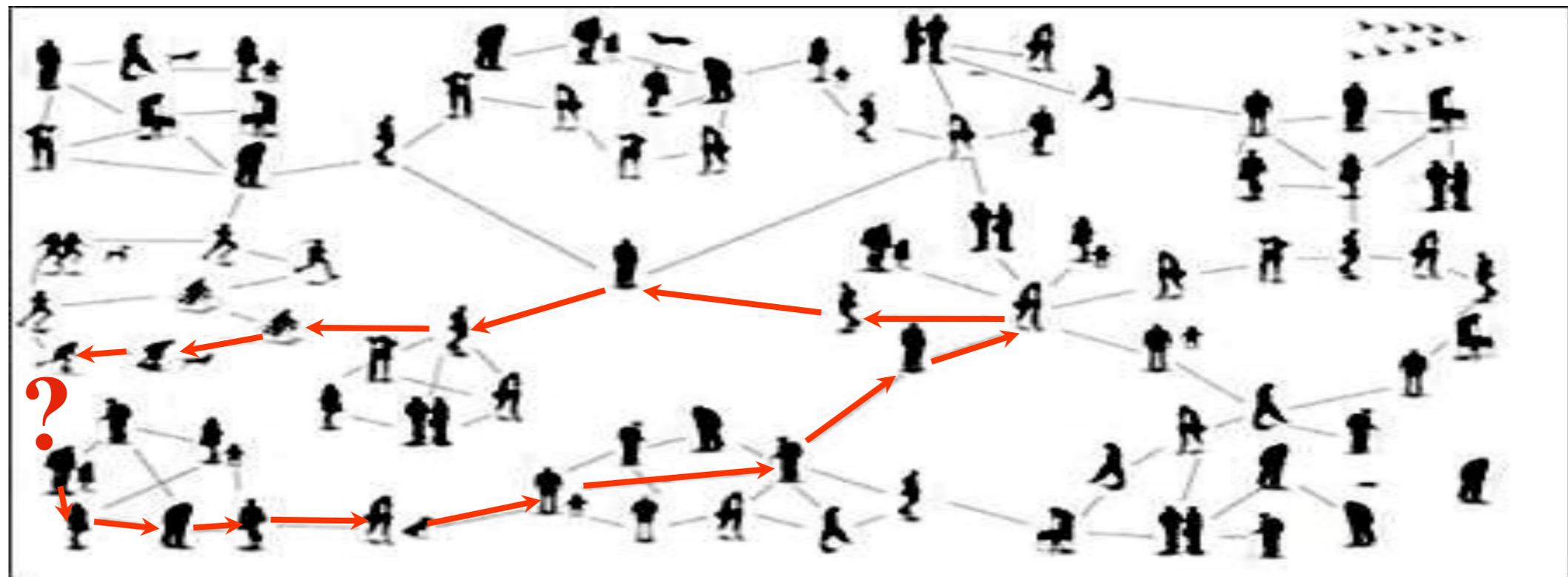


# Case studies

IBM<sup>2</sup>

business machines.

why socialize... ?

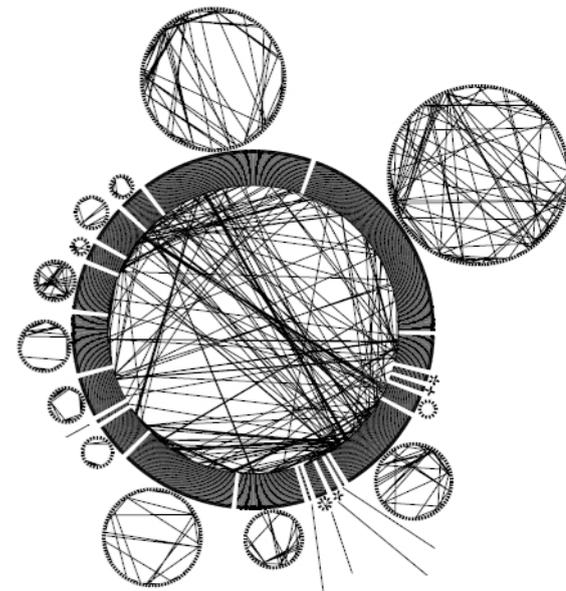


# Case studies<sup>2</sup>

## Bell Canada

dring.

