

## Title<sup>1</sup>

**Thinking Communities  
Developing a Global Infrastructure for Creative Thinking**

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## Problem

**In the modern Information and Communication Age, people no longer have time to think. Creative thinking is a human activity essential for self-realization, and for providing sustainable solutions to the myriad problems of our ever more complex global society. Three main factors prevent Thinking Communities from developing: lack of suitable locations for “semi-solitary” deep thought, lack of affordable communications infrastructure for such communities to develop, and too many social, professional and financial constraints preventing people from breaking out regularly for a sufficient period of time.**

## Context

This pattern supports creative individuals and small groups with a pressing need for finding the time and concentration to work on a major project, but who lack access to locations, and are inhibited by many personal constraints. The pattern helps them to connect with individuals and organizations interested in providing affordable thinking facilities, and then to design and build their Thinking Communities. These allow their members to concentrate deeply, while also to meet peers who are working on their own projects. This semi-solitary mix of deep thought and social interaction should significantly increase individual and societal creative thinking capacity.

## Discussion

Thinking, resulting in new knowledge, is an essential human activity. Most related community research has focused on knowledge management and knowledge construction communities, often in an organizational or educational setting. For example, a typical corporate knowledge management community acts as a custodian for a Knowledge

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Domain, nurturing the sharing and creation of practices and knowledge that is key to the achievement of both company and personal objectives (Von Krogh et al., 2001). Similarly, an educational knowledge building community is a group of learners committed to advancing the group's knowledge of some shared problem through collaboration knowledge (Chai and Khine, 2006). However, when shifting from such an institutional to a more individual-oriented type of knowledge community, not much is known. In such a community, not organizational goals but individual thinking requirements, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses predominate. The resulting communities have much more of an emergent nature, and can be realized in a wide variety of forms. Thinking Communities, even more so than other communities, cannot be fully designed in every detail. Instead, developers should provide the right conditions and just enough guidance for such communities to get started, then let them evolve (Preece, 2000). A Thinking Community pattern can help outline such conditions and guidelines, while leaving each community enough freedom to develop its own unique values, norms, structures, and processes.

Thinking Communities require the right physical locations for individuals to reflect deeply by themselves, while also being able to interact on their thoughts with peers. They need an electronic communications infrastructure to organize and coordinate their community and communicate between locations. Social, professional, and financial constraints need to be minimized.

With location, communication, and personal constraints satisfied, Thinking Communities should start to be established and grow. A great variety of communities, ranging from loosely connected, semi-solitary individuals to large groups intensely focusing on solving a joint problem, will develop. Thinking Communities could thus become catalysts of creative thinking processes urgently needed to deal with some of the many pressing problems facing our globalizing world.

### *Examples*

Thinking Communities can manifest themselves in numerous forms. Each of the dimensions identified in the pattern can have many possible values. The pattern acts as an analytical lens to help identify successful combinations of values, and possibly new types of Thinking Communities. To give some idea of the breadth and depth of Thinking Communities, here are some of many possible examples:

- A researcher is totally overworked, overwhelmed by the continuous stress of teaching, the publication rat race, and projects. She decides to recharge by taking a two month sabbatical after a conference she attended on the other side of the world. Since semester is over, she can plan it in between two academic years. She looks up the country she is visiting in the ReCharge researchers community web site, and discovers a scenic location close to the conference site, in the middle of a National Park. They offer long-term accommodation, for low monthly rent rates. They also have Internet connections, provide meals, and have a common room where she can meet fellow researchers. After two months of deep thinking and discussions with colleagues who provide fresh angles on her

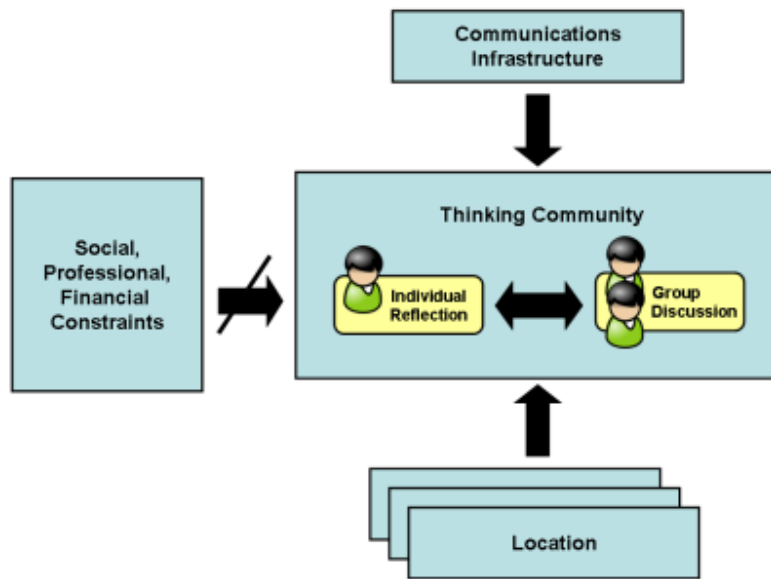
research, since they are not in her field, she goes back home. She is full of fundamental, new ideas that will sustain her in the stressful years to come.

- Many people are inspired by the ways of living and thinking of indigenous peoples. However, it is often hard to establish relationships with such communities. A First Nation, however, hosts a simple hostel with a limited number of rooms on its domain, allowing thinkers to work on their projects, while inviting them for a selected set of meetings and activities with the local community. This offers visitors a low-intensity, non-intrusive opportunity to get a realistic sense of the values, problems, and strengths of these communities, much beyond the understanding provided by the usual, shallow touristic visit to a reservation arts center. Simultaneously, it offers these local communities an alternative source of income and access to a world of ideas and contacts provided by visitors sincerely interested in building bridges between cultures.

- Two countries go to war. Enlightened individuals from both sides want to discuss their differences in order to stop the madness, but discussions on an open electronic forum dedicated to the conflict inevitably derail into emotional rants and diatribes. Meetings in either country obviously do not work for political and security reasons. Forum members from another country, which has managed to successfully negotiate a peace agreement between its feuding factions in the recent past, invite a number of the most reasonable discussants to come to a resort in their country. A private foundation, sponsoring the discussion forum, pays most of the travel expenses. In the resort, the discussants gather in a number of group sessions, but also get ample opportunity to break out, go for walks, and have one-on-one discussions. Their meetings are structured by electronic meeting room software. Although in the short time frame available they cannot reach agreement on a "Roadmap to Peace", they do agree on the most important issues to be worked out. In a closed electronic forum, supported by the same software, they continue their discussions upon return to their respective countries. The bonding and face to face meetings in a peaceful environment have created the conditions to start building a Thinking Community across political borders.

## **Solution**

**A finely meshed, worldwide network needs to be created of affordable locations where people can concentrate and work on their individual creative projects, while simultaneously being able to meet up with peers working on their own acts of creation. The Web will provide the communications infrastructure to develop the concepts of Thinking Communities and match supply and demand of Thinking Locations. Social, professional, and financial constraints need to be addressed by developing concrete guidelines and solution patterns.**



### Categories:

Engagement, Social learning and intelligence, Products and projects, Resources Themes: Social Movement, Education, Social Critique, Research for Action, Community Action, Globalism and Localism

### References:

- For more details and adding your own ideas about this developing concept, you can visit the Thinking Communities website (<http://thinkingcommunities.wikispaces.com/>)
- Much work is done on analyzing and facilitating factors promoting creativity. See for instance the 6th Creativity and Cognition Conference (<http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/CC2007/>) for an overview of the state of the art.
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