Resources for setting up and running your own UX Community of Practice (UX CoP)

UXLS Workstream: Best Practices

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PISTOIA ALLIANCE

UXLS

User Experience for Life Sciences

COMMUNITY

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Bridging Silos

UX Communities of Practice Can Transform Life Sciences

If you work in UX in pharma or life sciences, you'll know how easy it is to end up in silos:

- Teams across functions work in isolation
- Priorities compete for attention and resources
- Insights scatter instead of coming together
- Leadership struggles to see UX's full value

But fragmentation isn't inevitable!

Communities of Practice offer a bridge, bringing UX practitioners together, sharingknowledge, and amplifying our collective impact

This resource shares practical insights from across the UXLS network on how to start, sustain, and scale these communities so UX can thrive across organisations

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UX Community of Practice - About this effort

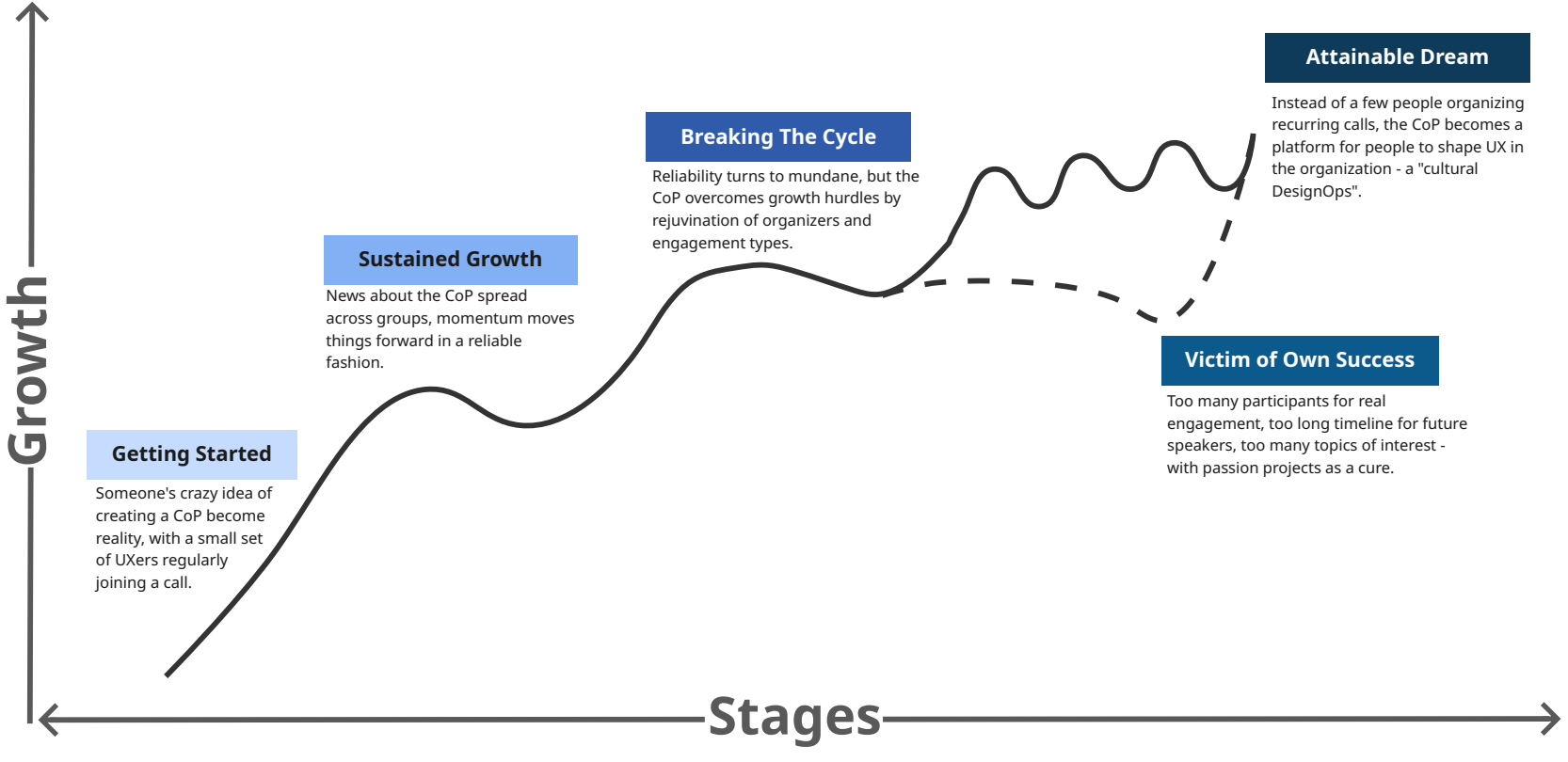
User Experience (UX) practices in pharma and life sciences face distinctive challenges due to the breadth of scientific domains and business functions they serve. These differences often lead to fragmentation—silos, inconsistent ways of working, and missed opportunities for shared learning. Some teams are unsure how to start a CoP, others struggle to sustain momentum, and some communities stall when key members change roles or leave.

