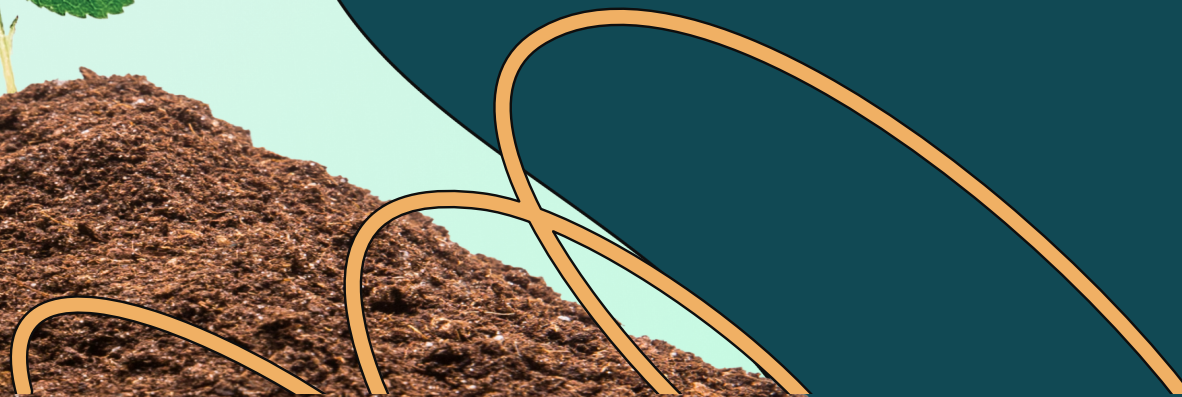# Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities

How to develop and nurture learning that delivers a rich harvest.

go1

This tool works best when used in conjunction with the other tools in this series

1. Needs Analysis Tool
2. Curation Decision Tool
3. Communication Plan Launch Tool
4. **Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities**
5. The Power Hour Tool
6. Improve Impact Tool

These tools have been brought to you in partnership with Emergent Stronger.

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Introduction

Workplace communities create an environment for people to grow and develop as they work, share and learn together.

With the increasing adoption of workplace collaboration technology such as Microsoft Teams or Slack there are more communities organically taking root in our organisations. People are moving beyond the back garden of their work team and finding others with whom they share a common interest or purpose.

Workplace learning communities present fertile ground for learning professionals looking to support learning, performance and growth. Just as a successful gardener applies findings from the natural science of botany, taking an approach informed by learning science will help learning in a community to grow and thrive. For more on this dig into the appendix.

The **Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities Tool** will help you to identify workplace communities with fertile ground and take action to help learning thrive. It will help you to:

1. Prepare. Understand and improve community growing conditions.
2. Sow. Determine what seeds to sow if you want to support learning and performance.
3. Nurture. How to water, fertilise, weed and prune the garden in order for learning to thrive.
4. Harvest. Gather and use the fruits of your labour.

By using this tool to take deliberate action to cultivate learning in workplace communities you will see improvements in areas such as:

- Individual ownership of continuous learning
- Learning transfer and application to work
- Increased learning from work
- Improved performance through practice, conversations and reflection
- Building motivation and engagement through shared connection
- Reduced 'brain drain' by collecting and sharing organisational knowledge
- Surfacing and spreading improved process and practices

Who is this tool for?

Anyone within an organization responsible for providing learning solutions that deliver business impact. This tool offers a set of questions and tips to help you take a deliberate, practical approach to increase learning and performance improvement by engaging community members more effectively. This tool is especially useful for those who are leveraging workplace community technology in their learning solutions for the first time.

When to use this tool?

