



# A Rational Approach to Technical Enablement

Draft 1

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**The Enablement Challenge.**

The Rational Company was founded in 1981 and was acquired by the IBM Corporation in 2003. Since that time, Rational has enjoyed a leadership position in the market for development tools, particularly for Java-based development, and the associated technologies and methods that support development teams and process.

In the fall of 2006, Rational Software began a dramatic growth curve as its market expanded beyond development tools and process into managing software as an asset in any size organization. Specifically, several large acquisitions and internal product transfers allowed Rational to enter entirely new markets (complex systems and embedded software with Telelogic, and enterprise modernization and mainframe software with product shifts from the WebSphere brand). In addition, Rational expanded its focus in the IT market beyond software developed in-house into the management and governance of software assets, particularly software inherited, purchased or commissioned from a vendor.

Adding to the challenge is the realization that the value of Rational's offerings are not about the tools and products it sells alone. Customers only achieve value from understanding the concepts, process, management and effectiveness of how you put those particular tools together across an entire organization to manage the software and systems delivery lifecycle. Therefore, product knowledge alone is insufficient: what customers need is see is competence and a track record in helping customers achieve real results from successful adoption of tools and processes.

One of the more difficult challenges associated with this growth and complexity is enablement of technical sales and technical services organizations (including business partners) who represent the capability and experience needed by customers.

Specifically, there were numerous challenges associated with traditional approaches:

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Highlights

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**Enablement must shift from “just in case” knowledge to “just in time” knowledge.**

**The old-fashioned notion that we must prepare different enablement for our customers than for our internal audiences is discarded.**

- We must leverage technology to bring together a widely distributed, global nature network of experts.
- The new technology associated with software and systems delivery, combined with the number of offerings that we provide, continues to grow at a rapid pace. Our customers need our technical team to not only understand the products, but they need to trust that we are capable of helping them apply the technology to meet their specific needs. In other words, our technical teams need to be experts. This increase in depth of knowledge and experience needed, coupled with the expansion of our offerings, requires that enablement shift from “just-in-case” to “just-in-time.”
- Like most companies, IBM continues to have significant downward pressure on expenses. This has forced scrutiny of face-to-face presence for all enablement, balancing it against travel expenses and the opportunity cost of being away from our customers. As a result, we have a challenge in figuring out how to effectively leverage technology in our enablement. We could no longer afford to send people to training classes with the hope that they apply what they’d learned. We needed to get smarter about how we invested in our enablement to maximize our return on investment.
- The old-fashioned notion that we must prepare different enablement for our customers than for our internal audiences is discarded in the face of the reality that we must be as open and transparent about our technology strengths and flaws as we can to ensure maximum customer satisfaction and success with what we offer. In addition, creating or reworking multiple streams of content is expensive, time-consuming and rigid.

In short, the profound challenges of a fast-growing business, a geographically distributed student base, and multiplying complexities in technology demanded a new model for enablement.

## Foundational Principles.

To establish the new plan, a number of core principles were agreed upon:

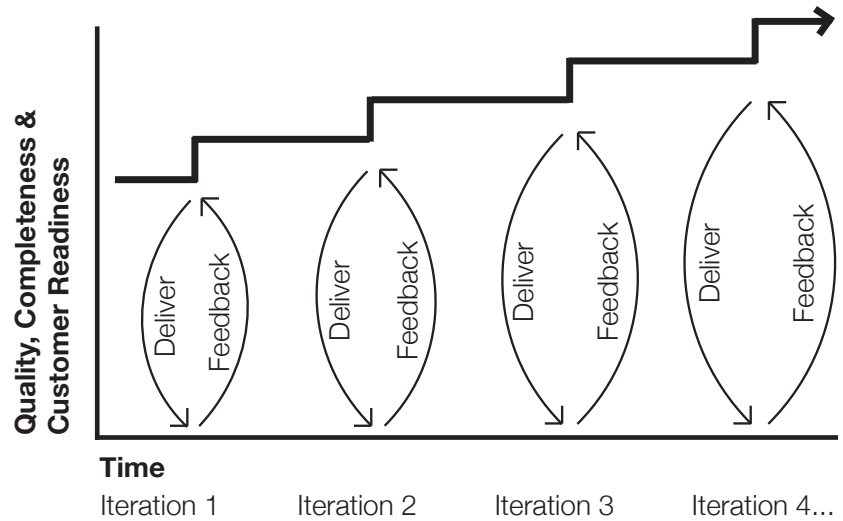
- *Experiential Learning* - the vast majority of what is learned comes from experiences, not from a book.
- *Participation By The Enabled* - the people closest to our customers provide the best expertise, and find high value in participating in the creation and delivery of enablement. As a result, enablement cannot be treated as a top-down flow of knowledge from a worldwide team. Knowledge and experiences need to flow freely in the community.
- *Learning From Each Other* - the wise man learns from his mistakes, but the wiser man learns from the mistakes of others. Problems need to be solved once and shared effectively around the world.
- *Enablement as a Business Investment* - by treating enablement as a pure business function, we can effectively assess costs versus returns and risks versus advantages. Given the business pressures of reducing expenses and increasing productivity by minimizing time away from customers, we must scrutinize every face-to-face enablement activity. In addition, we must aggressively leverage Web 2.0 and innovation in learning technologies to provide a range of delivery methods that match the needs..
- *Innovate over Imitate* - In a fast-changing technology industry where we are driving new innovations, we can't always rely on classes and books being available. Being at the front edge means that a lot of the learning occurs while solving problems and sharing experiences.
- *Enablement Everywhere* - we must design enablement into everyday work life, resulting in more opportunities for practical application.
- *Individual Ownership* - The ultimate responsibility for building expertise must fall to the individual. This is largely due to the fact that the majority of the enablement requires a level of self-directed discipline.