In 2025, the Pistoia Alliance's User Experience for Life Sciences (UXLS) community examined how leading pharmaceutical organizations design, govern, and sustain Communities of Practice (CoPs).

This report distills the research into practical guidance to start, strengthen, and scale CoPs.

Definition: A User Experience Community of Practice **(UX CoP)** is a collaborative group that connects practitioners to share knowledge, support each other, and collectively raise the visibility, maturity, and strategic impact of UX within and across organisations.

UX Community of Practice - Growth Model



UX Community of Practice - Impact on UXers

	Junior-level / Early Career UX Practitioner	Mid-level / Experienced UX Practitioner	Senior-level / Strategic UX Leader	UX Contractor / External Contributor	Sponsor / Executive Leadership
Challenges	• Isolation and lack of peer support • Difficulty accessing best practices and mentorship • Unawareness of broader UX activities in the organization • Risk of duplicating work	• Siloed teams and lack of cross-team visibility • Difficulty sharing knowledge • Limited opportunities for peer critique • Lack of professional networking opportunities within the organization	• Limited visibility of UX to leadership • Difficulty influencing organizational UX strategy • Fragmented leadership and governance • Risk of CoP becoming "just another meeting" that competes for time	• Difficulty integrating into company culture • Limited access to internal networks • Unclear onboarding and engagement pathways	• Duplication of effort and wasted resources • Inconsistent UX quality and practices across teams and business units • Difficulty scaling innovation and learning • Challenges in talent development
Benefits of CoP	**Exposure to tools, methods, and peer learning** *Immediate benefit is to identify the peer practitioners. It makes you feel less alone, especially when you are the lone wolf. (AstraZeneca)* **Safe space for questions and growth** *The UXLS community was established to fill a niche within life sciences where there was a gap in both the appreciation of user experience and the specific domain application. (Pistoia Alliance)* *Providing UX training to colleagues who were interested in UX but didn't quite know how to start.(EMBL-EBI)* *The CoP is a virtual meeting place to get designers together to help foster learning, understanding, skill development, and camaraderie. (Lextech)*	**Networking across business areas.** *We started CoP when we had UX teams spread across the organizations... to bring together UX members to share research methodologies/lessons learned/business process (Merck)* *We have a chat channel as the foundational connecting point for everyone, used to share ideas and announce initiatives. (Roche)* *The CoP is a virtual meeting place to get designers together to help foster learning, understanding, skill development, and camaraderie. (LexTech)* **Peer critique and advanced knowledge sharing** *There are a lot that can be shared and learned from CoP, such as tool sets, methodology, access to particular user population, and critique on approach. (AstraZeneca)*	**Visibility for UX impact** *Rotate presenters and encourage expert to showcase directly, promoting visibility of individuals and their work. (Novartis)* *CoP is one such way to make UX visible to org...inviting leaders to these sessions.(Merck)* **Drive UX Maturity** *Being in pharma, the CoP would be more focused on the business processes/bringing up your org UX maturity levels. Unawareness of the value that UX can bring is a big challenge that we always have to work towards. (Merck)* *Accelerates onboarding & raises baseline maturity by making CoP membership part of standard induction."* *(Roche)*	**Access to internal knowledge and networks** *Onboarding for externals includes joining the CoP, so they get to know the channel and initiatives. (Roche)* *Agency workers were coming in, bringing some fresh perspectives. So we really wanted to create a space like that. (GSK)* **Integration into wider community** *CoP creates a network and a home outside of the immediate team. (AstraZeneca)* *CoP was a way for them (contractors) to really link or identify even with a company, identify with a group of people that share the same challenges, learnings right and needs. (Roche)*	**Reduces duplication and drives efficiency** *We can avoid re-inventing the wheel and duplication of efforts when these methodologies/projects are shared. (Merck)* **Promote standardization and ensure consistency** *The initial idea was... to share knowledge and frameworks that we don't reinvent things such as style guides or really good templates—just piggyback on the best use cases that we have and learn from each other and share our work. (Novartis)* **Accelerate professional growth** *Participants... gain tangible benefits such as practical tools, frameworks, and shared learnings that can be applied... (Pistoia Alliance)* *Our UX CoP had a wider impact within the life sciences as its members became UX champions. (EMBL-EBI)*

