

# **Stitching an Organisation's Knowledge Together Communities of Practice as Facilitator for Innovations Inside an Affiliated Group**

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# Outline of Presentation

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1. Opportunities and Challenges in an Affiliated Group

2. Communities of Practice as Knowledge Bridges

3. Empirical Research on Communities of Practice

4. Practical Implications

5. Conclusion

# Case Example: Robert Bosch GmbH



**BOSCH**

## Bosch Group

Sales: 38.2 billion euros<sup>1)</sup>  
Associates on Jan. 1, 2010:  
270,687

### Automotive Technology

Sales: 21.7 billion euros  
Share of total sales: 57%



### Industrial Technology

Sales: 5.1 billion euros  
Share of total sales: 13%



### Consumer Goods & Building Technology

Sales: 11.3 billion euros  
Share of total sales: 30%



<sup>1)</sup> Including other business areas



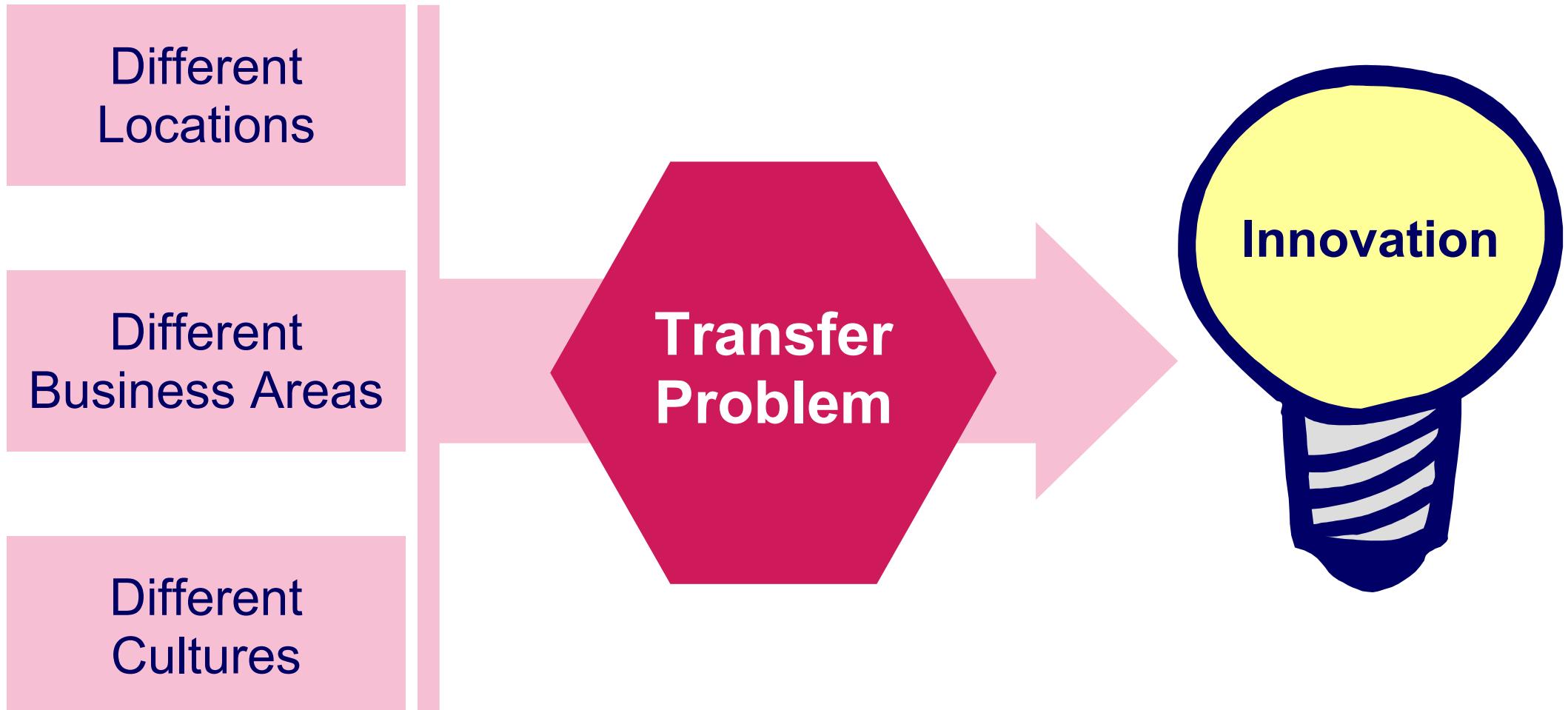
## International Activities

- Regional subsidiaries in more than 60 countries (~ 260 locations)
- Operating in about 150 countries