**Enablement cannot be treated as one-way consumption, but a participative exercise by those enabled.**

**A range of delivery methods must be matched to the content being delivered.**

*Applying Iterative Development Concepts to Enablement*

Iterative development is well understood within Rational and the broader IT marketplace. Conceptually it represents cycles of constant rework, improving the quality and value of the material at each iteration. Iterative stands in contrast to older methods of development where pieces are developed at different rates and integrated near the conclusion of the project.



*Fig 1. With each cycle of delivery and student input and feedback, the overall quality and completeness of the material improves. Enablement content is never perfect, particularly at the start, but approaches the highest level of quality and completeness over time through many cycles of delivery and feedback. Early iterations include more "learning by doing", while later iterations focus on content consumption.*

**Enablement content doesn't spring forth from the creators in a perfect state.**

The critical realization is that like software, enablement content doesn't spring forth from the creators in a perfect state, and the concept of iteration is quite useful in this context as well. The initial drafts reflect the incomplete understanding of the subject material. As each teacher delivers the material, the students return feedback on its accuracy and quality, and add to it their own experiences and perspectives. As the student becomes the teacher, the material improves in quality and depth. Each iteration adds to this resolution of understanding, until the material is eventually IBM's "best", and further improvement becomes subject to the law of diminishing returns.

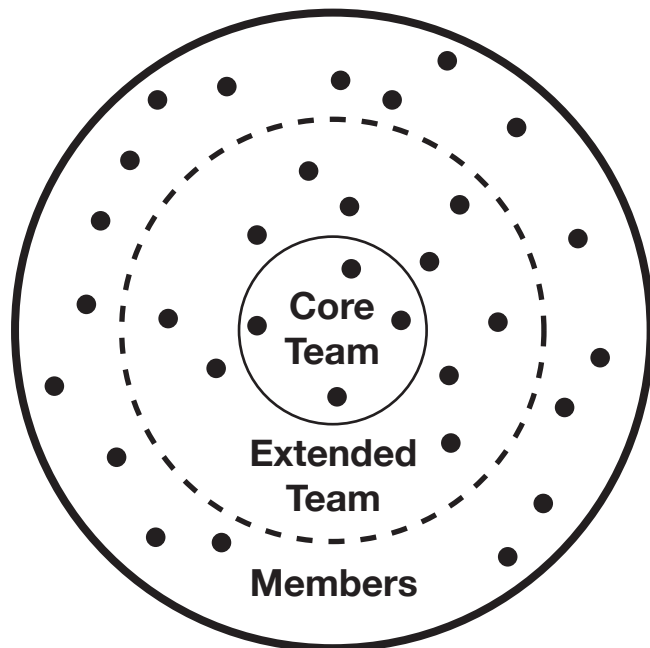
**It is the primary method of connecting and collaborating with fellow experts around the world within a common domain.**

### The Community of Practice Model.

Communities of Practice are groups of practitioners from around the world and across the organization that share a common concern or passion for improving methods and practices — innovation that matters to our clients — focused on different domains within software and systems delivery.

