

# The Developer Ecosystem Blueprint: Strategies for Building Thriving Communities

Lessons from Veteran Community Leaders



## You (Who) should read this?

Before we dive into this handbook, a couple of queries:

1. Are you a tech company whose customers or end users are techies (developers & designers) and are you a mid to large scale startup or an enterprise?  
**Yes / No**
2. Do you plan to build or already run tech (dev or design) communities for your business?  
**Yes / No**

If you answered Yes to both questions, then this handbook is precisely for you!

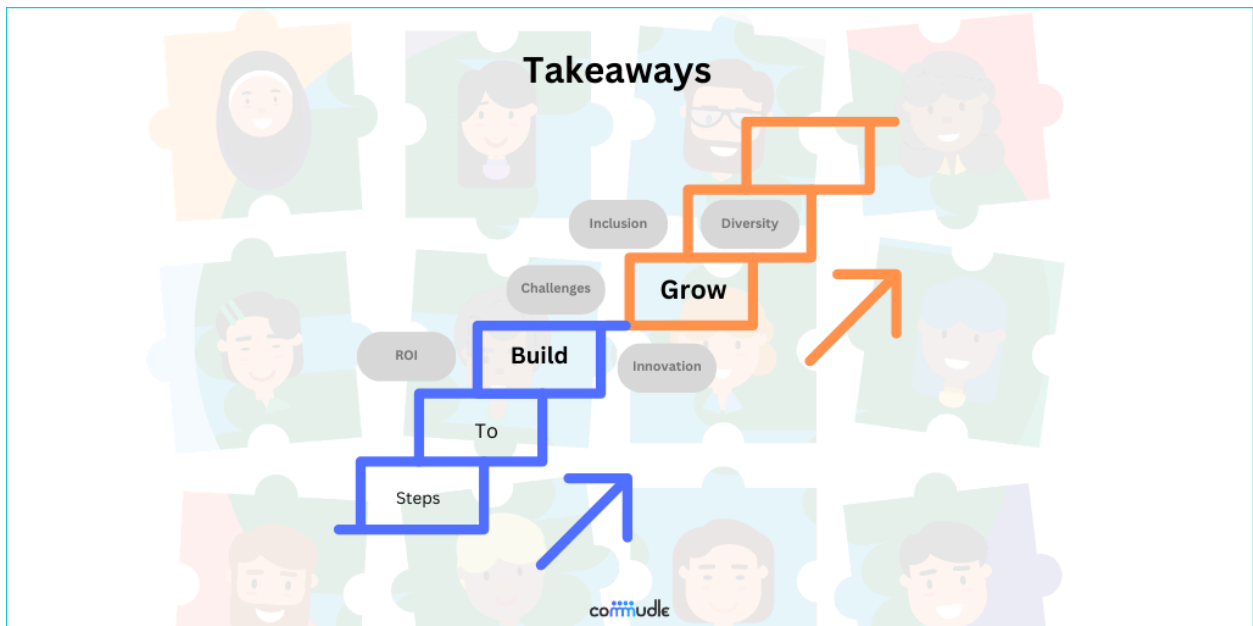
This handbook is written for tech companies targeting techies (devtools, edtech, open source organizations, etc) and are mid to large-scale startups or enterprises.

You don't necessarily have to be a Community Manager, a DevRel (Developer Relations) advocate or any techie (developer, architect, designer, etc) to read and understand this book. All you need is an interest in building and nurturing a tech community. If you want to set up a Developer Relations team, then you will find actionable insights here.

With practical advice and comprehensive strategies, this handbook will provide you with a complete blueprint to follow, covering every stage of the process from organizing events, running forums, managing groups, to creating documentation, tutorials and content. By the time you're finished reading, you will be well on your way to building engaging and active developer communities which are invested in the success of your product or platform.

Throughout this book I will be using these terms interchangeably, viz. *dev community*, *developer community*, *design community*, *tech community*, *UI/UX community*, *community and communities*.

## What's in it for you?



In this handbook I have shared insights and real examples from people who have built small teams to build communities with significant impact and then scaled them up across the world. This includes the details to build communities from scratch. Along the way, I have also covered reasons for why community efforts fail. The book distills that experience from me and a number

of stalwarts who have shaped the developer programs for companies including Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Github, etc. The goal is to help you plan your community efforts right.

If your company has one or more tech communities which you want to scale up further, or if your company wants to build developer communities, each chapter here describes a stage at which you might be and how to grow from it to the next one.

I will also go through the challenges which appear in the process with real examples from my experience and those of the leaders & communities around us while leading to finding success and **ROI** metrics because that's the question you will get asked.

Community building is not just a DevRel effort, it's at the core of business strategy. I will show you how to align your community engagement plans with your business goals and measure their impact.

## And hey, here's something about me.

I, Arpan, am building Commudle as a Founder. Previously, I have built and grown tech & product teams at healthcare and edtech startups from the very ground. From sitting next to a doctor while they're trying to fill in an online prescription, to teaching development to thousands of students from diverse backgrounds both offline and online, it has been a journey full of interesting challenges to solve and even more interesting and inspiring people to meet. All this while I was closely interacting with the target audience of the products I was building and it helped make the products as an extension of the users' daily functionality.

My current startup [Commudle](#) is a platform to help software developers and businesses engage seamlessly through communities, knowledge and networking. The larger goal is to bring together all the techies of the world to one platform. To imagine what an impact that network would create and what these people could create together is what keeps me awake and excited. Thousands of developers engage with multiple communities on Commudle every month. We are also an alum of [Google For Startups](#) Accelerator.

The origins of Commudle began as a side project to solve for the efficiency & engagements of one community which I still manage, [Google Developer Group New Delhi \(GDG ND\)](#), obviously through Commudle. It is one of the largest GDG's in the world at the moment.

My introduction to developer communities happened in the latter half of 2015. I was a lone developer at a healthcare startup, seeking validation for the code I wrote every day through various online resources on StackOverflow, Medium, YouTube, and more. But I missed out on live interaction with developers in person who might be doing some amazing work but not be bloggers or vloggers. They could teach me a lot from their mistakes and their journey. Furthermore, keeping up with the latest in tech was overwhelming because it seemed like every

new technology was taking over the pre-existing ones which included the ones which I was using. This need for interaction with other developers and keeping up-to-date with the latest technology was becoming more apparent. And in a random conversation with my interns, I got to know that a user group event was happening where they would teach development to eighty people.

I vividly remember attending my first community event where two college students were delivering a hands-on coding session to a diverse group of people ranging from tech leads, developers, freelancers, freshers and students. The vibe, the atmosphere was so relaxed, and people who didn't know each other were learning together and networking. I could literally walk up to anyone and start a tech discussion around what either of us were building. And all this was FREE!

I was driven to learn new things and in just about two months started delivering some hands-on sessions at events of GDG ND while volunteering alongside to distribute pizzas, manage registrations and facilitate communication when members were hesitant to talk amongst themselves by doing interactive activities sometimes. Community became my window for latest updates, network and validation for what I was doing. To top it all, there was an incredible boost of confidence in me, both while talking to people and computers (writing code) 😊. This was a place from where I brought in learnings to my workplace and I still do!

My first session was to happen at one of the year's largest events at Google's office and I rehearsed it daily for about two hours for a whole week after office work. It went pretty well considering I was told to do it twice as more people wanted to attend it.

In early 2017, I got the opportunity to step up as an organizer for GDG ND which was about 700 people strong at that time. It came with challenges which have shaped how seamlessly Commudle works today. The first ones which I recognized were:

1. **Multiple platforms to communicate with the same people:** We were using five to seven platforms (forms, emails, event listing, sheets, chats, social media profiles and more) to communicate with the community members.
2. **Unproductive networking sessions:** During networking time slots at offline events, developers mostly didn't talk to each other unless someone was a speaker for which I found two reasons, viz. people didn't know who else was attending the events developers are tuned to talk to their laptops & we had to find ways to make them talk to each other.)
3. **Tonnes of preparation, low attendance at the event:** For each event, we prepared for about a hundred & invited about three to four hundred folks (almost everyone who registered through the Google form was invited), but only about thirty to forty people showed up. Most importantly, we struggled to identify who's who in the community and didn't know about the tech background of the people attending the event.

In the coming year, I solved the third problem first on pen and paper, implemented a flow manually through multiple tools and before I coded a tool to solve it, we had achieved more than

90% turn up rate for all our offline events! Initially, I rolled it out only for my community on gdgnd.org but when demand came in, I had to think of a name.

## Community (People) + Doodle (Creativity) = Commudle

The name defines that creativity is at the core of Communities and our team functions like a community.

We achieved more than 80% turn up rate from invited attendees at almost all our offline events straight for almost four years now till 2023 (excluding the lockdown). It has also helped make GDG ND one of the largest and most active tech communities in the ecosystem; we're at more than 20,000 members right now. Everyday, it still feels like I'm solving for my use case and those of the friends who run communities around the world. Some have migrated to different parts of the world and still use it.

The journey still continues and there's so many more exciting things to be done and solved for.



In this journey I was twice invited to Google I/O, in 2018 and 2019. At Google I/O 2018, I interacted with over a hundred community leaders across the globe to understand the way they shape communities and some problems they face. It became clear that the challenges and thrills of building and nurturing communities were universal, regardless of where one came from.

In fact, at Google IO 2019, I delivered a session titled 'Building Scalable Communities: Tips from India' at the Community Lounge. Post the session, I interacted with more community leaders and global developer relations professionals. Unknowingly, this was my first phase of user research. These interactions helped me understand the amount of valuable insights which

developer focused companies can gain if they were able to engage better with their developer communities and I was amazed that no one had recognized this as a problem. It seemed like a one way flow of resources into the community with no specific insights in return from the knowledge and engagements in those communities.

In June, 2020, I finally made a decision to pursue Commudle (then a side project) full-time. Since then I have given a few hundred product demos, called up countless existing tech communities across different countries and built a completely remote team to grow the platform with.

Co-Founder and Advisors of Commudle have been or are at leadership positions with Google, Microsoft, IBM, Github, Amazon, Twilio & beyond. They have been in the developer ecosystem and shaped it from the time developer communities were limited to seminars inside the company for their employees. If I've learnt anything from their experiences, this guide has it all, and will keep getting it in updates too.

## How did the idea of writing this book come up?

Commudle is a graduate of Google for Startups Accelerator. Here we were mentored by an exclusive set of experts who have worked with businesses at multiple scales, from starts to enterprises. I was introduced to Shrinath V during the program and during our series of sessions he asked me "What is stopping you from putting down all your learnings from building your tech community into some actionables? Why not make a handbook, a guide which can be useful to more community leaders and businesses in this domain?"



[Shrinath V](#)

Shrinath is an Expert Product Strategy consultant & coach. If you get an opportunity to meet him, grab it!

And here we are! He has helped and guided me to refine the book so that it remains crisp to read and is filled with real world examples. His contribution to this has been nothing short of a Co-Author.

A BIG Thank You to my Co-Founder Apra Sahney who read through the whole guide and shared some enriching experiences from her career which also have made it to this book.

*We're all products or outcomes of the communities which accepted us and helped us grow and the ones we built or led.*

🌱 **Fun Fact #1:** Before the thought of developing Commudle came into my head, we used Google forms, sheets, docs, gmail, meetup, slack, website and validated people who registered using their LinkedIn & Github profiles. I recognized a process which could be coded.

## On to building Developer Communities

The stages in community development covered in this guide are meant to lay down the foundation in your journey of building and nurturing a tech community. You will find guidance on identifying the stage your community is at and tips on how to advance to the next level.