UX Community of Practice - Impact on Organisations

Fosters Belonging

CoPs act as creative and professional associations within the organization, providing encouragement, feedback, and a sense of belonging, identity and shared culture for UX practitioners.

Breaks Down Silos

By connecting practitioners across teams and functions, CoPs transform isolated efforts into a visible, collaborative network that elevates UX's strategic influence and visibility.

Accelerate Growth

Members benefit from shared tools, frameworks, and peer learnings that can be directly applied to their work and career development.

Drive Efficiency

CoPs help organizations avoid reinventing the wheel by sharing methodologies and lessons learned, leading to greater efficiency and innovation.

UX Community of Practice - Starting, Thriving, Failing

What makes a CoP thrive?

It's not just about member count or attendance. Rather than chasing bigger numbers, we identified a few factors that can signal health and effectiveness of a CoP: **engagement quality**, **diverse representation**, **knowledge generation**, **value realization**, and **sustainability**.

Community focus

CoPs flourish in bringing together UX fans and professionals, but struggle when being used for UX management alignment.

Diverse Representation

Representation from multiple business areas and roles enhances the richness of perspectives and fosters cross-functional collaboration

Engagement Quality

Reflected in the quality, depth of interactions, or number and variety of contributors

Knowledge Generation

The ability of the CoP to generate and disseminate standards and practices across the organization

Value Realization

Tangible benefits reported by members and stakeholders, such as improved skills, problem-solving, and strategic influence

Sustainability

Existence of governance structures, succession plans, and varied low-effort, engaging programs for different audiences and participation needs

Why do CoPs fail?

The value of UX CoPs is widely recognized, but most of those we examined struggle to survive. These challenges underscore the need for **dedicated ownership**, **formal recognition**, and ongoing **engagement strategies**—along with **proactive succession planning** and **flexible leadership structures**—to ensure CoPs remain sustainable and impactful even as organization structures or priorities shift.

Lack of Ownership, Resources

Without clear roles, dedicated resources, or shared leadership, CoPs often depend on goodwill and volunteer effort—making them vulnerable to fading momentum.

Absence of Formal Recognition

CoPs that lack official sponsorship or integration into organizational goals may be recognized informally but lack the support needed for sustainability.

Engagement Fatigue

Struggles with attendance and engagement often stem from unclear value, repetitive formats, or lack of relevant incentives for participation.

Shifting Priorities

Changes in organizational structure or priorities can disrupt CoP participation and continuity, as members' roles and interests shift.

Wrong metrics

As a CoP matures, so should its metric. Initially the number of events and participants works well, but later focus on balanced engagement, share of volunteer speakers, or diversity of topics and formats.

Too much overhead

A CoP vision is useful, and a backlog of speakers. practical - but other than that don't let a bloated governance get in the way of fun discussions.

How to get started?

Start a Community of Practice (CoP) by gathering a small, motivated group around **shared goals**, **securing managerial support** with **a clear value proposition**, and gradually scaling through **consistent cadence**, **common space**, and **visible impact**.

Start small and focused

Identify a core group with shared interests and clear, common goals before expanding.

Secure buy-in early

Articulate the broader mission and build a simple business case that shows value to managers and stakeholders.

Create structure and space

Set a regular cadence, establish a shared communication channel (e.g., Teams), and account for time zones.