Membership is voluntary, but is highly recommended for all Rational practitioners because it is the primary method of connecting and collaborating with fellow experts around the world within a common domain. Practitioners come from across the organization, including technical sales, technical services, development labs, IBM Global Services, business partners and technical support.

Some parts of the Rational organization have leveraged the Community of Practice structure to organize their resources and ensure that all parts of the solution portfolio have the appropriate level of focus and expertise.



*Fig 2. The Community of Practice Anatomy. The Core Team provides the central leadership and direction to the Community. General membership, which can come from all parts of the IBM business, including partners, are asked to join the Core in an Extended Team from time-to-time for special projects.*

**The Core Team has representation from all parts of Rational's business.**

While the Communities are informal organizations, Rational has invested in a dedicated leadership Core Team, with representatives from all parts of Rational's business, including development, intellectual capital creation and field resources from all parts of the world. All of the leadership has a customer facing role in some aspect, as the core mission of the Community is to quickly and fully understand customer problems and bring to bear the right expertise. Specifically, the Core Team's responsibilities are:

- Run the Community governance system
- Define and drive the key community initiatives
- Make key decisions for the Community
- Maintain the momentum to sustain the Community's development and continued evolution
- Mentor the next generation of leaders

**Extended Team members are considered part of the leadership for a period of time.**

Often, members of the general community will step up and lead special efforts, new initiatives or study groups, and so are considered extended members of the leadership team for a period of time. This Extended Team is fluid, and their individual participation in leadership fluctuates based on their own customer demands. Their responsibilities include:

- Lead and participate in core team initiatives
- Lead small group initiatives
- Take on specific Community responsibilities
- Mentor and provide guidance to less experienced members
- Provide local input to the Community governance system

The general Community membership tends to participate in these ways:

- Collaborate to discover new methods for solving problems or achieving something new in the domain
- Connect with others within the community who have experience
- Ask for help in solving a customer problem
- Reuse an asset that has worked for others
- Discuss within the community what is working, and what is not
- Document common problems and solutions
- Participates in small groups, initiatives or projects

**The overall purpose of Communities of Practice is tied directly to accelerating Rational's business.**

The overall purpose of Communities of Practice is tied directly to accelerating Rational's business:

- *Productivity* - Solving problems and finding answers faster, building intellectual capital from what we find once (and once only), and reusing more assets, templates and frameworks
- *Quality* - Solve problems more capably for our customers by bringing more experience to the table, providing quicker feedback to development, and reducing the time to value
- *Innovation* - Working together to solve problems that customers face by documenting and sharing new methods, practices and ideas

In driving to those purposes, the Community must keep these priorities in mind constantly:

- *Accelerating Revenue* opportunities through building trust with our customers based on our capabilities and track record of results. This aligns to the overall IBM value *Trust in all relationships*, which is enabled by delivering on our value commitments to customers and our business commitments to IBM.
- *Accelerating Customer Results* through our results that deliver improved time to value. This maps directly to IBM's value, *Ensuring every client's success*.
- *Building a Foundation for Growth* through contributions that enrich our intellectual capital, people, partners, collateral and infrastructure. This maps to IBM's value, *Innovation that matters*.

**Communities of Practice play a pivotal role in the overall technical enablement strategy.**

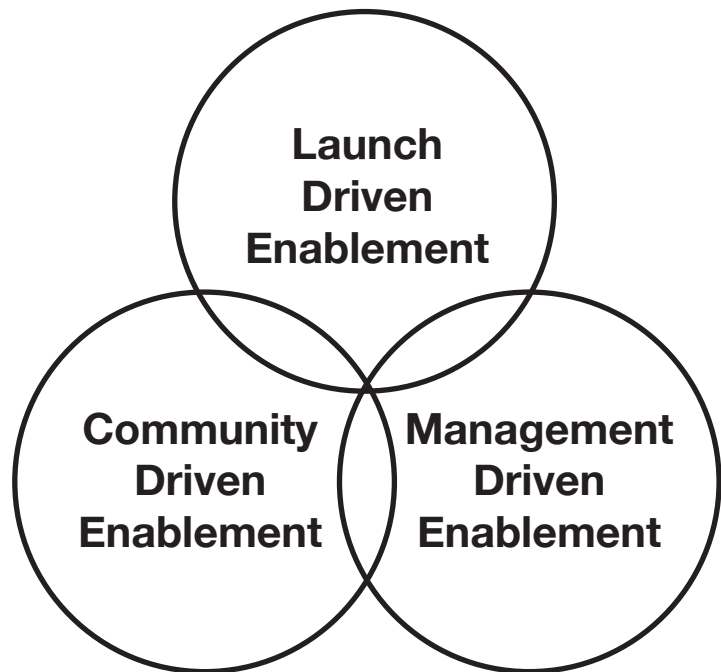
In considering the manifold enablement challenges that the Rational organization faced, it became clear that the Communities of Practice must play a pivotal role in the overall technical enablement strategy.