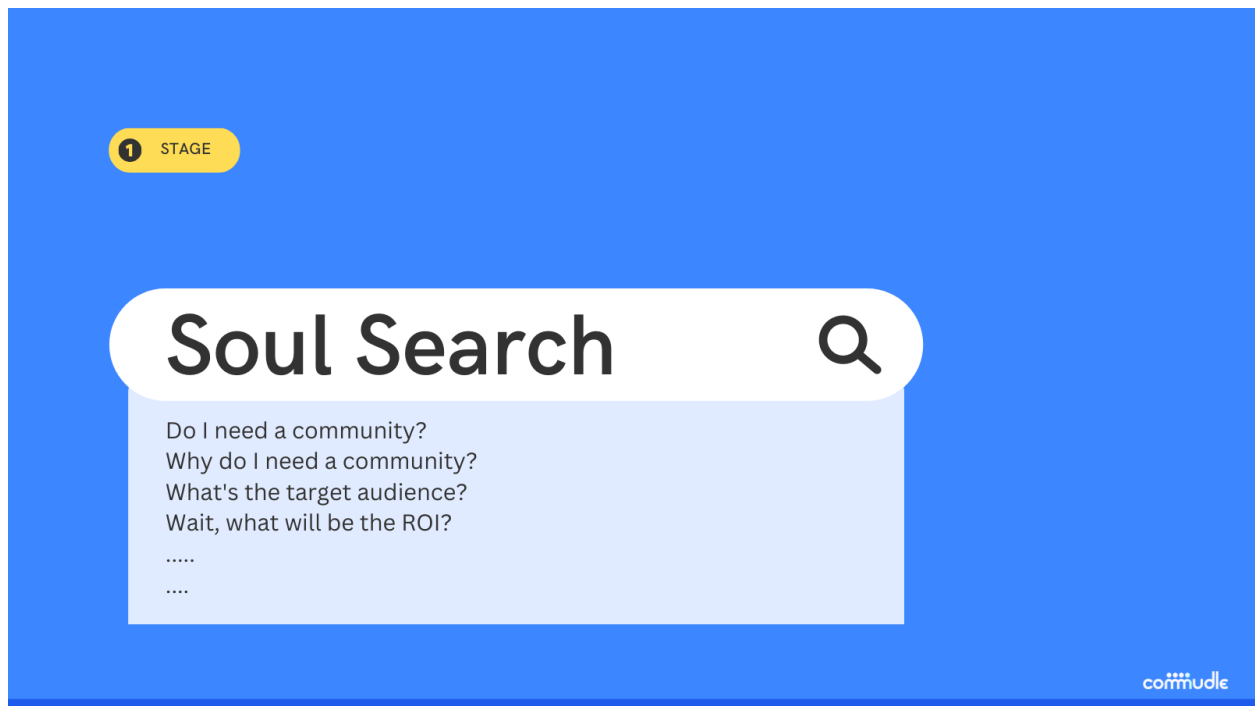
For each stage, I give you some questions related to your community to brainstorm with your team to craft an internal community brief. The questions are complemented with examples and stories from the experiences of people in the tech community. Here's a list in brief:

|                                  |                                       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Stage One                        | Soul Search                           |
| Stage Two                        | What? (to do) & Who?                  |
| Stage Three                      | How?                                  |
| Stage Four                       | The Launch                            |
| Stage Five                       | Sustain                               |
| Stage Six.One                    | Recalibration                         |
| Stage Six.Two                    | Engagements, Engagements, Engagements |
| Stage Seven                      | The Umbrella of New Programs          |
| INTRODUCING THE CREDIT FRAMEWORK |                                       |
| Stage Eight                      | Saturation                            |

Shall we begin?

✖ Fun Fact #2: First version of Commudle was coded while traveling to-from the office in the metro train. Mornings were for writing the code, evenings were for deploying, testing and planning for the next day. It took three months, those were not tiring trips at all, but they completed my day positively in anticipation of the next morning.

## Stage One: Soul Search



While I was pursuing engineering at a fairly remote university, a few batchmates started a Technology Club. It sounded exciting for sure because it was the first tech community of the college. A year later, they had done one small event about different advancements in the field. Unfortunately, that was also the last event they ever had. But there were other successful clubs in the same college, they were alive, had regular get-togethers, fun activities and cultural fests. Finally, when seniors graduated, they handed the baton to the most active and contributing members to lead it for the next year.



Something similar happens with tech communities at both small and large scale businesses. Continuous efforts and regular engagements are a must to sustain them, there's no such thing as auto-pilot, there's always a pilot and their team needed to steer the community

*When you are a tech company whose customers are developers, there's a FOMO when you see so many small and big companies running a developer community or participating in existing ones, and then there's a rallying cry: 'hey, we should start a community!'. It also brings in a certain high level of excitement of being at a center stage with so many more people to know about and love your product. But seldom do we ask, 'what will we solve for those developers who might join our community?'*

A thorough Soul Search is vital because it lays the foundation for your community ecosystem and instills a long-term commitment to building it. One thing which I have learnt from experience about building impactful developer communities is that 'it takes time'. Though, with Commudle we have implemented ways to fast-pace this journey.

**Building a community is about building a mutually beneficial relationship with the people who will be the biggest advocates for your company, technology or product.**

A strong community not only adds immeasurable value to your product, but also attracts paying customers to your product. But, you have to begin by solving for the users before you plug in your product into it.

As a Developer Relations professional, it is critical to create an internal brief that defines the purpose of the community-building initiative and secures leadership buy-in. This requires tackling tough questions that you and your team have already asked yourselves, so that you can confidently answer any concerns that arise.

Here they are:

When at Stage One, ask the following questions:

1. Am I in the network of the developer communities around me in this or similar domain and participating regularly in their engagements?

If the answer is No, please take a step back and make sure this answer becomes a Yes before you take the next step. Being a part of the developer communities around you not only helps build a network but it also gives an insight into how they are being run, the popular people, the passionate leaders, what are the current technologies for which these people are excited and what they are solving or building together. It gives you ideas on what your company's communities should be doing.

2. Why does my company need to build a tech community?

An enterprise company which has done a free trial with Commudle had a goal of 'testing the waters' to find out if developers would engage for building apps using their SDK. Their SDK enables developers to build & publish apps to their marketplace which can help them earn money & also build credibility / recognition. Apart from running ads and informing developers that such a

thing exists, teaching them how to do it is crucial. Even though there's documentation, you need to do a boost and building a community will help them create a place where these developers can interact, share ideas & solve each other's problems too. The problem they figured to solve for developers was to help them to learn to build useful apps using third party SDK's which might even enable them to earn.

Another startup is doing a lot of user testing by getting people to use their cloud based platform during live events so that they can fast move from beta to launch. It's a very straightforward strategy, if an online or offline session is taking place at any community, they give out complimentary licenses to the speaker and attendees to use their platform which saves the setup time as the boilerplate code is pre-setup and in return the startup is able to collect usage statistics to improve their product.

Your 'need' could be spreading awareness about the product, getting early adopters who become advocates & customers in the long term or even an exclusive expert community which contributes to building your product by giving valuable feedback, etc.

### 3. Who is the target audience?

Writing 'all the software developers of the world' will not help. Classify them, probably on the basis of tech, experience, country/city/locality, language, diversity, education, etc.

For example, [Google Developer Student Clubs \(GDSC\)](#) in the starting days was specifically for engineering college students interested in building mobile app based solutions for problems around them using technology. While Google Developer Groups (GDG's) presented a city centered group catering to people from all experience levels, the GDSC's helped recognize college specific audiences and helped the brand become a part of the lives of students at an earlier stage. They even involved the college's professors for some activities.

Also, [Women Who Code](#) caters specifically to Women in Technology at any stage in their career but they have specific programs running for different career stages which are started by their city leads called Directors.

### 4. What's in it for the community members?

This is the most overlooked question, but is the most vital part you need clarity about. Your community is built by techies, developers and/or designers. Think from their perspective. What will they gain from being a part of the community driven by your brand? We call this the **Community Bottom-Up Thinking**.

Take [Digital Ocean](#) for example, it is one huge community online and the first point of interaction for developers with their community is the well crafted blogs which guide you through setting up or troubleshooting some technology for your project / product. The tutorials sometimes might be titled as 'how to set up X technology on Y version of Ubuntu' where they plugin their offerings too. They are solving for the steps required to set up application code on servers. More so, content creation is an essential part of their community building and they rank high on search engines.

You would've also heard of Google Summer of Code (GSoC) which is initiated by Digital Ocean every year where they promote open source development. For the developers, it brings them recognition and makes finding a job easier by displaying the credentials of completing GSoC, they also get to work on real life projects while being paid handsomely for it. For Digital Ocean, this creates awareness amongst masses.

### 5. What goal do I want to achieve with this community?

Just to be sure, 'goal' and 'need' are related, a goal is the result of a need. A 'goal' can be clearly defined in terms of numbers or tangible achievements like 'I want 10,000' new users by the end of next 6 months. Getting users from communities is different when compared to getting them from ads, you have already formed a relationship with them before onboarding 😊.

I worked with an enterprise to create the goals to be achieved while setting up their developer ecosystem from scratch. We finalized the number of product downloads and number of engagements as two major tangibles.

## 6. What would be the success metrics?

We have discussed the need, goal and problem to be solved for the developers. How are success metrics different? Do product downloads not define success metrics? To an extent yes, but the number of people (more so, active people) in your community defines it better. This is however a very early stage to define clear success metrics, but it's essential to have them. People get this wrong a lot of times, setting a success metric that we want 100,000 users in our community in the next six months is difficult to be realistic with. Start small, build an identity, setup processes, guidelines, brand collaterals, build trust (Read '[CREDIT](#)' framework' in later parts) and multiply. Quality wins over quantity, so be careful.

Examples are, we would want 60% of our community to install the product and spend at least 2 hours using it; Open 5 communities and get regular with at least one monthly event; OR we will get 60% retention for engagements month on month. Obviously, you can build up the calculation of how many resources you have to execute the plan and optimize the numbers again.

 Read: [What are the metrics to measure the success of DevRel teams?](#)

## 7. ROI?

This one is definitely too early to decide at this stage, but your leadership will put this as the first question, 'but what revenue will the communities bring to my business?'. This is a two way street. Selling software is not about just advertising or just awareness today. It requires education and support being given to the users even before they start paying. You need to invest and make people trust your product, and developer communities are at the forefront of this process today.

You need to build and present a strategy to achieve the desired ROI to the leadership. This guide will help you with different stages to build your communities and with each stage you move closer to or achieve a part of your ROI. And your ROI will be determining which team funds the program, it could be the marketing team (when awareness and adoption is a criteria) or the product team (when they're looking for a lot of feedback).

I worked on building a plan for a company wherein the initial discussions were strongly about creating impact and helping the developers. When we started building the ROI metrics, the first thing was the number of sign ups on the product. I took a step back, collected examples from the largest tech communities in the world and explained how easy it would be to get X number of downloads when there will be N number of people in active communities around their brand. But expecting it from day one would be unrealistic. We finally broke down the initial numbers into more metrics in terms of number of communities, number of leaders, number of events/engagements, etc. An event where people give positive feedback is absolutely an ROI because you have built Trust with them.

[Postman's student communities](#) empower and educate students on API's and when these students become the professional developers of tomorrow, they might convert because they are already comfortable with the platform. This is a strategy. It's a similar strategy when [Microsoft Student Ambassadors](#) program facilitates students with learning about Azure.

I have shared a sample proposal format in [Stage Three](#) which you can build upon. But wait, don't reach there just yet, read through and answer all the questions.

Why do community initiatives fail to be accepted by the leadership?

Most businesses and the individuals in their teams are initially driven by the excitement of building their own community (standing on the stage and being at the center in a big event with a big logo of your company is exciting!), but the questions above, sooner or later they will be all around you.

Initiatives fail because the team doesn't have answers to the questions above and the lack of a clear strategy means the leadership can't be convinced to allocate resources/budget for the initiative.

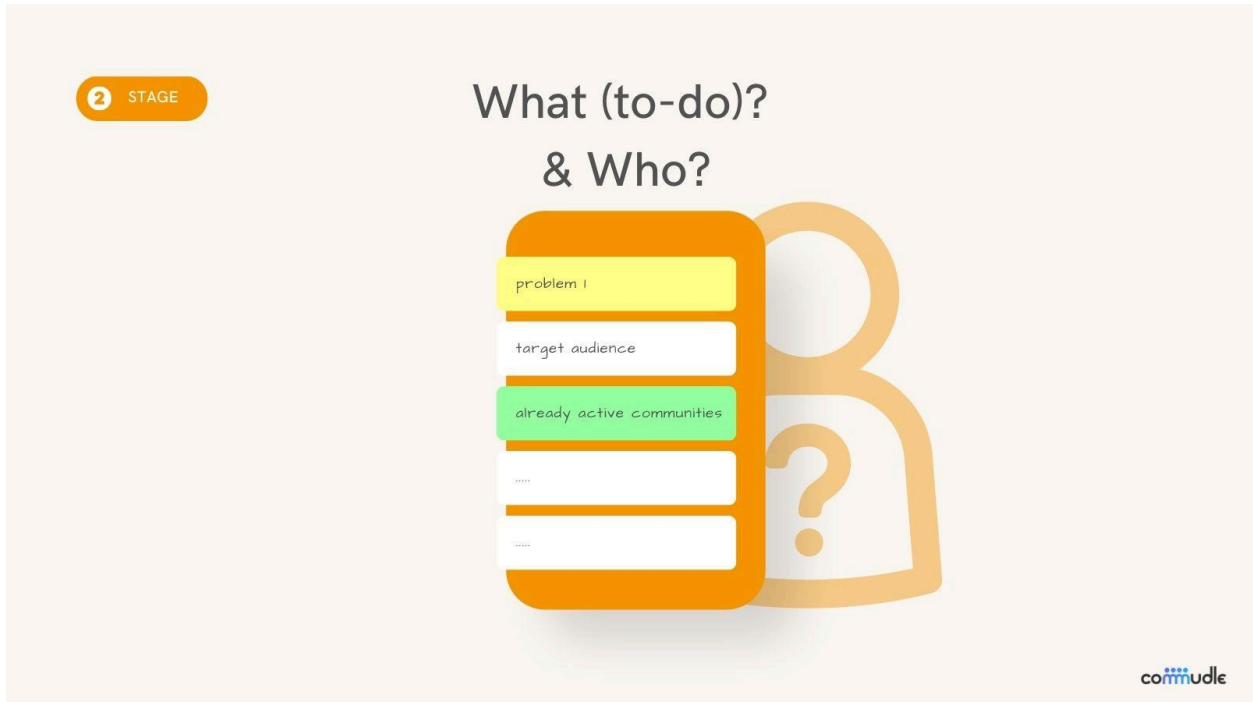
Answering these is as important as when you are building your product and need to clearly define 'what is the problem my business will solve?'