## Innovation as Basis for Business Success

- 3,800 patent applications in 2009
- Germany's largest patent applicant
- Spending in R&D in 2009 over 3,5 billion euro

# Diversity as Opportunity and Challenge



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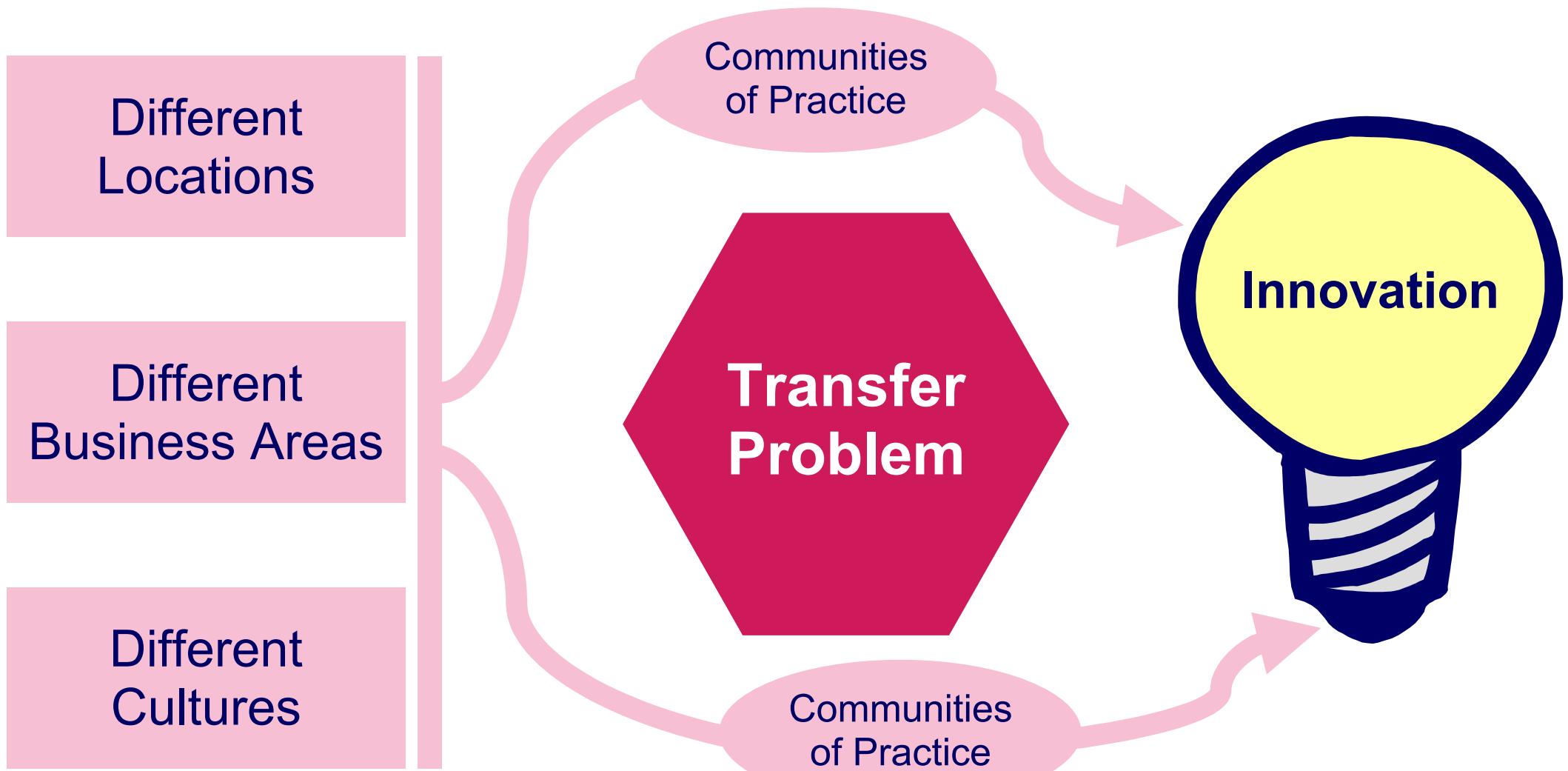
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# Overcoming the Transfer Problem