**Three Types of Enablement.**

**They must be applied and considered as one unit: each part does not work separately or alone.**

The overall strategy that was developed consisted of three types of enablement, called *Launch Driven Enablement*, *Community Driven Enablement*, and *Management Driven Enablement*. Each type addresses a different objective within the overall enablement framework, though they must be applied and considered together as one unit: each part does not work separately or alone.



*Fig 3. Though each type of enablement is aimed at a different part of the spectrum, there are overlapping concepts, and they must be considered together as one system.*

**Customers expect experts immediately upon availability.**

### **Launch Driven Enablement.**

Rational has undergone a dramatic increase in the raw number of technologies it sells over the last several years. Customers expect IBM to provide experts on all of these technologies, as they need that skill to adopt them successfully, and not many months later, but immediately upon availability.

Launch Driven Enablement is the segment of the overall enablement strategy that focuses on:

- Forming an starter team to collaborate with the development lab on understanding the practical value and usage models of a future offering. This group serves as the initial wave of experts.
- Building a consistent set of collateral based on those early experiences, leveraging members of the broader community ( called Regional Mentors) as participants, which creates the second wave of experts.
- Providing the enablement to the entire Community.

**A base set of knowledge is reached as close to the general availability date of the offering as possible.**

The result is a shared base set of knowledge, reached as close to the general availability date of the offering as possible.

The Launch-Driven Enablement phases are:

**Many months prior to the anticipated launch date, a Core Team is formed.**

- *Readiness (Phase 0):* Many months prior to the anticipated launch date, ideally before the beta testing phase, a decision is made as to which Community or Communities will find value in applying the new technology to the problems and opportunities their customers face. A launch Core Team is formed with membership from Community leaders.

**The Core Team builds the initial set of collateral.**

- *Initial Knowledge Transfer (Phase 1):* The launch Core Team, in collaboration with development, builds the initial set of collateral by drawing from their own background, early experiences with alpha and beta customers. This collateral might include documented case studies, sample presentations, training class modules and sample usage models.

**The Regional Mentor program is an advanced, multi-week course designed to build field experts capable of being “seeds”.**

- *Regional Mentor Program (Phase 2):* More than a simple “train the trainer” model where people learn to cascade a set of slides to their peers, the Regional Mentor program is an advanced, multi-week course designed to build field experts capable of being “seeds” for expertise within their territory and the broader community. The course consists of self-study assignments, a workshop with the Core Team and experts from development labs, participation in small-group projects to build specific intellectual capital artifacts, “field trips” with experts to early program (beta) customers, and acting as instructors for enablement in their home territory. Upon graduation from the course, Regional Mentors are expected to lead face-to-face workshops alongside their peers, and mentor others in initial customer engagements, as driven by the business needs in their region.

**Regional Mentors serve as instructors for both scheduled enablement events as well as on-demand content.**

- *General Enablement (Phase 3):* In a perfect “learning” world, with unlimited travel budgets and unlimited access to experts, we would transport our best talent on site, on-demand, to teach where and when needed. Since business pressures preclude this expensive approach, our expert Regional Mentors serve as instructors for both scheduled enablement events (such as web classes and local classes) as well as on-demand content (such as podcasts and self-driven courses). In addition, they engage members of the broader community in Small Group projects that extend the collateral family while providing important give-back learning experiences to everyone. The Rational Learning Portal, an important piece of infrastructure, ties together these components into a cohesive, multi-week learning experience, more like a college course than typical corporate “training”.

**Local teams leverage their Regional Mentors through initial opportunities.**

- *Deep Skills Enablement (Phase 4):* As “book knowledge” is not enough, in this phase local teams leverage their Regional Mentors as “seeds” for mentoring others through initial opportunities. By mentoring through real application, the Mentor’s skill deepens, and all members of the Community gain real customer experience with the technology.