Use this tool when you want to use an existing workplace community to cultivate learning, and:

- ⊘ share relevant content to seed learning

- ⊘ build and strengthen skills

- ⊘ troubleshoot problems

- ⊘ improve processes

- ⊘ strengthen workplace practices or performance

This tool will help you:

1. Encourage people to take responsibility for their own continuous learning

2. Support people learn from their work and each other

3. Improve performance through practice, reflection and collaboration

4. Build and sustain motivation through connection, accountability and progress

5. Highlight and spread improvement

How to use this tool

The Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities tool has two parts
- **Cultivation Worksheets** and the **Quarterly Learning Calendar**

| Part 1 | Cultivation Worksheets |

a. Identify learning goals and themes for the group

b. Stimulate your thinking about the purpose and options of each stage

c. Explore options and decide what you will do to support learning in each stage

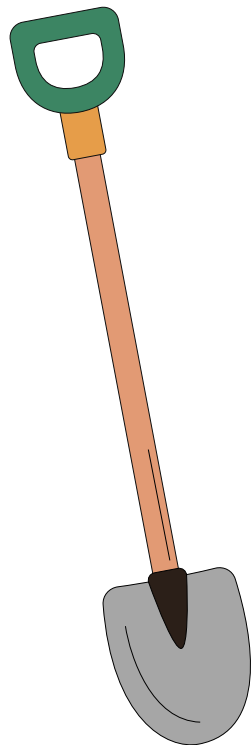| Part 2 | Quarterly Learning Calendar |

a. Use your completed worksheets as source input

b. Prepare a quarterly learning calendar for the group

c. Refer to a worked example

!

Read through this tool fully before using it for the first time.

Dig Into Purpose

Every garden has a purpose - vegetable garden, vineyard, relaxation garden and so on. The same holds true with workplace communities. Dig around to unearth why people are gathering in this space, what they are trying to do there and set learning goals that support this purpose.

Step 1.	Identify Purpose.

Identify who is working in this space and the problems or opportunities that have drawn them together. Common examples of purpose include:

- *Onboarding support to new starters in the organisation*
- *Project team members working together to achieve project goals*
- *People in similar roles looking for better ways to get their work done*

Step 2.	Define learning goals.

Set goals that support the group's purpose and leading indicators that will help you know if you are on track, for example:

- *Reduce time for new starters in role ABC to reach competency - indicated by metrics on content use, questions being asked by new starters and answered by more experienced people, and new starter participation in community activities*
- *Improve collaboration skills and practices on project XYZ - indicated by member reflection and stories about communication, application of skills in the community and daily work*

Dig Into Purpose

Step 3.	Identify priority knowledge, skills or topics.

Make a short list to focus on to achieve learning goals.

Where to dig:

○ *Find a statement of purpose in the online space*

○ *Read posts in the space to identify common topics and issues*

○ *Ask people who are part of the group*

Who works / participates in this community		What are they trying to achieve together	
What are their challenges and opportunities?			
How can you help? (Quarterly Learning Goals)		How will you know if you are successful (Progress Indicators)	
Quarterly Learning Theme(s): Knowledge / Skills / Topics			

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Prepare

Understand and improve the growing conditions.

Use the list below to test the soil for richness and identify how you can improve growing conditions

Growing conditions	Tick if this is in place	Action to improve growing conditions
It is easy to find the community online (e.g. using intranet search on relevant terms).		
It is easy to join the community (e.g. anyone interested can join without approval).		
The purpose or common interests of the community are clearly stated so people can decide if it's relevant to them.		
Guidelines are posted that describe how people are expected to participate and behave in the community.		
Most members have online profiles including a photo and description of their experience/expertise. People are welcomed as they join the group and introduce themself.		
People share resources, ask and answer questions and join community discussions with openness and curiosity.		
Managers actively participate in and support the community.		

SOW

If you want to support learning and performance, know what seeds to sow and why.

Sowing is about seeding the learning process in your community with relevant content, questions and activities. Apply principles from learning science to ensure that you not only drive engagement and interaction, but provide essential nutrients to grow learning.

Content

Thoughtfully curate quality content that is relevant to the community learning goals and share it in a way that seeds learning. Consider the type of information that will be relevant and helpful, and where you could source current, accurate content.