 How Commudle helps you get the big picture for Soul Search!

- ✓ Already active developer communities on the platform give you an insight on what's going on and how people are gaining & engaging with each other. Even before you set up a developer community, you will be able to see what other active communities are doing on Commudle to keep people engaged. Not only can you engage with them through the platform, but by learning from what they are doing, you can begin on similar lines too.
- ✓ In your presentation to the leadership team, Commudle becomes your engine for a long term growth and easy journey from launch to pilot. At every stage, from planning, launching, outreach, execution, growth, reporting, surveys & multiple types of engagements, you won't need to worry about purchasing or using a new platform and justifying it in your plan.

Let's move to the next stage!

## Stage Two: What? (to do) & Who?



There's a very common scenario here which I've come across repeatedly. An excerpt from a recent interaction with a well funded mid size startup went like this:

**Business:** We're building a community to get more users and create more brand presence! Any early ideas/connections you might have?

**Me:** Who's your target audience and what will they gain from your community?

**Business:** Discord server bana diya hai, baaki figure out kar lenge, aajkal sab wahi use karte hain. (In English: We've set up a discord server, rest we will figure out what to do on it, everyone uses the same these days.)

**Me:** Ok, and are you doing it yourself or hired someone to do the job?

**Business:** I'll take part in it but will initially get someone to do the executions!

As ironic as it is, with most people we see that a platform is chosen before deciding what it is that we want to do in our tech communities.

'What to do' is the stage at which it is relatively easier and fun to move across because you need to strategise activities around your product. These will help you move closer to the goals you have decided to achieve with your community, or rather a problem you will solve with and for your community members.

'Who' is someone very important. I've seen people switch their DevRel jobs every few months and it's not a one sided decision. Companies hire folks (as community managers, devrels) with a target number of people in mind to be achieved. Those who get hired are excited about the opportunity and get confident that they will be able to achieve those numbers. But, when those

numbers are not achieved, the devrel loses their freedom of creativity because of the number target pressure of getting to those many people. Both lose interest in working with each other...

When at Stage Two, ask the following questions:

1. What are some of the most active communities in the same domain as my community's, what activities are they doing to drive and keep their communities alive?

Do you think this is a repeat question? Absolutely. The existing communities help you understand what are some of the hot topics in the communities these days and also who are the most active speakers/leaders/influencers whom you might need to reach out to when you plan yours.

A real story comes from an early stage startup on Commudle. While brainstorming, the team realized that there's a good number of communities which are doing hands-on sessions on similar technologies. All they needed to do for a good start was to collaborate with them, or put one speaker representing their platform in the existing events instead of organizing the whole event by themselves. It worked! They had a couple of thousand members in their community even before they held their first independent event.

### **Collaboration = The Power of Community**

2. What is the target group (TG) of people I will engage with, with the first set of activities in my tech community?

It's a simple question, don't address the whole TG at once. Begin with a subset, see how they respond. If your TG is all the developers who write API's, you can divide them into subsets, viz. beginners who haven't written API's, beginners who have written API's but not structured, experts who need better API management, freelancers, full time professionals, etc. You can also classify them on the basis of them knowing about your product or not. Define your audience before you engage with them.

3. Which specific problem can these activities address for my target audience?

Remember in [Stage 1](#) we discussed 'What is in it for the community members?'. That was practice, this is the place where you can pick some items from that list. Initially, keeping a count to two or three is good. It's completely fine if any other community is solving the same, you can collaborate!

**Community is not competition, it is collaboration.**

4. What exactly would be the activities which I will execute? Does it fall into the budget we have and is our team capable of executing it?

Choosing the 'type' of activity is pretty simple, but it is definitely a lot of effort to drive it regularly. Now that you've decided what you want to help them achieve, some examples you can choose from include hands-on codelab, informative tech sessions, panel discussions, real time channels, resource repositories, collaborative projects, hackathons, email newsletters, webinars, etc. Decide between online, offline and hybrid.

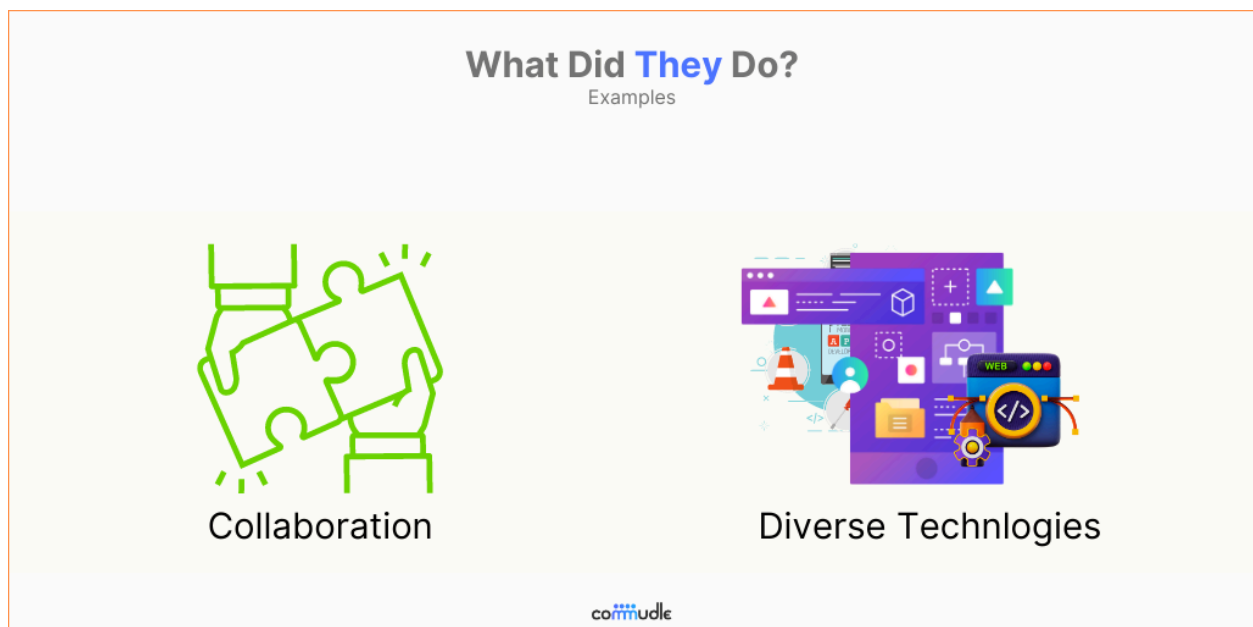
Personally, initially having a lower budget for giveaways is personally more fun because then you connect with more people for collaborations based on them actually believing in what you are doing.

5. Who is going to handle and execute the strategies prepared in the previous stages? What would be the most important set of things to achieve?

At a mid to enterprise level company, usually the budget is not constrained, and assuming you have prepared the answers to the previous stage yourself, you will initially lead the effort. So what you need is a set of people who believe in the bigger picture and are aligned with your goals, who can stick around for a longer time.

I'd suggest hiring full time folks (even if it's interns). Choose the structure of the community as the first most important thing to be achieved so that as your team grows, and the community grows, people have a path to follow and a structure to fit into. First set of designations people look at are community manager and developer advocate.

There are two examples I want to share with you here:



- A startup which runs Android on cloud needs to spread awareness about their product and get more users on board so that they can collect feedback from their usage and improve their product and move it to a launch stage (the same which I mentioned earlier). They could've paid for ads or incentives and got people to use their product. But instead, they did two things which helped them reach more than 3000 members in about 3 months:
  1. Created a community focused on android development and have done master classes (online) to educate developers on android development. These developers use their platform while building their first set of apps along with expert instructors.

2. Collaborated with communities having offline and online events on Android and facilitated with free subscriptions for people to use their platform during the demo or codelabs. This created value and saved so many hours of time which is usually spent in figuring out the setup of boilerplate code by developers.
- Google Developer Groups is one of the largest communities supported by Google. They achieve their goals by giving freedom to the leaders of their communities to educate developers on plethora of technologies (including those which are outside of the Google ecosystem) while pushing in some exciting incentives when people in these communities use their products too. Being a member of the community helps bring two way interaction between the product team and the users. And doing regular activities builds a long term loyalty where members become advocates of the products and future customers too.

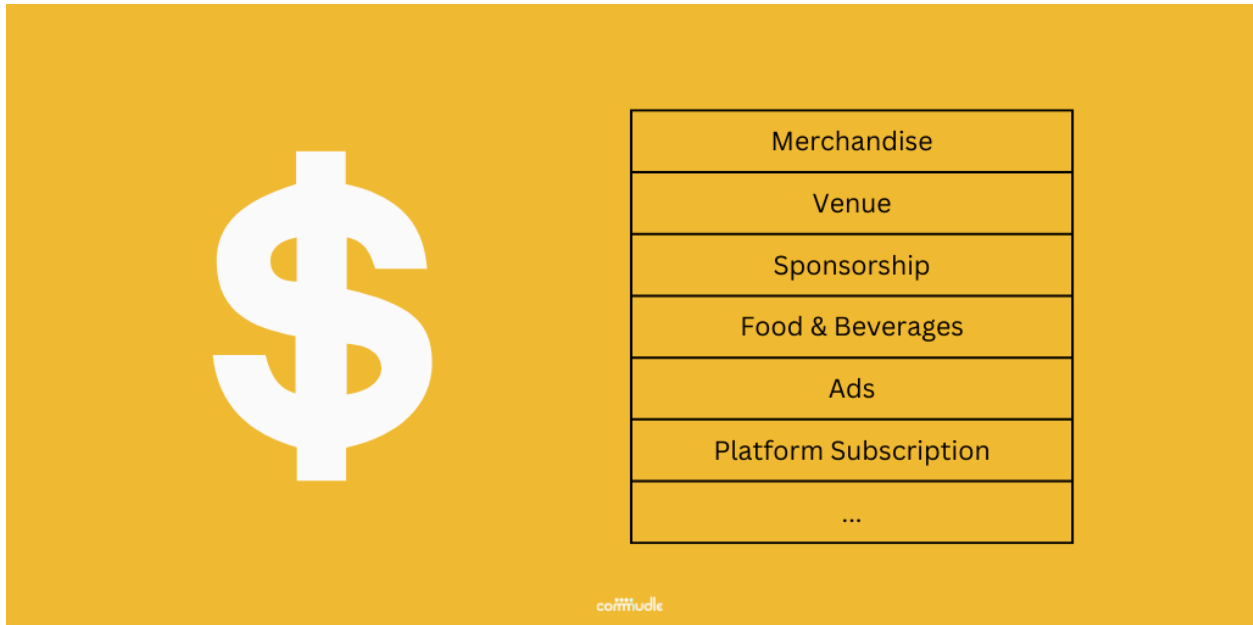
In both the above cases, it is clear that initially it's about giving what you have, supporting people and building trust with them before they actually start actively responding to support you.

## Managing Budgets & Their Discussions

These are tricky to navigate discussions, but really interesting ones to see how well your strategy is panned out before you gain the support of the company's leadership.

What you need to present to them as a plan includes all the info from the above two stages. Though being in a well funded company, money isn't a problem, but having a clear strategy on how it will be giving an ROI to the company is very important or even the deepest of pockets won't approve a dime to be spent. If you are able to lay the journey in terms of progress in stages with respect to time, it would do the job.






About managing the budgets, you will need to distribute it for hiring, merchandise/goodies, food, sponsorships, event setups, platform subscriptions and even online advertisements sometimes. Merchandise and food at offline events helps you run it throughout the day, for online events, it's an additional reward for those who remained active.

Sometimes communities also do have mischievous elements and hence it's essential to build some guidelines and share with your organizers and members. They can modify it according to their needs and use cases too. Here is a set of guidelines which can be used as a basic template.



🌱 Fun Fact #3: The QR code scanner built into Commudle was coded a night before the first event it was used to manage completely. There were about 550 people at the event and about eight hours to the event is when I realized that we need to save a lot of time spent in searching for the person and marking the attendance :D. Eventually, there wasn't even a single minute worth of queue at the registration desk.

 How Commudle helps you find the 'What' and 'Who'

- ✓ You can choose from a plethora of engagement activities on Commudle. The platform is like a partner to you. Right from event management, registrations, attendance/check-ins, member profiles, live QnA, polls, chats, preserving knowledge, etc are just a tip of the cake. You just need to decide what to do and the platform will manage everything.
- ✓ You can find your next community manager, leader, volunteer, speaker or influencer from amongst the thousands of techies on Commudle, or even simpler, from the active members in similar communities.

## Stage Three: How?



commudle

In over three hundred discovery & demo calls and chats with companies (both startups and enterprises, plus individuals too), I ask them why are you looking to build a community and do you already have an established community?

The answer to the first one helps me shape the product walkthrough customized for their needs with relevant examples. But the surprise comes when the answer to the second question is a 'Yes'. I follow up by asking why they are then looking for a new platform. The most common

answers include two things, viz. 'there is no response from members on the existing platform', 'the existing platform does not have a, b and c features'.