The overall benefits of this style of enablement include:

- Designed so that the majority of the content is available anytime, anywhere.
- Builds strong connections between the field and development.
- Provides dramatically increased access to experts, both virtual and live.
- Allows for virtual access to sandbox labs, complete with “shadowing” by experts for observation and guidance.
- Provides access to industry and business leaders and their expert views.
- Captures monitored discussions and conversations as part of the course, rather than through offline e-mail conversation.

**Regional Mentors find great personal and professional satisfaction in helping to drive organizational adoption.**

Most importantly, everyone in the organization participates in the consumption and application of enablement. In practice, Regional Mentors find great personal and professional satisfaction in helping to drive organizational adoption of new technologies, particularly as they are invited to be part of the “inside track”.

*Collateral Threads and Organizational Boundaries*

**By simplifying scenarios to one common thread and effort, there is a dramatic reduction in the amount of work required to create the material.**

By connecting all the players in collateral development, from the lab through our technical leaders, to our partners and our customers, we ensure that the same scenarios used to drive initial product development decisions carry through as a common thread, to all enablement material built around the technology. In the past, new use cases were developed for product function decisions, for demonstration scripts, for online help, for classes and tutorials, for partner enablement, for customer course and for many other purposes. By simplifying scenarios to one common thread and effort, there is a dramatic reduction in the amount of work required to create the material, a reduction in the overall quantity of material to review, as well as a dramatic improvement in its quality. Indeed, Launch Driven Enablement cannot succeed over the long term without a deliberate and consistent effort to break down organizational boundaries.

**The approach allows Rational to start building skills early while refining collateral with each phase.**

The value of iterative collateral development is never more obvious than when applied to Launch Driven Enablement, as each phase builds additional collateral depth and granularity while broadening understanding. Like Agile development, this approach allows Rational to start building skills early and quickly, while refining collateral closer and closer to customer needs with each phase.

Not every product launch requires the full complement of collateral and investment. Some product launches are less important to Rational, or have a smaller gap between existing field skill and what is required for a successful launch. Determination of this relative importance is part of the governance model for Rational's technical enablement strategy, and is addressed later in this whitepaper.

**Community Driven Enablement is about learning from the experiences of others.**

### **Community Driven Enablement.**

Community Driven Enablement is about learning from the experiences of others. Once the base knowledge is gained from Launch Driven Enablement, it's critical that Rational's technical people continue to build their skill through sharing of real-world situations and applications. Indeed, the majority of learning comes this way — a paradigm shift from the conventional wisdom that most learning comes from a book or a class.

**The heart of Community Driven Enablement is the Small Group.**

The heart of Community Driven Enablement is the Small Group. Within a Community there exists small pockets of common interest that unite people around a shared goal or problem. For example, a group of Community members might be experiencing a similar issue that deserves attention and thought, or more simply, they might all interact on a regular basis with a set of customers in a common industry, domain or geographical region. By acknowledging and celebrating these common interests, Community Driven Enablement cultivates the sharing of knowledge, experiences and common understanding.

**The purpose is to foster the construction and interaction of Small Groups.**

Therefore, the purpose of Community Driven Enablement first and foremost is to foster the construction and interaction of Small Groups. A variety of styles of Small Group have emerged, including:

- *Study Groups* where people focus on a specific topic with the goal of increasing their skill and sharing knowledge with the community. For example, a Study Group could be formed around a new industry regulation, a new process model, or a new technology trend.
- *Project Groups* where the objective is to build something. For example, a new assessment method, a whitepaper or a new piece of technical collateral.

**The Core Team and Regional Mentor teams for Launch Driven Enablement are actually Project Groups within their Community.**

In fact, the Core Team created for Launch Driven Enablement, as well as the Regional Mentor team are actually Project Groups within their Community.

Small groups can be spawned by the leadership of the Community for a specific Community aim, or be born from individual initiative within the membership itself. For example, a Regional Mentor program is a sponsored Small Group,

**This forms a unique “sense and respond” mechanism for the benefit of our customers.**

and joins managed programs like new-hire ramp ups, master courses and residencies as other varieties of groups invested in by business and Community leaders. This forms a unique “sense and respond” mechanism for the benefit of our customers, as we need not wait until a new product launch or formal enablement initiative develops to take action and build the necessary skill.

**Being involved in a customer-focused project has not been considered enablement, but it is perhaps the strongest form of all.**

Small Groups “meet” either face-to-face or through an extensive online collaboration environment built and maintained by the Community for the purpose.