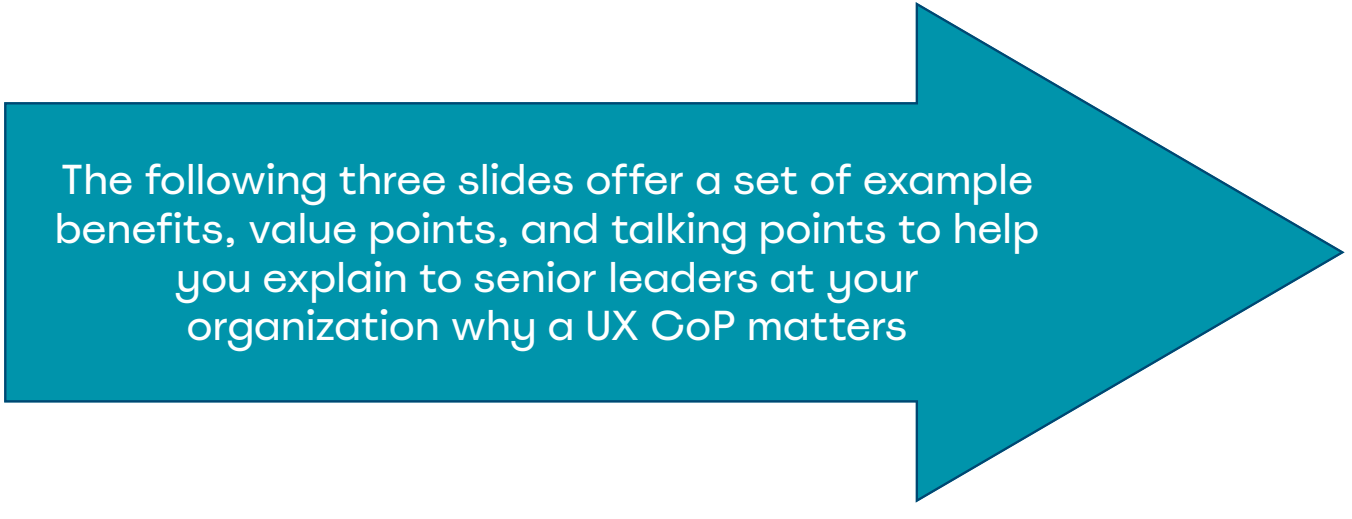
Lower barrier to participation

Make it easy to join and contribute by sharing tools, examples, and tangible success stories.

Scale intentionally

Increase size and complexity gradually, while reinforcing common ground as the group grows.

Making the case for a UX CoP - Proposal Deck



UX Community of Practice (CoP)

Challenges

Pharma UX faces fragmentation and duplication, hampering collaborative efforts and professional growth.

Unify

Establishing a UX CoP fosters connection, improves efficiency, and enhances professional development across departments.

Impact

Improved collaboration leads to better UX, increasedefficiency, a stronger talent pipeline and better retention.

Recommendation

Formal recognition, time allocation and dedicated ownership for UX Community of Practice implementation

UX Community of Practice: Proposal

Recommendation: Formal recognition, time allocation and dedicatedownership for UX Community of Practice implementation

Challenges in Pharma UX

Fragmentation: Pharma UX is fragmented across various departments

Duplication: Unconnected teams duplicate effort and lack peer support

Complexity: Complex phases, legacy tools and regulations make connection critical

Talent & Impact Development: UX professionals lack peer support and learning frameworks for established and emerging technologies

UX Community of Practice

Connection: Break down silos and connect UX practitioners

Efficiency: Cross-departmental sharing of methods, templates and lessons learned

Maturity: UX better able to support organisational initiatives and accelerate growth

Learning: Supports sustained professional development, reduces onboarding load and stay current with standards, frameworks and emerging technologies

UX Community of Practice: Why it works

UX Community of Practice: Unlocks efficiency gains and UX maturitysmall resource investment of time and effort

Approach

Regular Practitioner Sessions: Share work, challenges, patterns, cross-department engagement

Grow: Add async channels, dedicated workstreams and collaboration initiatives

Pharma Fit: Tailored to pharma-specific realities andorganisational priorities

Measure: Relevant metrics for scientific and operational impact

Key Benefits

Better UX, Better R&D: Smoother adoption of critical tools & AI, with fewer errors and rework in research workflows

Efficiency: Shared resources cut duplication and increases standardisation of practices across departments

Growth: Peer learning, critiques and networking reduce isolation, build skills and foster retention

Maturity: Raises UX visibility and enables inter-function collaboration

Join the journey

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