# General Idea of Communities of Practice (CoP)

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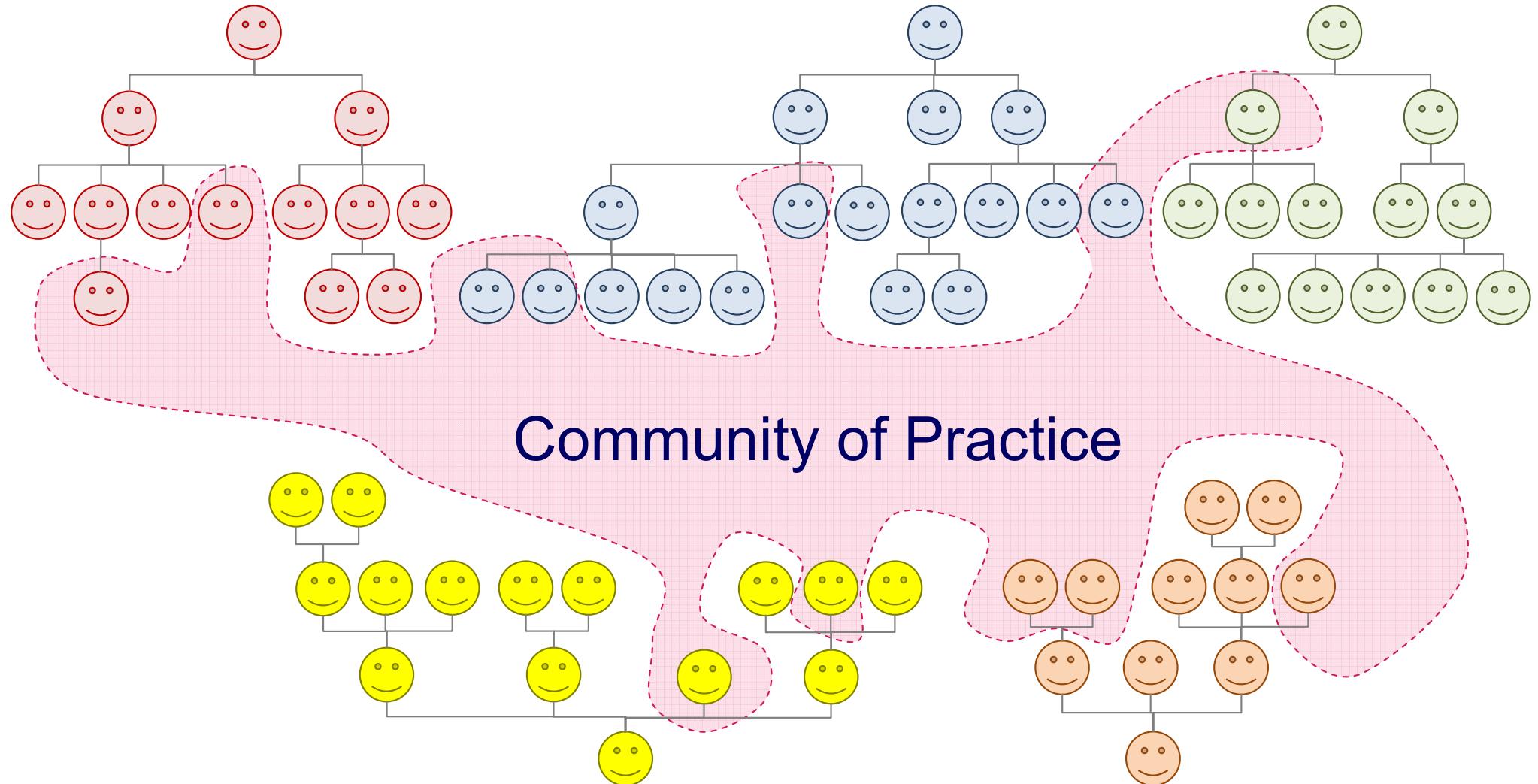
## CoPs in Knowledge Management

- Situated learning (learning in a social context)
- CoP = group of people with common interest in a topic
- Tool for knowledge identification, transfer and creation

## CoPs at Bosch

- First groups founded in Mid 90<sup>th</sup>
- About 150 active groups

# Overcoming Organisational Boundaries Through CoP



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# Qualitative Pilot Study

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## Approach

- Goal: Finding out how CoPs effects on intra-organisational collaboration
- Data collection: 22 semi-structured expert interviews
- Data evaluation: Qualitative content analysis

## Findings

- Strong relation between CoP and knowledge transfer
- Personal relations reduce cognitive barriers
- Successful groups spend more time on socialising and discussions after presentations, focus on one key topic per meeting

# Influence on Innovation

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# Correlation Between Communities of Practice and Innovation

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## Approach

- Calculation of the correlation between CoP participation and inventions
- CoP participation index = 
$$\frac{\text{no. of CoP participations in department}}{\text{employees in department}}$$
- Analysis of 405 engineering departments