Traditionally, being involved in a customer-focused project has not been considered enablement, but it is perhaps the strongest form of all. Beyond the immediate value, the network built through participation in Small Groups speeds the access to resources, perspectives and community assets long after the group dissolves. In addition, the Small Group online structure captures the participants and artifacts for permanent reference by broader Community. In fact, many small groups choose to purposely broadcast their progress and results through podcasts, news feeds and other delivery vehicles to intentionally share their experiences with everyone.

The assets created by the Small Groups form the cornerstone of a Community Library. The assets can be studied and used by the broader Community, both by download as well as broadcast mechanisms like podcasting. Community members can add to the library material created individually, such as expert speaker podcasts, or the results of and artifacts from a successful customer engagement.

**Truly the best of our expertise available anytime, anywhere.**

The Small Groups and their residual library of assets, experiences and network connections provide a rich source of on-demand learning - truly the best of our expertise available anytime, anywhere.

### *The Jam*

The Jams are our premier, face-to-face event. Unlike more traditional approaches to enablement which rely on large events as their primary mechanism, the Jam is a foundational element only. Jams not only yield immediate business value for the investment, but they provide fuel to the rest of the enablement efforts throughout the year. This is especially true for

those programs that rely on effective Small Group interactions, where face-to-face is not desired or possible. These Small Group interactions address enablement needs throughout the year, but Small Groups cannot be formed unless members of the Community know each other and are familiar with skills and commonalities. Therefore, it is important that occasionally the entire Community gathers for the purpose of building trust and relationships.

The Community Jam is the event where this occurs. It is structured to provide multiple ways to interact and share real-world experiences, such as:

- Town Hall Meetings where Community members have the opportunity to voice opinions and ask leaders probing and difficult questions.
- Small Group Working Sessions where ongoing Small Groups can find time to interact face-to-face
- Pedestal Expo to showcase Small Group initiatives, progress and to recruit participation, or simply to find others working on problems of relevance to me.

Indeed, even breaks and mealtimes are designed to build community interaction.

**The Jam is an “inflection point” in the life of the Community.**

The Jam is, in fact, an “inflection point” in the life of the Community. While Small Groups continually startup and complete their work, the Jam is the chance to accelerate bringing the community together on the “same page”. Trust and relationships are the core of everything done within the Community. Face-to-face interactions accelerate the construction of strong, trust relationships, and thus increase the effectiveness of virtual collaboration throughout the rest of the year.



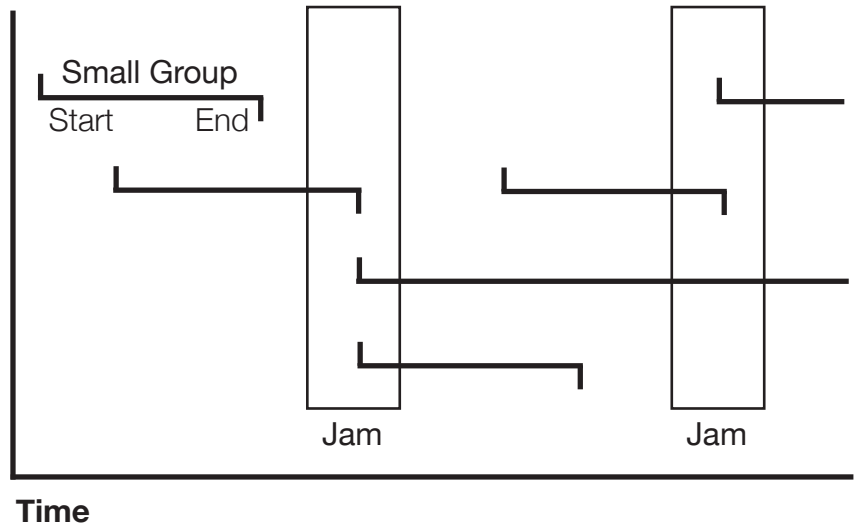


Fig 4. Small Groups start and end their work throughout the year. Jams bring all Groups together to share results, recruit members, for dedicated work time -- even for forming and dissolving.

**The primary purpose of the Jam is to construct new trusted connections in the Community network.**

Components of the Jam, such as a Town Hall meeting, can be run virtually when needed, particularly to reform Community unity or maintain a constant drumbeat of connection. However, though relationships can be maintained for a long time through virtual means, it is very difficult if not impossible to create new trusted relationships that way. The primary purpose of bringing people from the Community together for the Jam is to construct new trusted connections in the Community network that can be leveraged later when needed.