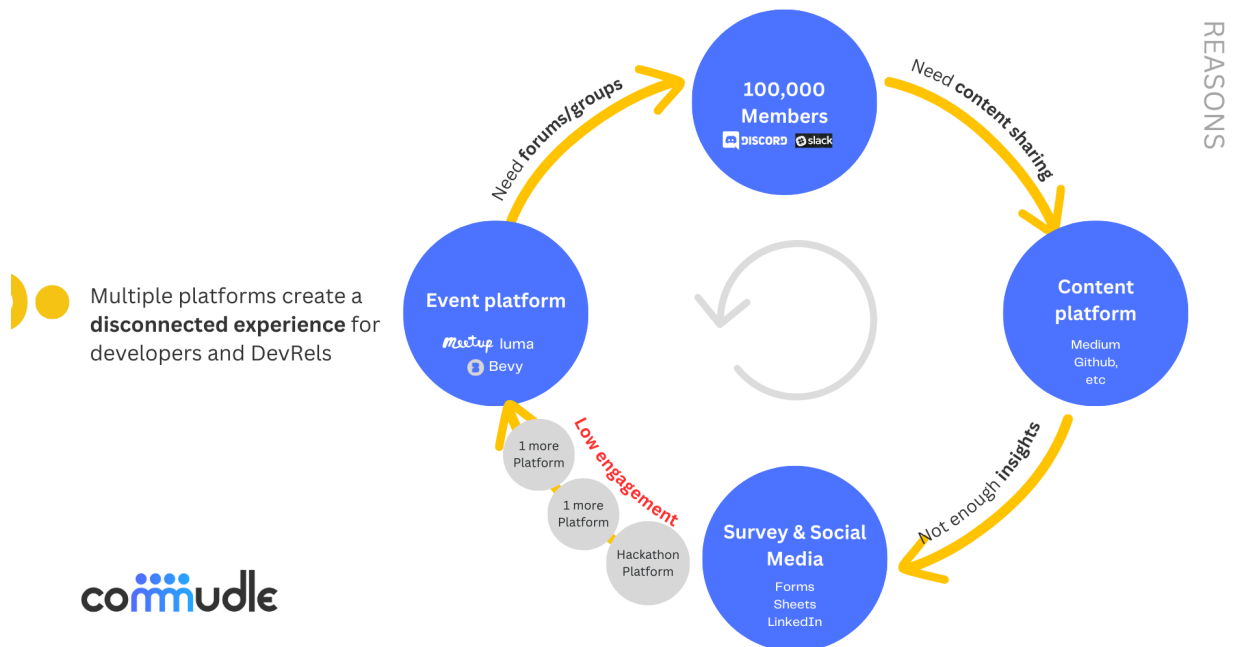
On Stage Three you figure out where in the world of the internet your tech community will exist.

Some of the obvious ways we figure it out (not always the right way) is by looking at the following factors viz.

- Which is the most famous platform used by many other communities or touted as the best one?
- Where can I get the most users with ease or least effort / where are my users already present?
- How much deep insights does this platform give me (less asked question though at this stage)
- Cost! (can I get it for free?) (You have to realize how free is free?)
- If the cost is high, why don't I create my own community platform, that'd be so exciting! (The idea is exciting, but, is it the core of your business?)

 Read: [The wide needs of a developer community](#)

Developer communities start with one platform and soon a new need arises and then another one and a new one. With every need, comes a platform which you purchase hoping it will bring more engagement.



A platform serves as a partner to your DevRel team and serves as an identity to your brand. Going with the most popular, most used, but limited on features platform soon makes your community saturated in terms of engagements and then you jump to another platform. This cycle continues, soon the team is busy collecting data from everywhere and trying to make sense of it. Eventually, leadership raises questions on the viability of even having a community. Go for a platform (Commudle 😊) which gives you plethora of engagement options and insights from those too so that neither your team, nor your community leaders and members are jumping across platforms.

Those questions above might seem fine, here are the better ones (obviously, according to me)

When at Stage Three, ask the following questions:

1. What is it that I will be doing in my community (this will take you to Stage Three)?

Now, are you confused that you decided the 'What' earlier? Obviously we did, but you did not decide how you will deliver the 'what'.

Activities can include online/offline events, webinars, emails, newsletters, live chat, content repository, project sharing, member profiles, badges, forums and more... But that's not what you're looking to list here. You need to put a strategy in place. Create a calendar of activities to be done for the next three to six months and what are you looking to achieve with each of them.

2. What are some of the best platforms 'used by tech communities' for the activities I want to organize?

The definition of 'best' might not exactly be the most 'famous' but it's fine to interchange these terms. I won't refrain from selling [Commudle](#) here ;)

3. What are the features in this platform which will help me build a better two-way engagement with my community members and also help community members to engage amongst themselves?

Features you need directly correspond to the activities you want to organize in your community, but having a vision on what might be needed in the near future is important, else you'll be using multiple platforms to interact with the same set of people. It's not just about the leaders or brands engaging with their developer community members. The members also have a need to connect with each other for multiple opportunities and knowledge they can exchange.

You need to lookout for features which help you do three things:

## Start, Sustain, Scale.

Sustain comes before scale because once you sustain at the initial stage, you can sustain at any stage. The efforts put into sustenance also help you build a loyal community.



4. What insights will I need to understand my community better on the path of growth and does this platform provide them? If not, are they willing to make an exception and give me API's/dashboard for it?

Aah, this is the most important part which will help you steer both your community and your product/services in the right direction. Most of the times you can get an insight of the amount of engagements your activities brought, for example how many chats occurred or when was the time that people were the most inactive in your event, but, you should also look out for 'who' (popular technologies they use, their designations, interests, etc) your users are when they join and engage with the community.

Here are some sample job descriptions to the rescue:

1. [Developer Community Manager](#)
2. [Developer Advocate](#)
3. [Developer Evangelist](#)

5. How scalable is the platform? Does it support more features and an umbrella of communities if & when I want to open more of them under my brand name?

This is a big big question, as your developer communities evolve, you need a platform which gives you multiple modes of engagement with your members and also facilitates them to engage with each other. Right from rolling out incentives to recognizing community heroes, everything comes into play soon!

The platform you are using is the engine of your ship. It should help increase your DevRel or community management team's efficiency. And if it can automatically bring in more users, it's a boon!

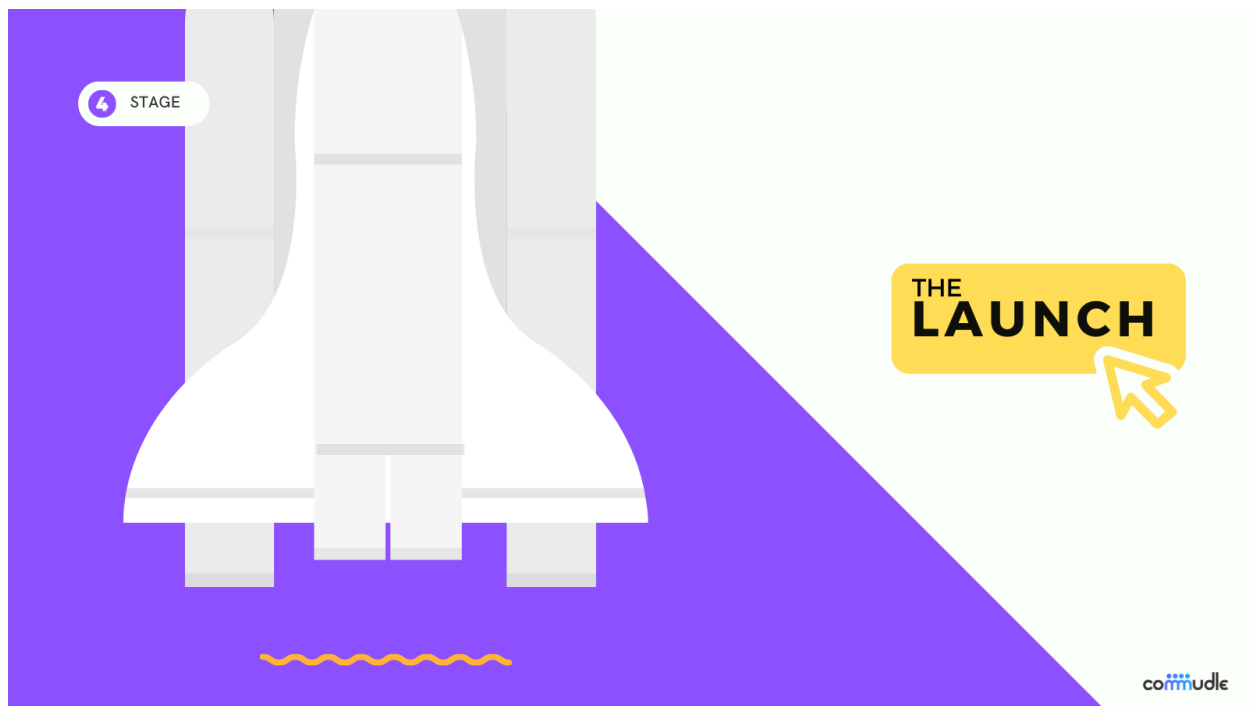
🌟 **Fun Fact #4:** The first developer at Commudle was someone who contributed to our open source front end repository, he's playing a pivotal role in how your engagement happens with the platform! The front end of the application is still [open sourced](#).

#### 🚀 How Commudle helps you win

- ✓ We're a platform for techies, so, hundreds of developer communities and thousands of techies who belong to your target audience are active on Commudle already.
- ✓ A user can participate in multiple communities from a single profile and build their journey. This gives you deep insights into the diversity of your community.

- ✓ Survey forms are built into Commudle and even if your community organizers change tomorrow, data remains in one place.
- ✓ The platform is your engine to host right from one to an umbrella of communities under an organization.
- ✓ Features including online/offline events, Commudle stage, live polls & QnA, survey forms, smart shortlisting, QR code scanner, member list management, emails, newsletters, real time private & public channels, content repository, project collaborations help you choose your specific mode of communication and create a holistic experience around it for your members. I see some of the largest communities still struggling with all of this because their community management is distributed along forms + channels + mails + event platform + quiz platform + content + Own website + code repository. Just imagine the task of maintaining an identity across all these platforms and engaging with the same member at so many platforms. Even if you use integrations across all these, the end user loses on crafting a journey with your community.
- ✓ You can even find your community managers directly from the communities which are active on Commudle.

## Stage Four: The Launch

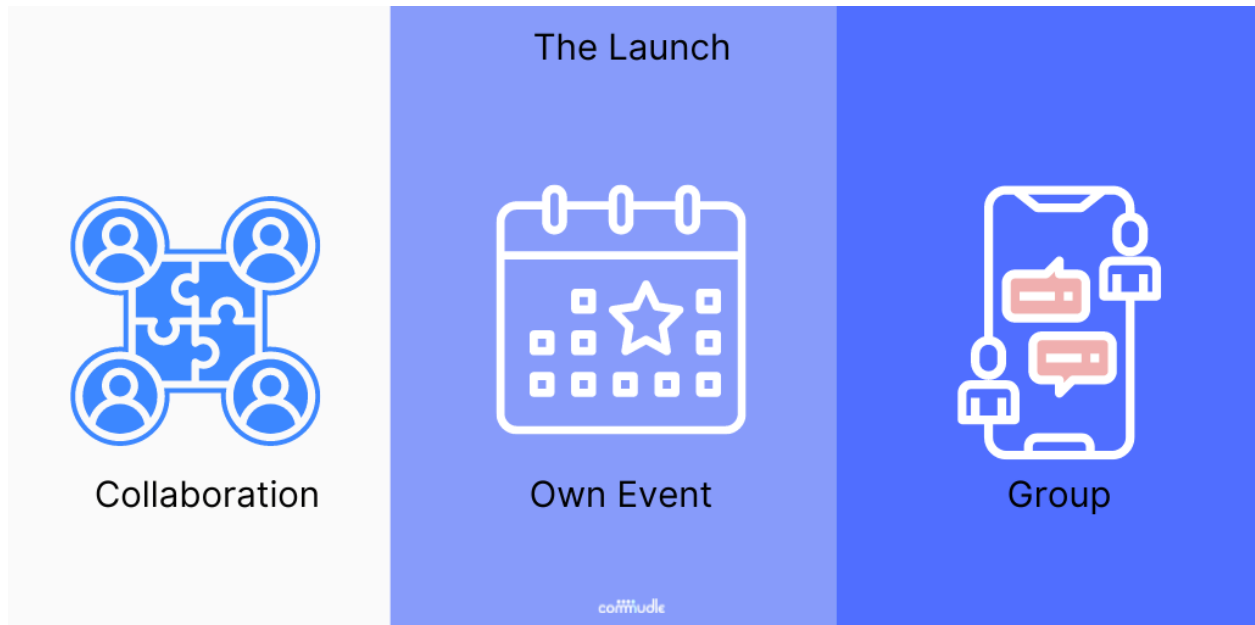


Till now we have done a good amount of brainstorming, formed our budgets and figured out what we need to do. Those are very important things to have clarity upon as they get you the approval from the leadership of your company (unless you're the founder and need to convince yourself :D) and also give you confidence for what you're going to build.