Role model sharing content effectively. Make a brief, conversational post that:

- States the content format and duration to watch/read or listen
- Explains what the content is about and why it's relevant
- Points out what to look for - steps, actions, key takeaways
- Asks good questions that draw on the content to seed learning

Tip: Refer to the appendix for key principles from learning science.
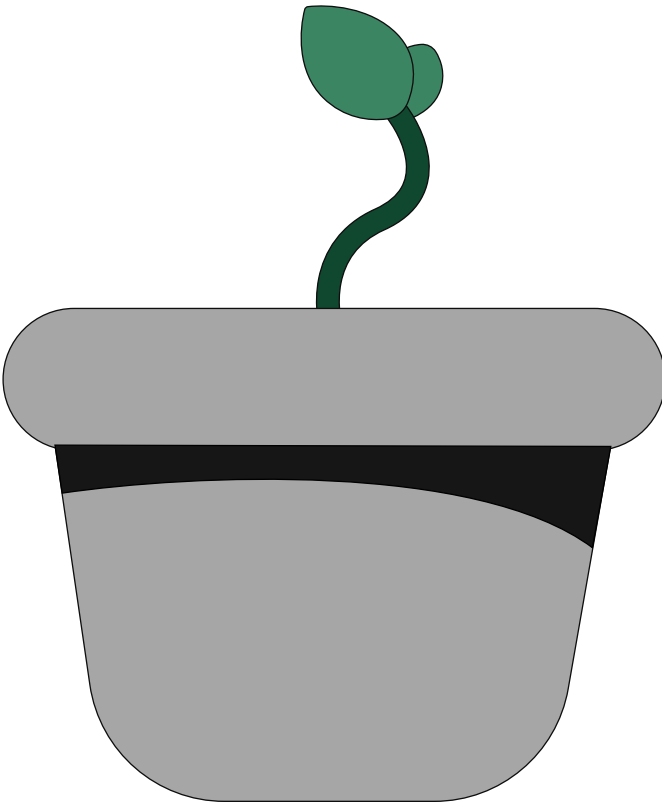
SOW

In the table below, list types of information that you think will be useful in your community and potential sources of high quality content. Be specific about sources if you can.

Useful information	Content sources

Types of Information
- Concepts
- Theories
- Opinions
- Facts
- Data
- Research
- Reports
- Examples
- Practices
- Stories
- How to guides

Content Sources
- Your learning content library
- Internal document libraries and intranet
- Reputable business industry websites
- Resources from professional associations
- Industry research bodies
- YouTube
- TED Talks
- Book summaries e.g. Blinkist
- Podcasts
- Research databases
- LinkedIn articles and discussions

Tip: Use the Go1 Step Further Curation Decision Tool to ensure quality curation.

SOW
Questions

Questions are a powerful way to stimulate learning. Review recent community discussions to find examples of effective questions. Refer to the principles in the appendix to prompt your thinking on how and when you ask questions.

Tip: Refer to the Go1 Step Further Improving Impact Tool for more questions to seed learning.

Identify triggers to spark questions or to encourage others to ask questions, such as:

○ A regular weekly rhythm e.g. Monday: "What do you want to learn this week?"
Friday: "What went well this week and why?"

○ A resource being shared e.g. "This article suggests XYZ. Do you agree? Why/why not?"

○ An event or activity e.g. After a live event: "What is a key takeaway from this event? How will you apply it?"

○ An issue or problem arising e.g. "We are having a problem with <describe problem>. Does anyone have any ideas for why this is occurring or how it could be addressed?"

Sample Question	Potential Trigger(s)	Learning Science Principle

SOW
Activities

Live virtual and face-to-face activities can stimulate learning by:

○ Building relationships, making it easier for people to identify and reach out to others to support their learning and performance needs

○ Creating a sense of belonging, increasing psychological safety and willingness to share experiences and ask questions

○ Providing an opportunity to think together, share knowledge and experience, practice and apply skills

Learning activities may be:

○ Built into existing workplace tasks or events e.g. project team meetings

○ Incorporated in existing community events

○ Overlap with activities in formal learning programs

○ New events

SOW

There are many different formats and styles of activity that can help learning grow.

When choosing a format, be it live or virtual, consider the purpose of the activity.

Activities need to support learning by using ingredients such as reflection, real-world examples, practice and feedback.

Pick a format from this list, search online for ideas and/or ask community members what kind of activities they enjoy.

Activity Formats

Reflection
Reflection VLOG
Retrospectives/After
Action Reviews

Journaling
Sketchnote goals

Practice
Buddies working together
Video "how-to"

Virtual task practice

Action Learning Sets
Warm Seats business challenge

Problem solving teams

Feedback
"Help me" channels (Slack or Teams)

Feedback One-Pager

Post practice video for feedback

Warm Seats (coaching)

Share Groups
Book clubs
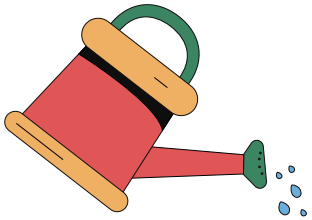Podcast clubs

Ask me anything panels

Topic based Scrapbook

List your own

Live Activities

Virtual Activities

Nurture

How to water, fertilise, weed and prune the garden in order for learning to thrive.

