Transformation and Learning to build the test Community of Practice

As teams transform to a more agile approach and the Dev Cells push for greater autonomy, how do we still ensure that the test discipline can continue to drive best practice and ensure alignment to an overarching strategy? In this new way of working people are looking to remove the ineffective line management style of 'command and control', and replace it with a more engaging model of coaching and mentoring. The problem with the hierarchal style of a centralized test function is that it cannot cope with an agile approach, where decisions need to be made quickly within the squad itself; there can be confused loyalty of squad versus function and the function may not see the needs of the squad member in relation to building necessary skills.

One possible solution is to build the concept of a CoP (Community of Practice) - "*a group of people who share a craft and/or a profession*". They share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly, where once we may have had a Test Centre of Excellence we now have the CoP to provide coaching and mentoring to other members of the practice who sit 100% in the dev squads. But when someone is 100% dedicated to the squad then how can we still ensure that alignment to best practice, how can ideas be shared across squads and allow teams to build on each other's improvements? So if that line management hierarchy is removed there still needs to be a way to provide support to others performing a similar function. To make the CoP a success people must be allowed allocate time to the practice itself and not just be 100% dedicated to the squad. Depending on the size of the company and the number of squads or tribes this time allocation may change. Let's take an example of a number of different product tribes that are made up of a number of different squads. Where we have the different skills of developer, BA, Product Owner, Architect, Agile Practitioner, Engineer and Tester (figure 1), all aligned into the tribe and allocated into different forms of dev squads.
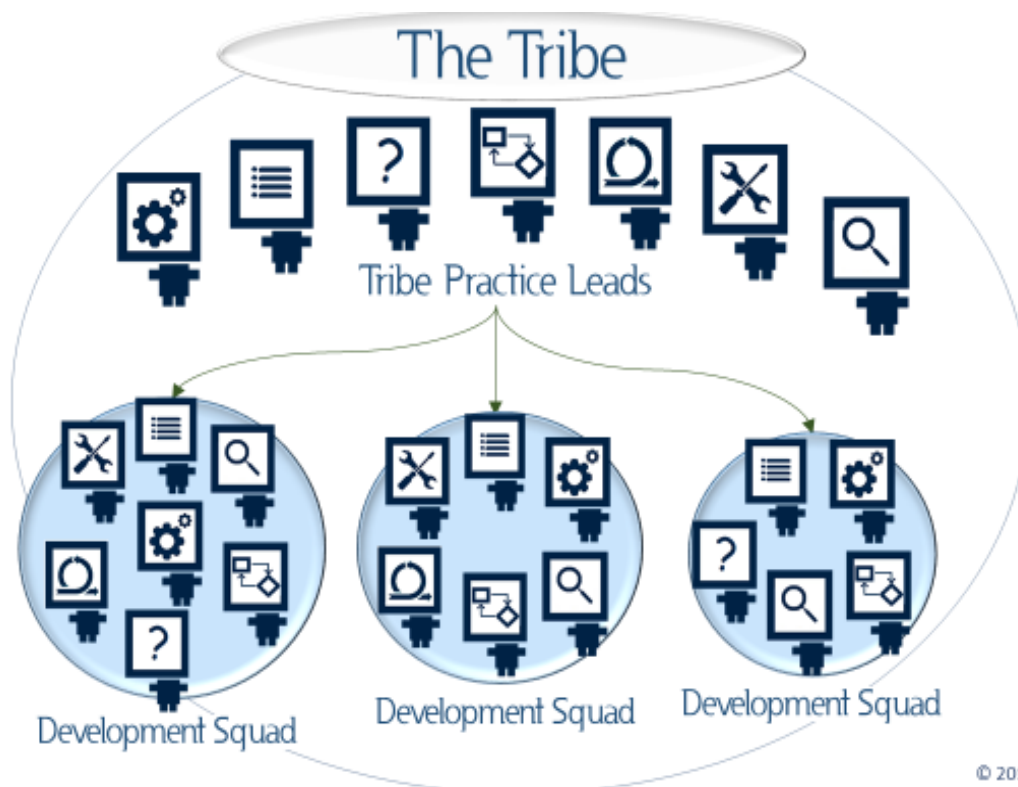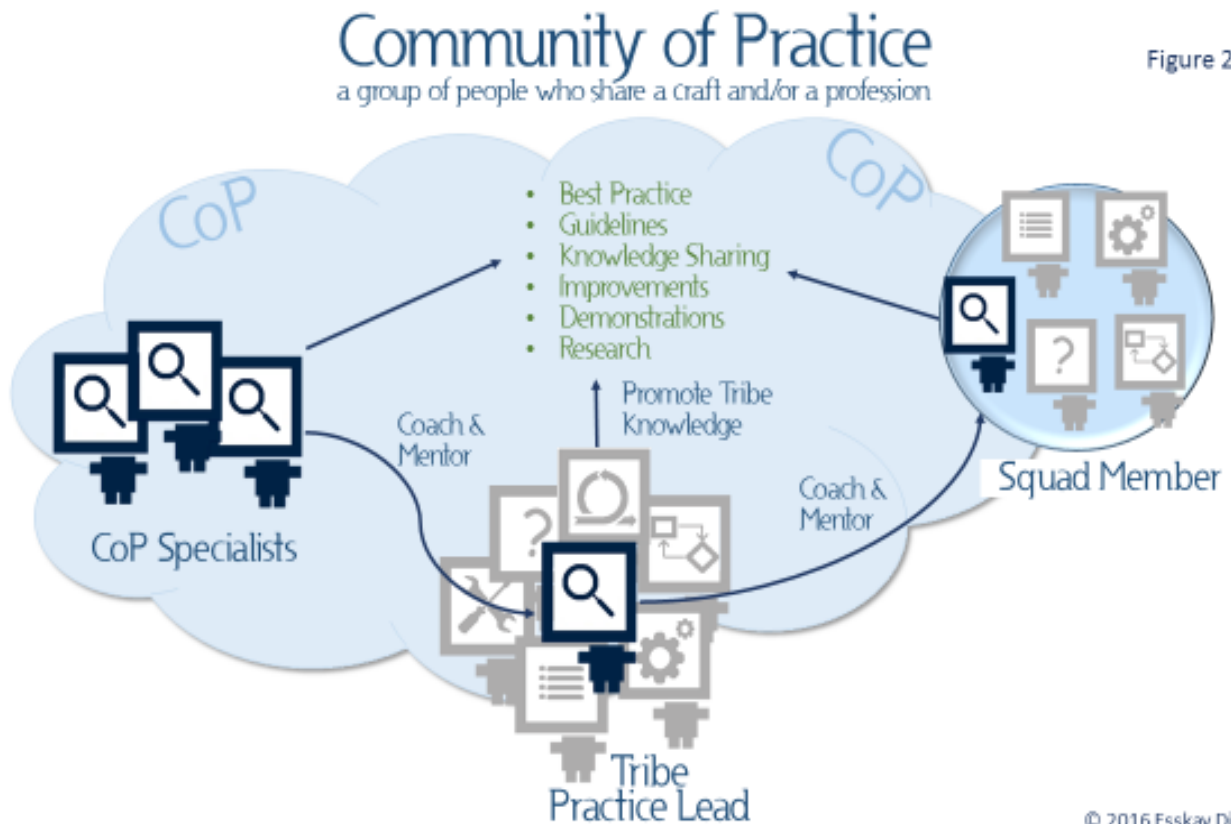