What comes now is the D-Day, 'The Launch' stage.

This is where you build an awareness for your community or brand. Tell the world that 'We are (also) here!'.

Let's look at three different types of launches:



1. **Event session through collaboration:** If you are participating as a community in another community's event, during the session, be sure to ask the attendees to join your community. They usually do it out of the positive spirit of supporting you.
2. **Your own event:** Initially people will get to know about your community through your company & team's social media and that of the speakers/influencers/partner or friend communities. But once they have completed the event, make sure to follow up using some post event engagement & feedback forms.
3. **A group/forum:** Keep the access exclusive, make people introduce themselves when they join. Make an effort to share some useful resources from time to time and reinstate the reason for creating the group. Make them feel welcomed.
4. **A newsletter:** You've been announcing and getting people to join a waitlist. It's time to close the waitlist, send out the first email with content which is crisp and is exactly what you told people it'd be about and useful to them. Collect feedback before onboarding more people, maybe ask the initial readers to respond with emails of people who would want to receive it too (referrals).

When at Stage Four, ask the following questions:

1. How many people count is good enough for me to begin with for the first activity which could be an event, a group, a newsletter's subscribers, etc?  
The more the merrier doesn't apply here because eventually quality wins over quantity. How close knit your community is, defines your future journey because these people spread the word of mouth and advocate about/influence you.
2. What are some of the most active communities in the same domain which might not be competitors and hence, open to collaboration?



Even if you're doing your own independent event or a group online, collaborating with the existing communities gives you a better outreach to their audiences and also gives a good validation to your community's brand.

### 3. What is 'success' for the first activity?

I'll be successful if '100 people join my group, 80 people show up at my event, 500 people open my email'. All these are NOT the best metrics to assess your success. Some first time success metrics could be defined from the feedback taken from members at events, click-through-rate of newsletters, or how many people participated in your group's chats.

But the most important success metric shows up with repeated activities and engagements. It's called **retention**.

From this stage onwards, I introduce a section which is about the 'Goals' you should be looking to achieve. Earlier you decided the bigger goals, but when the community is running, we often miss out on the regular things.

### Goals at Stage Four:

#### 1. Get people to join your community

Making people join the community so that they get some freebies is a bad idea, that relationship is not even platonic 😞, connect over a vision, an achievement, a deliverable, a topic of interest which you both are interested in.

#### 2. Collaborate with more communities

**It's Community, not competition.** Fortunately, community is not a company, hence there can be collaborations even with communities who are in the same domain. Guess what, I've seen Microsoft and Google communities collaborate for events too.

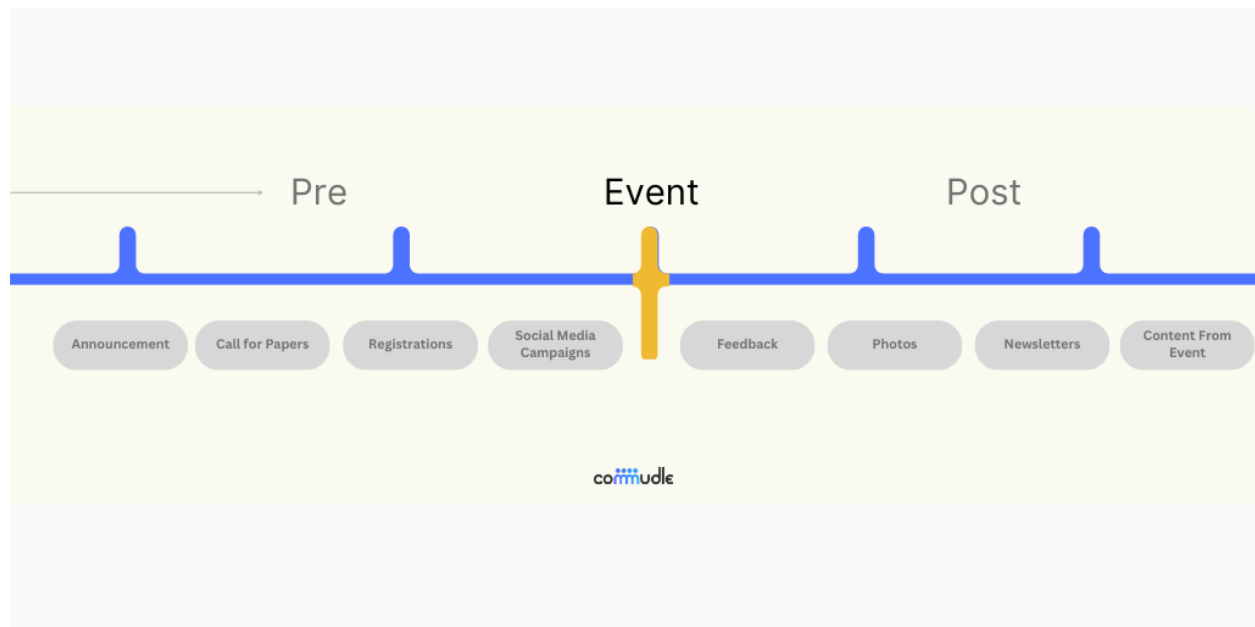
#### 3. Do the first activity / engagement with your members!

What's stopping you now, nothing. Go ahead, make the first move and see how many people join or show up, learn from what worked and not, improve. Even if one person participates, kudos to you.

Yay! Now that you are here, you have launched your community and completed your first activity. Be sure to collect feedback (using forms, personal chats, etc.) from members because this is what defines the next stage [PS. Commudle has everything you need, to collect custom feedback]. You can also reward them for it through some goodies, free subscriptions, coupons or it could be a moral incentive (I think this carries the highest value) because then they are participating in making the community better. At an event where about 500 people attended, we did not reveal we had goodies, but explained the importance of feedback to people. Guess what? >400 people filled the feedback form with proper answers on what they learnt, what was good and what needed improvement.

For those who write dedicated feedback, do reach out to them personally too to understand better and thank them for taking the pain.

Personally, after each offline or online event, I talk to people and share how important feedback is for us, what efforts went into building the event, thank all of them for showing up on a weekend and discuss stories from the attendees' lives.



### Pre and post event engagements are a necessity

Even when you're acquiring your customers through sales, you do a pre and post engagement. These people have contributed from their personal and professional time, appreciating them will build Trust and take you and your community places!

🌱 Fun Fact #5: Collaboration is the secret of a community's energy 😊! When your community collaborates with a community over an event they are doing on Commudle, the people who register become a member of both the communities. This has helped a lot of communities to boost their initial growth!

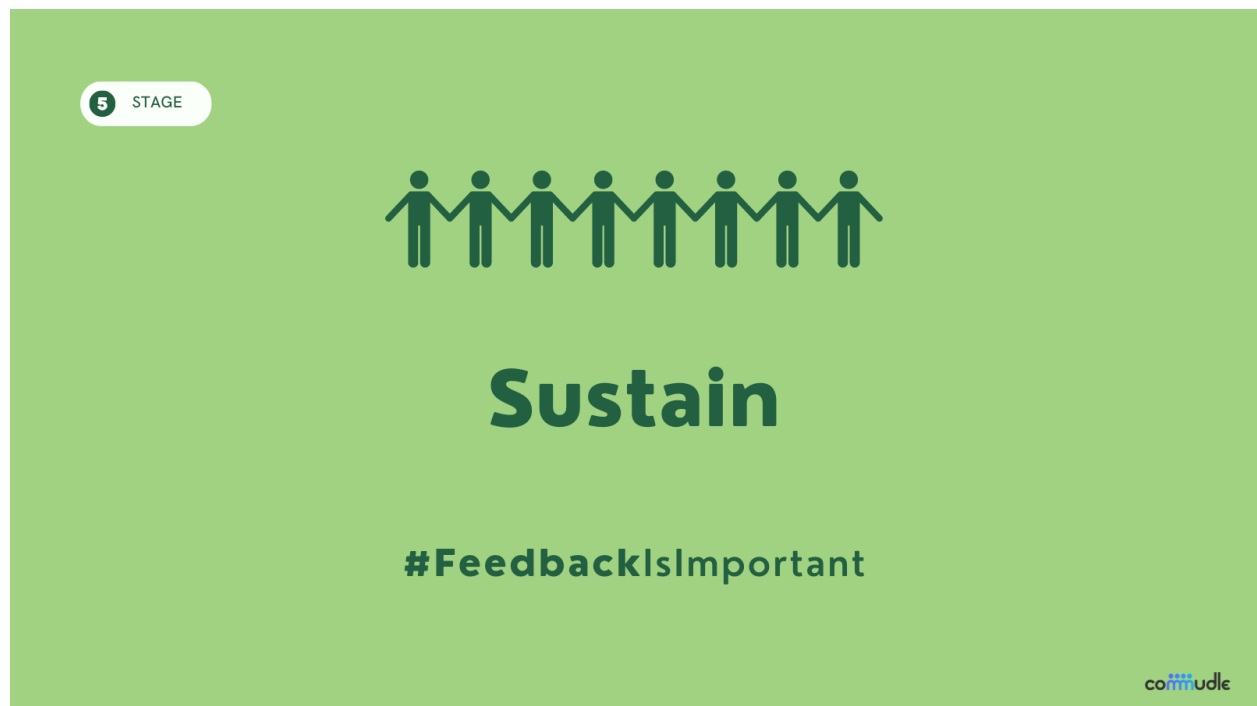
### 🚀👤 How Commudle helps you launch successfully

- ✓ Community collaboration is a built in feature! A community started with only collaborations, reached about 6000 members before their first event. Out of these, more than 4500 people registered for their first event when they announced it!
- ✓ You have a dedicated page for your events, channels and every member has a profile too. You can manage everything from offline checkins to online live QnA & Polls with the attendees of an event. Increase the turn up rate at your events with

the built in smart shortlisting.

- ✓ For channels, you can create public & private groups amongst your members and drive relevant conversations. All along this, you'll know who is who through their profiles!
- ✓ You can create content based forums for support, discussions, product announcements, etc.
- ✓ With thousands of developers visiting Commudle, you just need to get active and they start noticing you and join your activities based on their common interests!

## Stage Five: Sustain



Well well well, it's great to have completed [Stage Four](#). Your community's launch could've resulted in three things viz.

### 1. Success

- There was a great amount of interaction, everyone is all praises, people are talking about it
- There's engagement in your groups.

## 2. Towards success

- Not many people showed up / joined the group.
- There were technical glitches (doesn't matter)
- Low engagement in your groups

## 3. Success too

- Not many people showed up if it was an event / less people joined the group.
- A high amount of interaction on a personal level and everyone went home happy

Notice that I've not mentioned failure, there's none in the community, this is where it's different from running a company.

I was fortunate to be recognized for my contribution to GDG New Delhi (a community I manage) and received an invite to Google IO 2018 and 2019. In 2018, I got a chance to meet an organizer of a design community who had a very inspiring story on how it all started for her probably around the year 2016. This was when design as a field was still new to most folks and they announced their community and the first offline meet (event). She told me that they were very excited and planned for at least 25 people to show up, but only 2 people showed up. Now imagine all the preparation you do, the raw materials for organizing hands on activities, food, venue, etc. The normal thought is to either cancel or cut the activity short and send people home. But what they did was, had a close knitted session, a complete event with those who attended, including the organizers it was 4 people. Within a year or so, they became one of the most active design communities in the world and guess what, she was invited at IO 2018 for her contributions!

Here's what I've seen a lot of community leaders think and do depending on which of the results from above three points they achieve:

- It went great
  - Let me put all the people who joined into a marketing funnel and let the sales team do it's magic.
  - OMG, this is it, now we will do this next year, or in a few months, till then bid adieu.
  - Let's get more members, scale this up fast, this is the right way to do it
  - Let's build it up from here and get regular with interactions while new people find their way to my community.
- It's not working out
  - QUIT: Communities are not meant for me/my company
  - This activity was a failure, let us try some other platforms and some other activities.
  - What was it that didn't work out, I will fix it in the next one soon.

Now you might already know what I'm hinting at 😊.

## Goals at Stage Five:

### 1. Get regular with your community activities

**Drive it actively.** A community builds its recognition by being there in front of its members. You can use the communication channels your members prefer (chat group, emails, social media,...) and keep talking to them whether you are an event driven community or not.

One of the very active tech communities in Asia does one event a year, it's a large tech conference from speakers around the world. How do they make sure people don't forget about them? Soon after the conference, they start planning the one for next year and keep sharing updates with their members. However far-fetched this might be, they also add some valuable resources for the developers in their community to learn from and any updates from the tech they cover in their talks. The frequency of emails increases as the event comes closer.

Once you set up the communities for your company, they won't run on auto-pilot. Even your community organizers need motivation from the DevRel team. Example, Google Developer Groups have different developer programs throughout the year for which the DevRel team creates content, guidelines, rewards, keep a budget for food, goodies and get some google verified speakers too (who might not be Google employees). They make it optional for the community organizers/leaders across regions to opt in and organize events around this if their audience would benefit from it. Turns out, it's very successful and each regional community tweaks it in their own way.