Every garden needs regular maintenance. Schedule a 'three to thrive' check on your quarterly calendar.

Use the checklist below to identify actions you can take to maintain healthy growing conditions to support learning in the community.
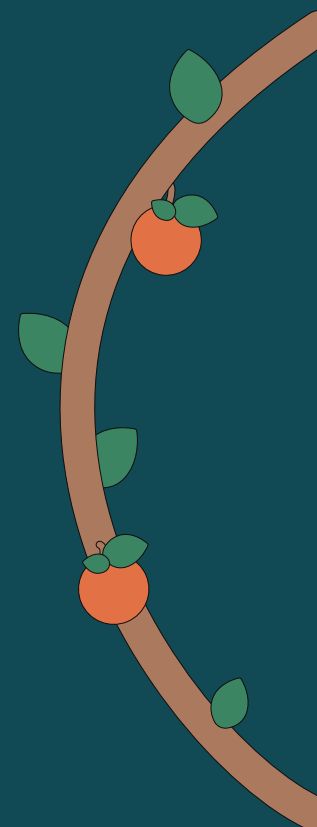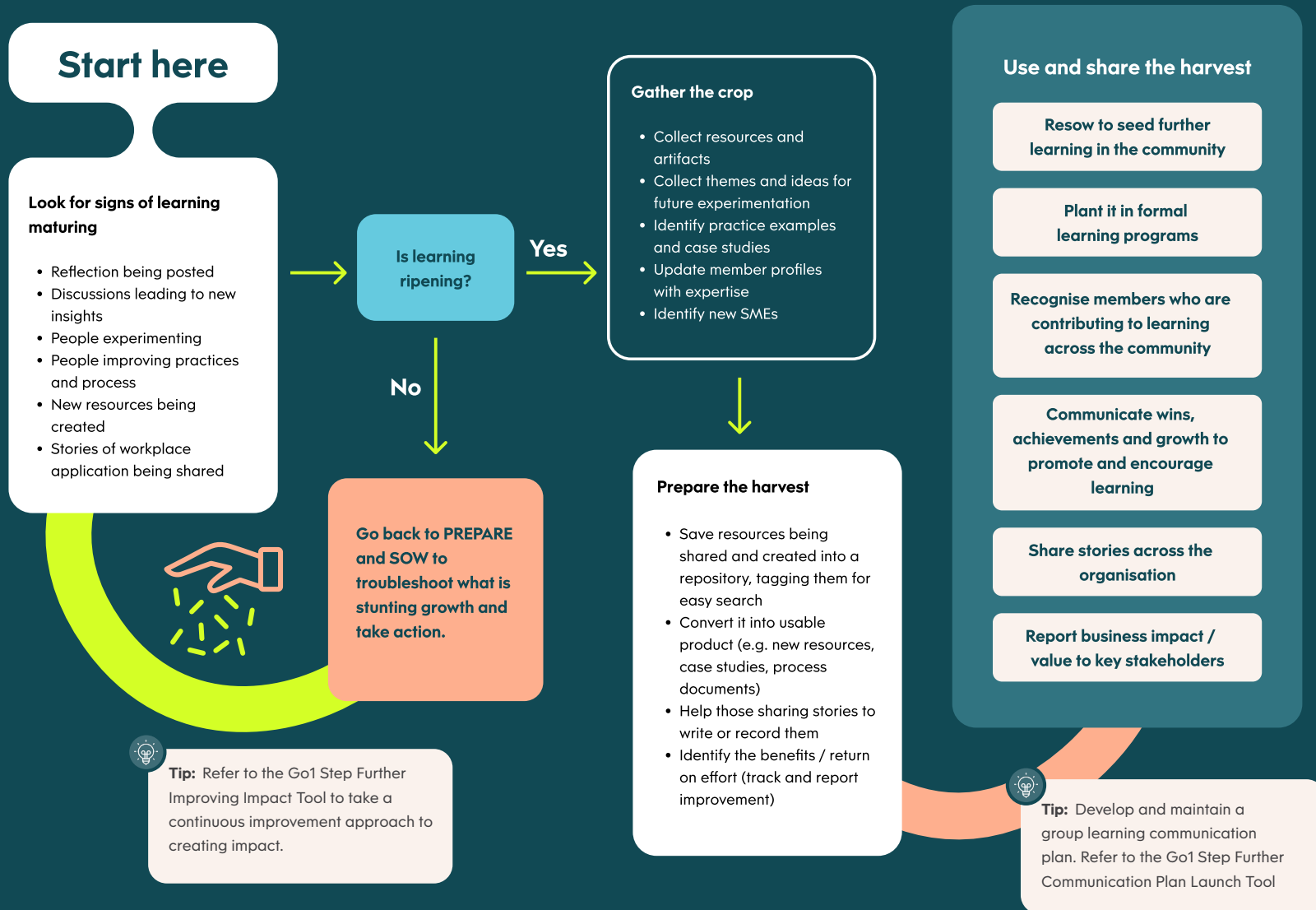
Three to thrive	Action to be taken
Practice 1 - Keeping your garden well organised. Make it easy for people to find current, relevant content, conversations and each other. Review online channels/topics and do the following to weed or prune: ○ Remove inactive areas ○ Merge similar / related topics ○ Set up distinct areas if new topics are appearing in discussion ○ Remove old posts/content that are no longer current, accurate or relevant	
Practice 2 - Look for areas where engagement and learning are happening. Use the following methods to identify topics, content, questions and activities that can be used to water and fertilise your garden: ○ Data tracked in your platform (e.g. content access, rating/liking, member activity) ○ Search in your online platform using key terms ○ Review live activity participation and feedback ○ Read posts to spot engagement and learning	
Practice 3 - Make it easy for community members to support each other: ○ Spot check online profiles and encourage members to complete their profiles ○ Review your activity calendar to ensure that you are giving members opportunities to speak/present at activities, with support to assist them to prepare if needed ○ Tag members who may be SMEs in comments to encourage peer-support ○ Encourage conversations between people with like backgrounds to build connection	