**Things that can be done remotely should be done remotely.**

Things that can be done remotely should be done remotely, reserving our face-to-face investments for things like Regional Mentor workshops, residencies, apprenticeships, and critical Small Group meetings. All of these require a “learn by doing model” focused on solving real customer problems.

**Management Driven Enablement fosters foundational skills beyond technical knowledge and expertise.**

### **Management Driven Enablement.**

Management Driven Enablement fosters foundational skills beyond technical knowledge and expertise. These skills, commonly referred to as “soft skills” include necessary capabilities like listening, communication, negotiation, collaboration, establishing and maintaining trust, as well as territory management and sales methodologies. These skills are required of those who work in a customer-oriented organization, as they help our people become better advocates of change and improvement in our customer’s enterprises.

The management team plays the pivotal role in developing and reinforcing these skills through daily guidance and continuous hands-on coaching. It is insufficient for an “enablement team” to drop in and teach these skills, as they must be reinforced every day. Thus, the “target” of Management Driven Enablement is the management team itself.

Management Driven Enablement in general is similar to a Regional Mentor team, where the Mentors are each individual employee’s direct manager. We build expertise “seeds” in the management team so they can lead workshops and guide their people in the context of real customer engagements. Our managers understand the territory best, and therefore are in the best position to respond in an agile way to changing customer demands by executing a local workshop to address the new identified needs.

For example, the initial program within Management Driven Enablement was a Manager Jam, where the entire leadership team learned a common methodology for strategy and planning at the business unit level.

Even new-hire “ramp up” programs are part of Management Driven Enablement, as their purpose is to provide managers with an effective and efficient framework for bringing a new member of the team up to speed.

**Together the three types of enablement provide a complete framework for the construction and maintenance of skill.**

Together, Launch Driven Enablement, Community Driven Enablement and Management Driven Enablement provide a complete framework for the construction and maintenance of skill across the Rational technical teams.

**Governance is about deciding which things are most important to invest in, and assessing the effectiveness of those decisions.**

**Rational has developed a four-quadrant model to determine the relative importance of one possible enablement activity over another.**

**Governance and Infrastructure.**

Governance in enablement is about deciding which things are most important to invest in, and laying in metrics and controls to assess the effectiveness of those decisions. These investments could include both skills and intellectual capital - but either way, they demonstrate expertise to our customers. With the rapid pace of our industry, it is critical that we make the best investment decisions.

*Tiering*

Rational has developed a four-quadrant model to determine the relative importance of one possible enablement activity over another. Primarily this is applied to the continuous stream of new product launches and acquisitions, and guides the Launch Driven Enablement teams in both the depth and quantity of collateral and expertise required at launch.

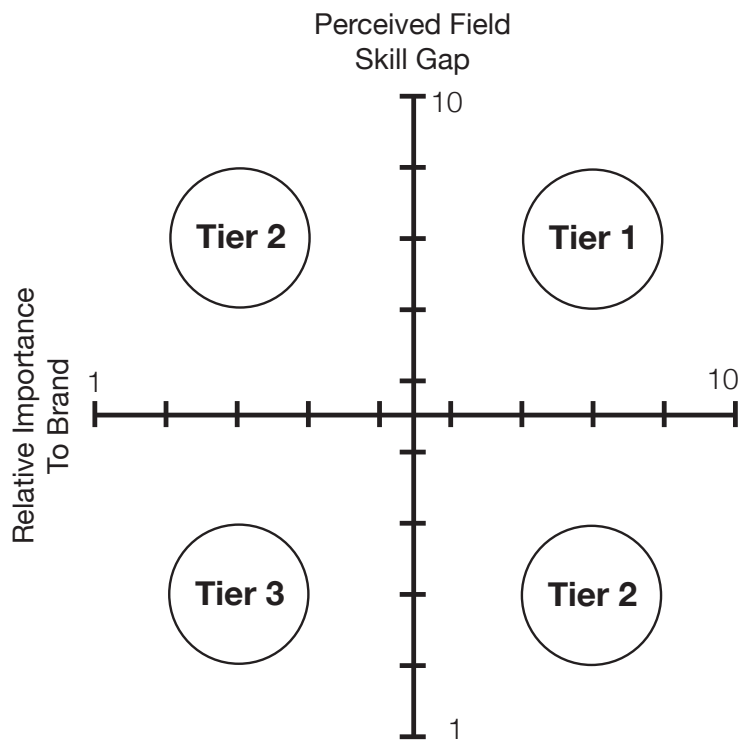


Fig 5. Voting across the Community via a two measurement axis results in a determination of the importance and complexity tier for the enablement effort.