### 2. Take regular feedback from your members

**Fill: Feedback Is Important.** If I have not emphasized it enough yet, feedback is the most important thing and the beginning to post-event engagements. In global developer relations teams, there are regional, country and continent leads who represent the company. But their eyes and ears are the community organizers/leaders who are at the ground level interacting with real people, be it online or offline. The feedback they collect shapes up the program globally.

Whether you have one community or an umbrella ecosystem with multiple communities, taking feedback is a habit you need to develop amongst the community leaders and giving feedback is a habit they cultivate in their members.

### 3. Try out different things for people who are inactive

If it's a channel or a group then tag them, ping them personally (maybe even ask about their well being), get people to engage with others. But don't force it upon them, community participation is voluntary unless you have an agreement with your members or community leaders.

A couple of examples here, viz. a very active mentorship community runs an ambassador program where the appointed ambassadors have to complete certain tasks like publishing N blogs and doing N social media posts, else they are removed. Another ecosystem requires each of the communities in their umbrella to organize at least one event every N days else they mark it as inactive and either shut it down or get new leaders.

**Start smart, sustain and grow.**

This is the mantra for developing a community which grows.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <u>Start Smart</u> | Find one way to engage, learn more on what your members want, improve through feedback.   |
| <u>Sustain</u>     | This is the most important, sustaining means you have created advocates in the members of your communities. If you are able to identify regular active members and leaders, you will need to replicate the model across more products/technologies/regions. |
| <u>Grow</u>        | With loyal leaders and members, growth is easy as you can depend on them to grow the number of people and impact through your communities.  |

**i** Read: [Top fun activities to try out at your developer community events](#)

When at Stage Five, ask the following questions:

1. What was the outcome of the activities I have done, are people actually gaining something?  
If you did a hands-on session for design or coding, it's easy to know if people find it useful by finding out who all completed it. For a tech session delivered through slides, check how many people asked questions and also take feedback. Don't be hesitant to ask thinking that you might receive negative feedback. This will help you improve.
2. What percentage of people are benefiting from it?  
This can be assessed through the following:
  - If it was a hands on session then what % of people completed it with the speaker/instructor.
  - If there was a follow up given to complete the code or design for the activity, what % of people completed it
  - For slide based sessions, were people attentive, how many people were asking questions or taking notes (an approximate number). When people asked questions, were others listening? You can even assess this by doing a quiz / poll in between the talk and sometimes the least engaging audience is listening very carefully!
  - Finally, feedback, two things are very important, viz. Ask them which the best sessions they attended through the day, and what could be improved in which sessions. Ensure them that the feedback will be kept private and will be very useful.
3. Was/Is there a two way engagement? Are people participating?  
If they engage, then they gain, then they re-engage!
4. [Only in case of events] How many times should I do the same type of engagements in a month/week/quarter?  
It is essential to understand that people put personal efforts and resources to even attend your event. It's not just about an association with your brand, but also about what they gain from being present there.

My community did a series on Android for beginners across 4 weekends and 90% of the attendees retained. We kept it limited to only 25 people, made sure everyone got personal attention and completed their modules. End result, everyone on the last session day had an Android app built and uploaded to the play store successfully.

5. [Only in case of events] How can I keep in touch with people until we meet next time?

I should be advertising Commudle here 😊

If you used a specific platform to manage the event registrations, but then invited people to another platform to chat or receive emails from, there is attrition even upto 90%! Try communicating with them from the same platform, sharing the achievements of people from within the community too.

6. Feedback?

Emphasized enough, but still people do forget, so here I am, mentioning it here again!

7. What do I need to change?

What was the least engaging part of your event, from your perspective and from the feedback you collected. If it was a particular talk (could be the topic or the speaker), vet the session better next time. If people are not responding to your group, introduce an initiative where people can help each other, ask them what works and what not.



P.S. Stay at this stage till you get regular!

P.S. Again, not 100% of the members will engage, but you will get an idea or a feel of whether you are going in the right direction once you collect feedback. Soon people will already want to step up and be moderators or speakers in your community.

🌱 **Fun Fact #6:** Commudle was initially gdgnd.org, built only for one community to be managed. A couple of months from when we used it at a flagship event with over 500 attendees, requests started pouring in to share it with other communities too and hence the name Commudle arrived.. And just like that, there were about 20 communities who signed up and started using Commudle in a couple of months.

#### ⚓ How Commudle helps you sustain the ecosystem

- ✓ Survey forms are built into Commudle, so all your data remains in one place. This helps you build registration, survey and feedback forms and directly send them to attendees or all members of different channels.
- ✓ Multiple modes of communication including emails and channels help you keep the members engaged and updated about the latest in the community.
- ✓ Smart shortlisting: The smart shortlisting feature helps you find the right people to attend the event and increase the overall turn up rate of your events.

## Stage Six Point One: Recalibration

6\_1 STAGE

# Recalibration

QUALITY

QUANTITY

THE ROI SCALE

commudle



Congratulations 🎉! You have crossed the first threshold, you have achieved 'Regularity', the most important part for a community.

This 'Recalibration' stage comes in when you start questioning yourself on what's next? You start asking whether the community efforts are actually adding 'value to my company. It's a valid, very valid thought because if you're building it for a brand, then you are spending time, resources, money to keep it running.

After attending/volunteering for events & activities and also sometimes delivering hands-on sessions for about a year and a half at GDG New Delhi, I got a chance to step up as an organizer in 2017. And I had a lot of questions with this new responsibility (most of them overlap with the questions in the next paragraph). And when we started answering each of them, it resulted in knowing our members better and for the next almost three years up until the lockdown arrived, we were able to achieve more than 90% turn up rate for all our events!

This is the time to dive deeper into data, get to know your community better to see how it's impacting your company. Here's some questions which will help you build a report for your community activities:

1. Do my community members fit my target users' profile?
2. Are community members using my product outside of the engagements?
3. Are they ready to / already paying for it?
4. Has feedback from the community improved my product/services?
5. Are my communities increasing the outreach and awareness of my product/company?
6. Are people from my community recommending my product/services to their colleagues / friends / workplaces?

 Goals at Stage Six:



Know your Community **better**.

Plan for the future growth.

community

1. **Get to know your community better.**

Stats, demographics, diversity, engagements, retention, what's working what's not working.

Instead of github issues, if you go to stackoverflow and just find out what questions people are asking about your product, you'll simply know what needs to be improved. So, read through in-event chats, read through feedback, go through members' profiles, find out all the insights you can.

2. **Plan for the future, you do want to grow**

Once you have the insights, lay down the plan for the next couple of quarters and a vision for the year. A small community can be changed, but as an enterprise, moving a ship takes effort and fuel.

When at Stage Six, ask the following questions:

1. **What's the ROI which I calculated to achieve from my community activities? Am I anywhere near it?**

If not, then find out what exactly it is that you are achieving through the community and recalibrate your ROI's to scale that achievement further. For example, you might not be gaining a lot of paid users, but people might be using the free trial well. Or people use your product during the live interaction but not after that. Also these could be some of the product related problems too.

2. **What is the next growth stage for my community?**

This could be more count of members if you've kept it closely knitted till now. Or more targeted sub groups. Or more regional / tech / diversity based communities for which you can start building from stage one again

### 3. What is the retention rate for my community?

Super important, yet overlooked. I know some communities with over 100,000 members on their discord channels but not even 1% of people are active. Retention is built by people helping each other. If people are not leaving but are inactive, it's not good either.

Solve for the three questions above and decide what's the right direction for the next step. I've added some tips/suggestions, just in case you need them

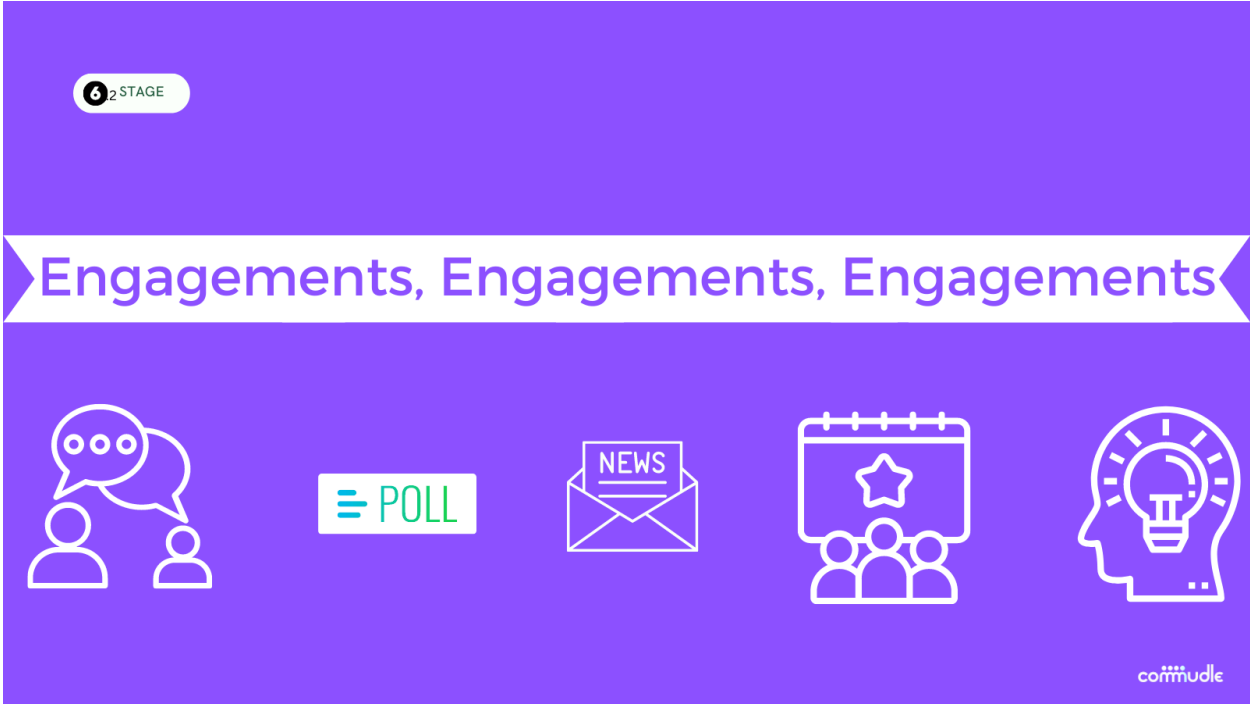
#### 👉 Tips at Stage Six

- If you decide to start new communities under the umbrella of your company name, use the power of your current community people to spread the word, but before that, include them in the decision, this is very very very important because they were your exclusive set of members or community organizers till now and know what works better than you.
  - Experiment with creating a group / doing an event or activity in the current community about this new community you want to run.
- Decide ROI wisely, remember, this is not your marketing funnel, you suddenly don't want to lose all the goodwill or the image you have created for the community / brand and be perceived as 'their community is built for marketing' because it is a difficult feat to go back from that image. What's more painful is losing out on your loyal members.
- Don't introduce sudden changes in your community if you are heading out on a new path unless there's no activity. Because people who are already well versed with how your community functions, it'll be difficult for them to migrate, but again, it all depends on the current numbers.

Decide the next stage based on the current stage. If you're not regular (Stage Five) is where you should head back to.

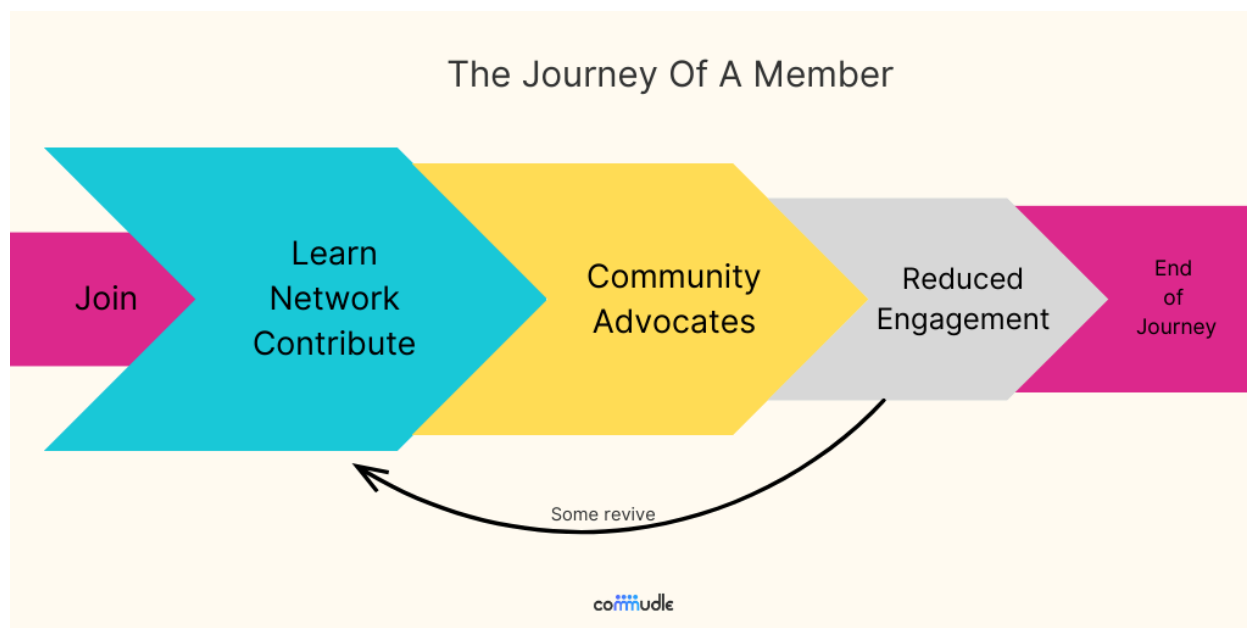
Wait wait, this stage has another part to it.