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Harvest

Gather and use the fruits of your labour

You've prepared the ground, sown seeds to get learning growing, and nurtured your garden to create conditions for learning to thrive. Watch your garden to spot signs of your efforts bearing fruit that you can gather and use. Use this flowchart for a monthly harvest.

Start here

Look for signs of learning maturing

- Reflection being posted
- Discussions leading to new insights
- People experimenting
- People improving practices and process
- New resources being created
- Stories of workplace application being shared

Is learning ripening?

Yes →

No ↓

Go back to PREPARE and SOW to troubleshoot what is stunting growth and take action.

Gather the crop

- Collect resources and artifacts
- Collect themes and ideas for future experimentation
- Identify practice examples and case studies
- Update member profiles with expertise
- Identify new SMEs

Prepare the harvest

- Save resources being shared and created into a repository, tagging them for easy search
- Convert it into usable product (e.g. new resources, case studies, process documents)
- Help those sharing stories to write or record them
- Identify the benefits / return on effort (track and report improvement)

Use and share the harvest

- Resow to seed further learning in the community
- Plant it in formal learning programs
- Recognise members who are contributing to learning across the community
- Communicate wins, achievements and growth to promote and encourage learning
- Share stories across the organisation
- Report business impact / value to key stakeholders

Tip: Refer to the Go1 Step Further Improving Impact Tool to take a continuous improvement approach to creating impact.

Tip: Develop and maintain a group learning communication plan. Refer to the Go1 Step Further Communication Plan Launch Tool

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Quarterly Group Learning Calendar

Name of community space	
What they are trying to achieve together	
Quarterly Learning Goals	
Quarterly Learning Theme(s): Knowledge / Skills / Topics	

Seeding Schedule

Date	Activity

Day	Time
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	

Nurture and Harvest (Monthly)

Complete this checklist in last week of each month. Refer to detail in Nurture and Harvest pages of your Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities Tool.