The horizontal axis of the quadrant grid measures “Relative Importance to the Brand” while the vertical axis measures “Perceived Skill Gap”. Both are measured on a scale of one to ten.

“Relative Importance to the Brand” is a subjective assessment of both the immediate and long-term impact of the specific offering on the future of Rational. A 1-3 score would indicate low importance, such as an incremental point release of a product near end of life. A 8-10 score would indicate technology that will shape the future of the organization.

“Perceived Skill Gap” is also a subjective assessment, but in this case of the readiness of our customer-facing teams to effectively apply the technology to customer problems. A 1-3 score would indicate a small gap between needed skill and actual ability, while an 8-10 score would indicate a large gap, and thus a large investment required to close it.

Scoring in the upper-right corner of the grid, with both high “Relative Importance to the Brand” as well as high “Perceived Skill Gap” is termed a *Tier 1 Launch*. A score in either the lower-right or upper left quadrant, where one measure is high while the other is low, is termed a *Tier 2 Launch*. A score in the lower-left quadrant, where both measures are low, is termed a *Tier 3 Launch*.

The tier determines both the relative importance of a technology to others for the purposes of prioritization, as well as the overall level of investment and complexity of collateral required.

#### *Participation in Governance*

**The result then speaks to the will of the entire organization.**

The intent is to provide the broadest possible input in the weighting process. As such, all entities with a “stake” in the success of the enablement are encouraged to vote. The result then speaks to the will of the entire organization.

Product launches drive the majority of Small Group activity creation, though independently initiated projects within a Community could leverage a similar process.

As a final checkpoint, management in regions around the world has the latitude to determine participation levels for their teams based on local challenges and opportunities.

### *Infrastructure*

From the perspective of the practitioner, the primary purpose of the online Community of Practice infrastructure is to connect to Small Group opportunities, resources, expertise, news, courses and reusable assets in support of continual improvement in addressing customer problems and initiatives.

**The primary purpose is to connect to Small Group opportunities and information.**

For management, the primary purpose of the infrastructure is to provide a closed-loop assessment of skill level gained from participation in Launch, Community and Management-Driven enablement activities. As such the system can track direct completion of learning activities, such as those associated with a product launch, as well as Community participation activities through a “points system” that tracks depth of involvement and activity in collaboration and expertise sharing.

**Managers are provided a closed-loop assessment of skill level gained from participation.**

To provide these functions, the infrastructure provides a full complement of online tools that leverage Web 2.0 technologies like RSS/Atom feeds and WIKIs. These include:

- Collaborative Small Group Workspace and Directory
- Learning Portal
- Moderated Online Discussion Forums
- News and Event feeds
- Highly Rated Assets and Roadmaps
- Artifact Asset Library Management
- Broadcast mechanism (recorded and live), like podcasts
- Instant Help System
- Community Directory with Expertise Ratings

Overall, the infrastructure is critical to the success of the life of both the enablement strategy as well as the Communities themselves. It is impossible to build and maintain any enablement without it.

### **Future Directions.**

There remain a series of challenges and unmet goals.

**Leveraging Communities in the early days of an acquisition remains a challenge.**

As with most large organizations, acquisitions are becoming a more common way of life. Our challenge is to find out how to immediately leverage the value of Communities in the early days of integration of an acquisition, as well as to merge personnel more effectively through enablement. The more quickly we can rally around common customer problems, the more quickly we bring people together.

**The rigor and discipline around participation in virtual enablement must be raised.**

Another challenge is that virtual enablement is nearly always seen as optional and less valuable. Since so much of the value of this strategy is delivered in methods other than face-to-face, the rigor and discipline around participation must be raised. Additionally, the notion that removing people from their natural environment to focus their attention on learning must be confronted.

Additional areas for future study include:

- Continued focus on establishing stronger, more collaborative relationships with experts from the development team, particularly participation in Launch and Community driven activities as full members of the community.
- Development of a Management Community of Practice

**References.**

Etienne Wenger wrote an important whitepaper on Communities of Practice. You can read it at [www.ewenger.com/theory](http://www.ewenger.com/theory). He also wrote a book along with Richard McDermott and William Snyder entitled *Cultivating Communities of Practice*.



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