# Stage Six Point Two: Engagements, Engagements, Engagements



While re-calibrating, you will realize that your community needs three things, viz. Engagements, Engagements and Engagements.

A member’s community journey is usually built up of the following stages.



1. Join community
2. High Engagement
  - a. Learn
  - b. Network
  - c. Contribute
3. Become advocates of the community
4. Reduced engagements while still supporting the community (sometimes revive to 2)
5. Move out of the community

Although this might be covered along different lengths of time.

So we always need new people to keep joining our communities to keep a healthy balance between people at different stages.

Techies, developers, designers are highly creative people who interact with so many newly launched technologies across different platforms that if your developer community is based on a single or limited type of engagements then soon people might get inactive or less engaging faster. To solve this, you need to keep introducing different ways to reach them but not spam or intrude their privacy.

As an example, a member of your community based on slack might not be active anymore on chat because of too many slack organizations of which they are a part. But when you send them some emails (useful ones) about what's new going on, suddenly they revive!

📅 Goals at Stage Six Point Two:

1. Find new people to join

This could be through collaborations, being present at other communities and networking, asking current members to help. I've given a few examples in the previous stages on how collaboration can do wonders and associating with communities which are valued by techies will give you good validation too.

**2. Increase the avenues of engagements for your members.**

For example if your community is an email newsletter community, give them a place to participate in creating the newsletter wherein they are able to showcase what they are doing in tech.

When at Stage Six Point Two, ask the following questions:

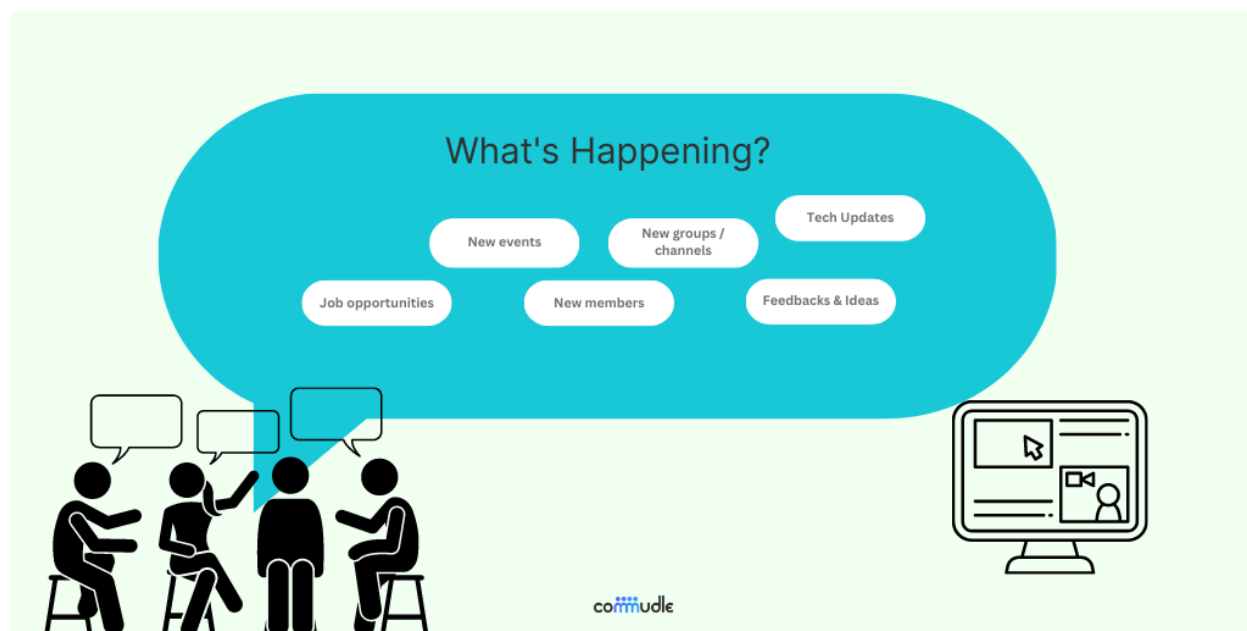
**1. How many members are active in my community?**

'Active' is defined by them registering for your events / reading or responding to your emails / responding to your chats on channels or any way which shows that they are consuming your content even if not responding all the time. Define a time period within which if a member doesn't respond or participate then they should be considered inactive.

**2. How can I get members to engage with each other or get to know more about other people in the community?**


This can be achieved by showcasing other member's work / achievements / needs and doing activities which can involve them with each other. It could be as simple as creating a list of people looking for a job and a list of people hiring. Achieving this without getting your members to sign up on a new platform.


👉 Tips at Stage Six Point Two:



- Tell people about what other people are building, contributing not just within your community's space, but in general in their lives/career, it might garner interest from others and inspire new members too.
- Be a super connector in your community, find out who needs what and find resources to help them. This will then become an automated cycle where you might just need to push slightly but regularly.

This sums up the stages where most communities spend the most part of their lifetime. But when you are a midsize to enterprise size organization, what happens when you have a breakout of this stage? That's next!

 **Fun Fact #7:** When we first rolled out the project sharing feature called 'Builds', we received about eighty projects shared by beginner to intermediate experience developers. Interestingly, about eighty percent of them created an account on Github to share those projects! Imagine how many more of such projects are yet to be explored.

 **How Commudle helps find insights for better engagements**  
 Insights are the most important when it comes to deciding the future course of your communities, that's why I'll put this section in a comparative way.

|                   | Without Commudle  | With Commudle   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| <b>Surveys</b>    | - Use multiple platforms to do surveys via forms from multiple accounts. Result is loss of valuable data              | + Forms are built into Commudle, whether your teammates change or new ones arrive, data is intact   |
| <b>Profiles</b>   | - You get very limited information which includes name, gender and work designation mostly.                           | + Commudle profile is a complete representation of your members' journey as a techie. You'll get to know about their updated interests, achievements, work history, community activities, participation, demographics, whether they are a content creator or a future community leader, and more! |
| <b>Activities</b> | - List of activities (like events or channels, whichever that platform supports), average activity in it, most active | + Your communities become active through multiple types of engagements with their members over time. Commudle captures  |

|                |  |  |
|----------------|--|--|
|                | members, count of events.                  | them all. List of activities, details and interests of participants, attendance, diversity and demographic distribution, polls, chats, feedbacks, etc.   |
| <b>Journey</b> | - You get to see individual activity stats | + Commudle displays a journey, how many members you gained and reached through each activity. But your communities are not just a list of events. What happens before and after that is also what Commudle captures! |

## Stage Seven: The Umbrella of New Programs

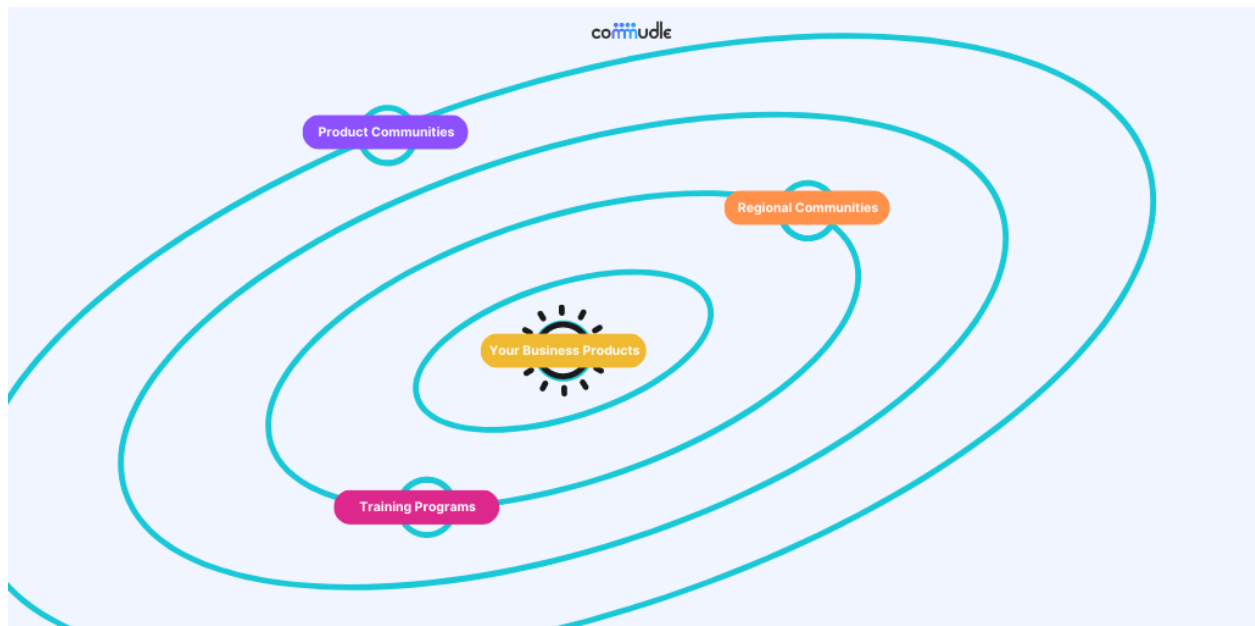


If you google through enterprise communities including Microsoft Ambassador Programs, Atlassian Communities and Google's own Google Developers, they also went through this stage



and grew exponentially. Microsoft has different communities for students and professionals. Google has Google Developer Groups (GDG), TensorFlow, Kotlin, GDG Cloud & more.

As your communities grow, it's a good practice to further diversify and distribute them into newer groups which are based on geographies / different products / technologies / purposes. This helps members better identify the groups of their interests and build a stronger network. This also helps in managing them better, plus gives you more targeted audiences. A member could be a part of multiple communities out of these based on their interests. For example, a member of the [Postman community ecosystem](#) might be receiving their newsletters, attending some webinars and also be a part of their support forum.



I've been fortunate enough to have witnessed this journey across multiple enterprise communities, some have sustained and grown beautifully and few have even gone back to initial stages due to lack of momentum from the leadership. There are two very contrasting examples today in 2023. Google began its programs as GTUG (Google Technology User Groups) probably when I was doing my graduation in some remotely beautiful part of India and didn't even have a hint that it existed. When I joined, the program had a new name GDG (Google Developer Groups). And over time I've seen it branch out into multiple programs like Developer Student Clubs (for college), communities for Flutter, TensorFlow, Firebase, Google Business Groups. All these are at different stages in their journey and some have grown less than others or even become inactive. But they're learning and evolving. On the other hand, there's Facebook Developer Circles (or may be Meta). I saw them as a very active and growing set of communities which immediately became popular amongst techies. But at the time of writing this, in early 2023, there's very rare activity which I see. It's all about how much the company wants to drive. If you're creating the 'Solar System' where planets are your communities, you need a 'Sun' to keep them alive, your company, your DevRel team is the Sun!

Let's jump to the pointers.

### Goal at Stage Seven:

There's just one

1. **Expand your communities' ecosystem**

Expansion can be based on regional presence (countries or cities), technologies/products (web, mobile, cloud, etc), experience level of developers, career goals, etc.

When at Stage Seven, ask the following questions:

1. **What are some of the most popular topics being discussed in my existing communities? Does it make sense to make separate communities for them?**

For example, if the population of mobile app developers is increasing constantly in your generic tech communities, you might want to create a new program for them which would be a space dedicated to those discussions. The members would find more relevant knowledge and network there and those who are not interested can choose not to join.

2. **What are the demographics (region, experience level, diversity) stats for my existing communities? Can and should I create separate communities for a particular type from the demographics to cater to their specific engagements?**

It might not always make sense to create a new program or communities altogether. As an example, if your audience is beginners in software development, these folks usually try their hands at multiple technologies. However if it's about UI/UX/Design, it might be a good idea to create a different space because the career path is different.

3. **Does my existing platform support this umbrella org feature or would I need to ask people to sign up somewhere else?**


If yes is the answer then find a solution to keep them on the same platform because shifting platforms gives you a huge amount of attrition (as big as 90%). This is something I saw when a large enterprise (no points for guessing) moved away from one to another platform to support their growing ecosystem and then they still are nowhere close to the number of people who were there on the first one. Result, they are still migrating after two years! Guess what? Commudle is capable of helping you achieve this!

### Tips at Stage Seven:

1. Migrating might not always be bad, it helps you find out how many people are actually active and want to be associated with your communities. A new platform might bring freshness and more modes of engagements which could help you grow faster.
2. Creating new programs requires you to run through the same set of questions as earlier because essentially you are introducing people to a new program. But it's a simpler job because you already have an audience and deep insights into it.
3. Include your existing members, advocates, community managers & organizers into the decision, they would always know it better than you, there might be some resistance

because their communities might appear to be getting diluted, but these people are the ones who will accelerate the growth of your new communities.