## Findings

- Correlation verifiable ( $\tau = 0.121$ )
- Significance level of 0.01

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# Empowering Communities of Practice

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## CoP Spokesperson as Key Player

- Critical for success of the group
- Agenda as main steering tool

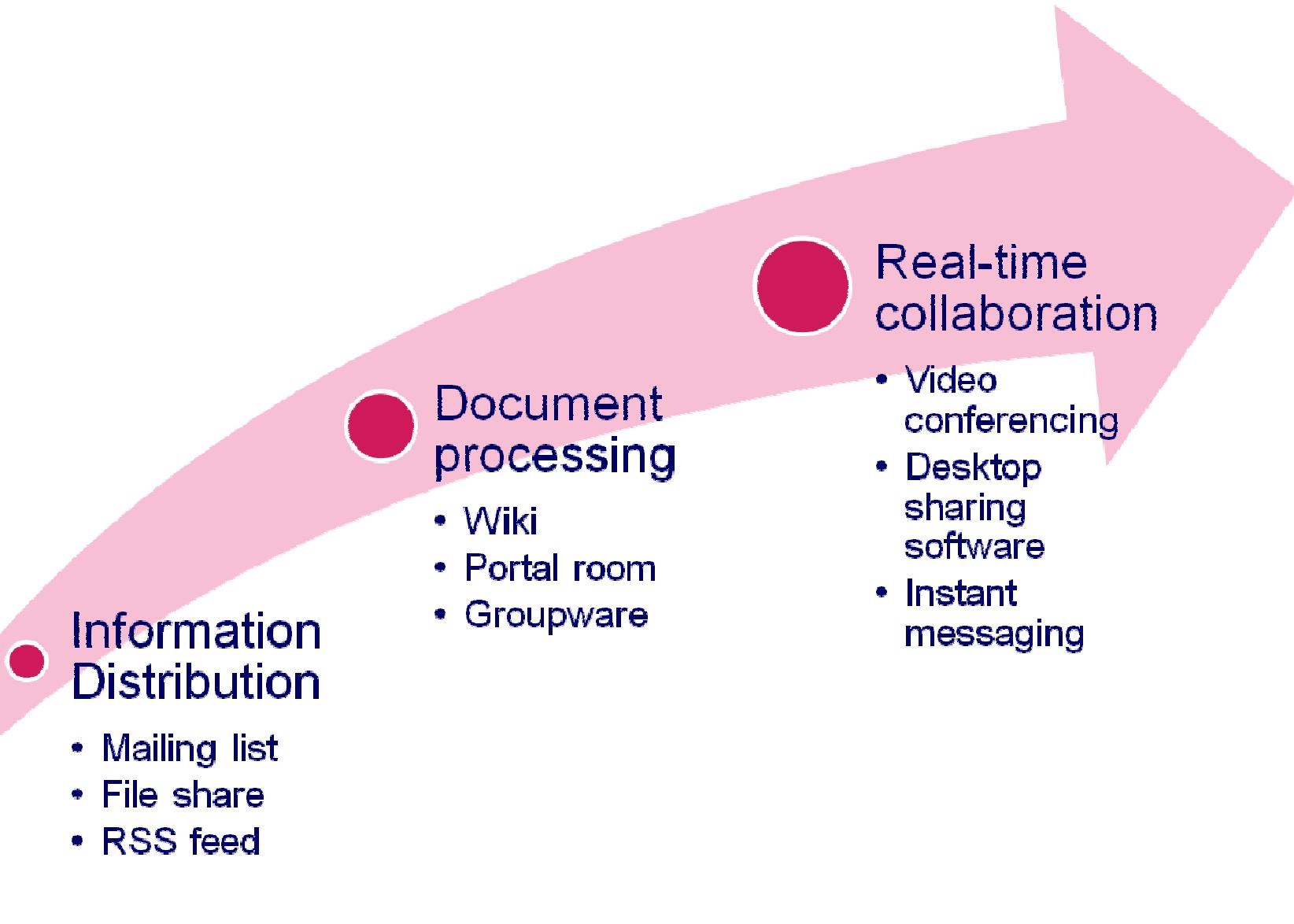
## High Influence of CoP Members' Supervisors

- Information about CoPs
- Support participation

## Support of an Organisation

- Clear rules e.g. for cooperation with joint ventures or external partners
- Offer adequate media support (media richness theory)

# Supporting Information and Communication Technology



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# Conclusion

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## Main Results

- CoPs can enhance innovation by knowledge transfer
- Socialising and discussions as major success factors
- Significant influence of spokesperson and members' supervisors
- Organisation can support CoPs by creating adequate surrounding conditions