- The canonical example of the large, stale bureaucracy
- Taking pride in numbers
- ESRs with increasing responsibilities
- New ideas, old processes
- Emphasis : codification
- The logo anecdote



# Case studies<sup>2</sup>

Bell Canada<sup>2</sup>

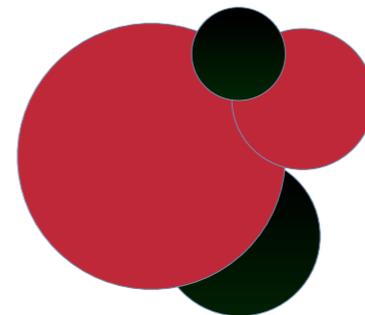
dring.

**BISTRO**<sup>2.0</sup>

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KNOWLEDGE SHARING TOOLS

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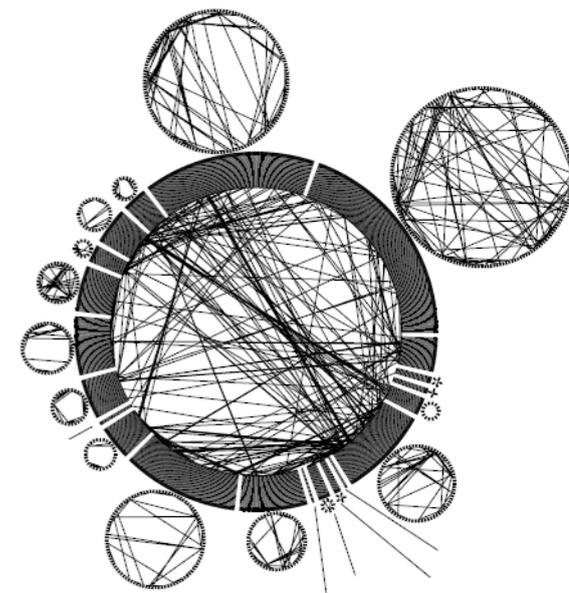


# Case studies<sup>3</sup>

## GDF SUEZ

gas+water.

- A world-class leader in energy and environment
- Cultivating hundreds of so-called CoPs
- Created CoP KM to bring together all ‘coaches’
- Very high number of participants (>130) ; two animators - some specificities
- What makes a difference? Cultural context? Organizational determinants?



# **Firms | Spaces**

## Communities and the city

# CoPs + Spots

- The dynamics of innovation | a social construction
- Urbanity favours creativity [density, intensity, diversity]
- What do 'creative cities' have in common ?
- A lengthy process of maturation
- Going back to the basics



# CoPs + Spots

## Montreal

- 3M ppl
- Betw. Paris+SF
- Midpoint (NY, Boston, Tor.)
- Bilingual
- the “Quiet Revolution” ; expo, games
- City of Festivals [...] - increase chaos
- Areas for the underground\*
- Public/private/artistic symbiosis



Informal activities  
(illicit?) are highly  
contributive to  
building **creativity**

**Barcelona**

# CoPs + Spots

- Activities are decentralized: the center is essential
- A rich supply of cultural activities ; nightlife, etc.
- Poble Nou - 22@ : 200 hectares of creative space (Barcelona Activa, notably)
- A city of festivals - chaos, uninstitutionalized (!)

A photograph of a stage performance. The stage is lit with vertical columns of red and blue light. The word "Mannheim" is overlaid in white text on the left side of the image. The background is dark, and there are some figures on the stage.

Mannheim

# CoPs + Spots

- A history of industrial development
- The Quadrate ; what creativity comes from squares...
- Instituting the arts : from Popakademie to Mannheim Hochschule
- Arranging around the creative industries : security, technique, PR, etc.
- The underground : festivals, inPop<sup>[w/schoolchildren]</sup>, theaters, clubs

# Alternative structures of knowledge management and production

## Conclusion

- The evolution of a concept
- Management consulting fad ? [...]
- Alternative structures yield alternative results
  - For firms | for cities
- Measurement difficulties
- In search of a coherent framework