Figure 1

For this type of system to work we need to have CoP Specialists 100% dedicated to the practice, who move around different tribes and squads to provide coaching and mentoring. There would then be CoP practice leads fully aligned to a tribe and CoP members fully embedded within a squad. (Figure 2).

Community of Practice
a group of people who share a craft and/or a profession

Figure 2

- Best Practice
- Guidelines
- Knowledge Sharing
- Improvements
- Demonstrations
- Research

Coach & Mentor

Promote Tribe Knowledge

Coach & Mentor

CoP Specialists

Squad Member

Tribe Practice Lead

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The **Squad Member** would need approximately 20% of their time to:-
- share knowledge across squads
- accept guidance on best practice
- align to the automation framework
- build on their own skill set

The **Practice Lead** would need approximately 40% of their time to:-
- promote the work being done within the tribe back across the CoP
- participate in discussions on good practice
- share knowledge and experience across tribes
- pull on CoP specialists for support

The **CoP Specialist** would be fully dedicated to:-
- drive CoP best practice alongside Practice Leads
- promote the cause of the CoP throughout the company
- provide leadership in issue resolution
- identify trends and patterns in practice improvements
- help maintain the practice framework

If people are not given this opportunity to spend enough time with the CoP then the practice itself will fail. We end up with no alignment on best practice, no way for people to build on their skillsets and maintain their mastery and a confused understanding on their purpose. So the key success of any CoP is to allow its members spend the necessary time to build it and maintain it, balancing both the needs of their squad and their community.