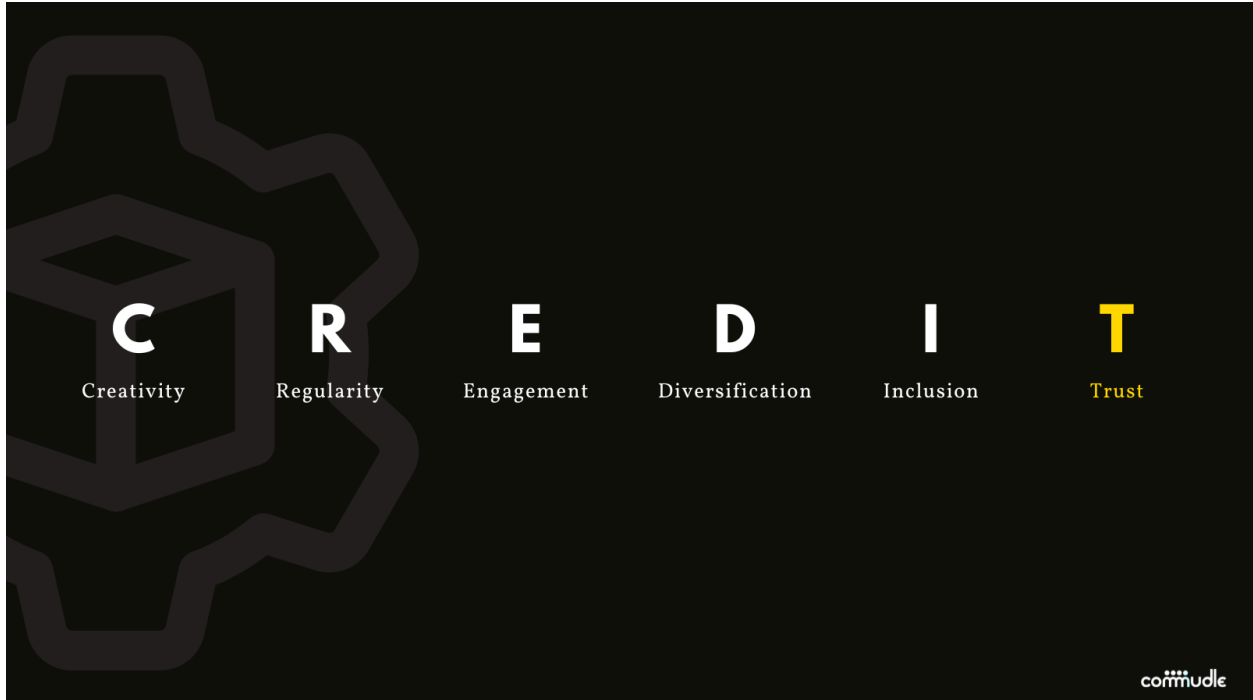
A healthy enterprise community cycles between Stages Seven and Six Point Two to keep evolving. However, some programs do reach saturation too, which brings us to the final part of this guide.

 **Fun Fact #8:** We have been a completely remote team, spread across multiple continents and roles. My Co-Founder and I met in person for the first time almost two years after we started working together. It almost feels like an in-house community seeing everyone helping each other!

#### How Commudle helps you grow your Community Ecosystem

- ✓ Organization: You can create an organization (org) on Commudle and move all your communities under it. This becomes your online identity. Anyone who visits the org page can find the desired communities of their interest and also participate in the latest activities, connect with heroes and contribute too.
- ✓ I have discussed insights above already, but when you have an org, you are able to get the bigger picture put together on the same dashboard to see what kind of a global impact your ecosystem is creating.
- ✓ Once again, as Commudle's users grow, based on their interests, they automatically will discover and join your communities if you are active!

## Introducing the CREDIT framework!



Here is a set of pillars which you can refer to back and forth, these are also everything which is present in this guide.

- **Creativity:** Communities are the most creative places, you will find new challenges very often in bringing people together and achieving the goals you've set because a community is not a company and not a competition either. Your members are not committed to being active, but still they value what you're doing for them. And you will need to find creative solutions for each activity you do! do something different with each event or activity we have in your communities, and it's super fun.
- **Regularity:** If you vanish then so do your members. Being in regular communication with them is very important. Mark your presence with helpful content and resources for your members and leaders through new programs and initiatives. Build some trademarks. For example, we started doing 'Developer Days' on various themes including mobile, web, cloud, etc every year.
- **Engagement:** It is the most essential thing to do. Different regions of the world have different types of audiences, some are very sincere, some need that extra push. You have created communities to engage with people, one way communication is boring.
- **Diversification:** When you reach the right stage, diversify your ecosystem. Create diverse communities not just by audience types or location, but also based on technologies and goals.
- **Inclusion:** Inclusivity is very very very important. From women in tech to people from different backgrounds, give a chance to everyone.
- **Trust:** This is gained over time, if you deliver value, people trust your community and its leaders. The largest communities and companies in the world are because their members and customers trust them. Trust is golden, if you achieve it, your ecosystem is a rich one!

Anytime you feel lost, find out which part needs to be CREDITed to your communities!

## Stage Eight: Saturation: From Survival to Revival



Why do people switch companies or jobs? Two important reasons out of the many are they get bored & see no further growth or they could've had a better manager & environment to work in.

I won't say that the same completely applies to communities too when people become inactive in one and are active in some other communities. But let's take an example from my experience. This is a community (still present, but struggling) of one of the large scale startups. For more than a year since I've been following it up, their member count has been increasing, probably a couple of hundred thousands. But if you go to the community webpage, there are seldom any registrations or questions & answers present. What happened was that they launched with a big bang, gave a lot of freebies and people joined in immediately. There was a lot of word of mouth too. But then, their activities kept on repeating, the same topic events, the same competitions in online groups, and so on. It took just about six to eight months and engagements declined, retention went through the floor, and eventually they were looking to close the program and find a new platform. See!!! Though platform is not the first culprit, yes it's a partner in what could've been better.

What I saw happen was, there was no reason for people to come back other than winning more goodies, eventually they were making it all about their product free trial and selling it eventually, the 'Community Spirit' was lost.

Why do communities reach saturation? Probably due to some of these reasons:

1. **Parking Mode:** Inactive community leaders

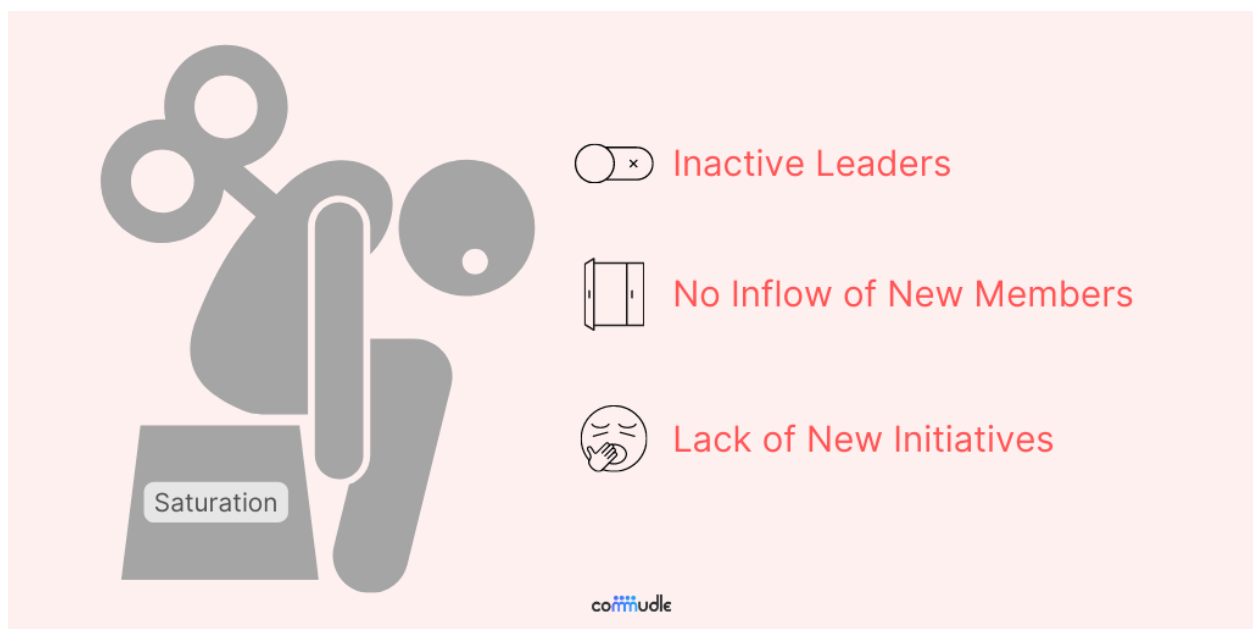
If you build your communities thinking they will run on autopilot, most probably they won't. There's a concept of community leaders, managers, heroes/stars, advocates, influencers, members, etc. It's the job of the community leaders to keep these activities going.

2. **No Traffic:** Low or zero inflow of new members

As I mentioned above, there needs to be a healthy mix of members who would be at different stages in their journey with your community. Imagine if everyone is in the less activity stage, it's obvious that most of your members are on the move out.

3. **Boring:** Lack of new initiatives

Keeping up with trends is important. If something new is happening in the world of tech which your members might be flocking towards, you must tap into it. If you are doing webinars which are informative, but have similar content repeatedly, then you are mostly getting new people to join but then that's just one touch point and they're gone. Craft a journey and get them to contribute back from what they've learnt. As an example, programs like Github Campus Expert, Microsoft MVP, Google Developer Student Clubs find new leaders periodically (over a year or so) from the most active members.



What happens at this stage with tech communities is that they get into a hibernation mode where new people do join in or post or participate, there's even regular programs running, but the ecosystem starts losing traction and then even the leadership decides to cut down on the budgets. It's a trickle down effect.

Though communities of this scale don't just die out overnight but it's a similar state.

Another thing (miracle!) happens is that they revive for a short period of time, because the company suddenly releases a product/tech which goes viral or due to some marketing activity (including giveaways).

If you are at this stage (I hope not, but it's an interesting challenge to solve):

### Goal at Stage Eight:

#### 1. Revival of the communities

The way to do this is the same, begin finding a goal to achieve in your communities. Use the CREDIT framework and it'll be easy! It's no rocket science, but will take efforts to bring back the trust and interest of people.

When at Stage Eight, ask the following questions:

#### 1. Is there any activity automatically happening in my community? If yes, then why?

If yes then it's great! Find out those who are active, find their 'why' and make it reach more people through them.

#### 2. Are my community leaders/organizers (not the employees) active? Would they become active?

It might be possible that one of your many community leaders might still be making efforts to keep their community running. Or maybe, they are not active for your organization, but are pursuing the leadership of some other community. What to do? Simple, ask for help. See if they are still interested and would want to commit to rekindle and grow the community they lead.

#### 3. Do I bring in new people (both members and organizers) or revive engagement with the existing folks?

Sometimes, bringing in fresh minds to lead the communities also helps because they have a higher level of enthusiasm and faith that it'll work. But someone who's experienced brings a level of maturity and better understanding of the people in that community.

#### 4. What exactly happened due to which I reached this stage of saturation?

Very important, yet overlooked. While there might be any reasons ranging from the past DevRel team to lack of budget, it's essential to know what didn't work for the end members and your community leaders that they stopped participating. It could be lack of structure in the program, or lack of target audience too.

#### 5. How do I revive engagements in my communities?

Obvious question 😊. I'd redirect you to Stage 1 and read up till stage three again!

#### 6. Does the platform I'm using to manage my communities support my growth plan?

If not, it might be a good idea to start migrating (to Commudle 😊), this way you'll keep the active members too.

### 👉 Tips at Stage Eight:

- Relax, it's not rocket science.
- Don't relax, get going, it will take time and effort to build things up again.
- Get back to the basics
- Don't hurry to migrate, platform could be just one of the reasons but not big enough.
- If you plan to migrate, start experimenting with a new platform, take feedback from people who are/have been active leaders in your community.

🌱 Fun Fact #9: We have developed most of the features in Commudle through years of live feedback and observations across communities. For instance, for about three months, I asked three questions at each event after the networking session viz. How many of you know each other?; Who all are hiring?; Who all are looking for jobs? Guess what, we built all these into the platform and people started using them immediately!

### 🔄 How Commudle helps you revive from the survival mode

- ✓ Being on a platform where techies are engaging with multiple communities is a big advantage for you. The best part is that your community members might already be active on Commudle and when you restart your engagements, they automatically notice and engage too!

## That's all my folks!

Though I thought it'll be less than 10 pages, my mentor asked me to write better, and if better means more, so be it. This sums up this guide or book or anything you might call it. I will keep updating it with more examples, fine tune it with 'feedback' 😊 as it's very important.

Finally, this is the image where it all began, it's a cycle I think communities go through, and it'll help you identify where you are. And if you relate, and need any help from me, I'm here! Just an email at arpan[at]commudle[fullstop]com will connect us! Or you could send me a message on my [Commudle profile](#)



# The Life of a Community