- ☐ Keep your garden well organised
- ☐ Make it easy for members to support each other
- ☐ Look for engagement and learning happening
- ☐ Look for signs of learning maturing
- ☐ Gather the crop and prepare the harvest
- ☐ Plan how you will use what you have harvested

Quarterly Group Learning Calendar

Example

Name of community space	Carbon Footprint Reduction
What they are trying to achieve together	Reduce the carbon footprint of our organisation's operations
Quarterly Learning Goals	Improve skills in data analysis to support conduct and communication of an organisational wide carbon footprint analysis. Improve skills in stakeholder engagement to support the development of an engagement plan and support of key stakeholder groups for the environmental footprint project
Quarterly Learning Theme(s): Knowledge / Skills / Topics	Data analysis, visualisation and storytelling Stakeholder engagement

Seeding Schedule

Date	Activity
Week 3	Treasure Hunt - find a data visualisation you like and critique in peer groups
Week 7	AMA - National Change Manager presentation and Ask Me Anything session on stakeholder engagement
Week 9	Warm seats - bring a challenge with either data or stakeholder engagement to a 'warm seat' with peers and SMEs
Week 12	Sharecase - members to present a data visualisation or tell a data story in conjunction with a stakeholder

Day	Time
Monday	Motivation Monday: What do you intend to learn (practice/improve/get better at/find out about) this week?
Tuesday	Takeaway Tuesday: Share a resource or practice scenario about the data theme and ask people for takeaways and tips.
Wednesday	Wonder Wednesday: What are you wondering about? Ask one question of the group / Answer one question.
Thursday	Theme Thursday: Share a resource or practice scenario about the stakeholder theme and ask people for takeaways and tips.
Friday	Friday Finds: Invite group to share something you learned or a useful resource you found this week.

Nurture and Harvest (Monthly)

Complete this checklist in last week of each month. Refer to detail in Nurture and Harvest pages of your Cultivating Learning in Workplace Communities Tool.

☐ Keep your garden well organised

☐ Make it easy for members to support each other

☐ Look for engagement and learning happening

☐ Look for signs of learning maturing

☐ Gather the crop and prepare the harvest

☐ Plan how you will use what you have harvested

Appendix
Unearthing Learning Science

Ground your approach in learning science using these proven methods to seed effective learning.

○ Let's get to work with productive learning strategies: All-in-one by Tine Hoof, Tim Surma, Paul A. Kirschner & Mirjam Neelen
https://3starlearningexperiences.wordpress.com/2022/04/26/lets-get-to-work-with-productive-learning-strategies-all-in-one/

○ The Decisive Dozen: A Brief Synopsis by Dr Will Thalheimer
https://www.worklearning.com/2012/11/26/the-decisive-dozen-a-brief-synopsis/

○ *Robert Gagne's 9 Steps of Instruction*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ODzenHs_jo

Principle	Application in workplace community (examples)
Content - When people learn, they ought to learn from content that is correct and relevant to their needs.	Ensure that content shared into the online space is relevant to group purpose and learning goals. Regularly weed out outdated content.
Repetition - Providing repetition in a manner that engages people helps them to understand and remember.	Capture, adapt and reshare information and content from live activities in a variety of formats.
Retrieval Practice - Pulling existing information from memory and using it flexibly deepens understanding and makes it stick.	Post case studies or scenarios, or run activities where people can seek input on challenges, providing people with an opportunity to retrieve and apply their knowledge.
Spaced Practice - Spacing out learning in small sessions over a longer time frame is more effective than learning in fewer larger blocks.	Revisit topics in the online space and live events over time, cycling through topics in your quarterly calendar. Rather than simply posting content, set challenges or run activities that provide practice opportunities.
Elaboration - Relating new concepts, ideas or skills to existing prior knowledge, creates new connections and expands the depth and breadth of knowledge.	Monitor online discussions and ask 'why' questions inviting people to explain their thinking. Provide opportunities for people to present to, 'teach' or provide feedback to others.
Feedback - Providing feedback appropriately helps people to reflect on their progress and identify opportunities for improvement.	Create opportunities for peer feedback through discussion and activities. Role model and guide effective feedback techniques.
Reflection - Assessing their own progress and performance helps people to identify how they can improve and increases personal ownership of learning.	Ask questions that invite people to reflect. Incorporate reflection in live activities.