There is a paradox that lies at the heart of all communities, arising from them comprising both groups and individuals. Do we define communities based on group or individual characteristics, and if we stress one, is that not to the detriment of the other?

Yes, it is and that is what we must live with. However, we all know that in group situations, there are individuals who stand out more than others. In the language industry, we have certain individuals who are innovators, doers and achievers. Call them what you will, but we are lucky to have some outstanding talent hard at work, pushing our global cultural and enterprise agendas. Among those leading the way for us is Anna Schlegel.

When I was rereading Schlegel’s book *Truly Global* (2016), I was particularly inspired by the concluding words of the final chapter: “globalization at corporations has become a whole science that is understood more and more as an invaluable asset. Companies that foster the localization team’s growth and let them run more like any other business will be able to meet any international challenge and will allow the company to be more successful globally. Globalizers make the world go round!”

This is the sharp end of all the theory and practice described in the foregoing text of the book. While I am regularly stunned by developments in our industry, the language community still needs greater cohesion to grab the attention of those C-suite types who truly have the power to change the world.

A key concept in Schlegel’s work is geo alignment. This is her shrewdly-devised solution to marshal all language, technical and business functions in the common goal of seizing the opportunities arising in a truly global economy. Alignment ensures that globalization is not centrally controlled by a company’s head office, but includes local expertise that we all know can vary considerably from one country to another or even one region to another. As such, much emphasis — in her book and larger life — is placed
on bridge-building, opening and maintaining lines of communication, spreading messages and so on. She is a strong advocate of practical solutions involving social media, training and executive involvement rather than by issuing lofty directives that may or may not be heeded. All good advice that ensures a healthy business community.

Aside from enterprise-wide organization, Schlegel uses her hard-won experience to organize the globalization teams that work under her. Similar principles apply. Make sure every functionary is aware of their immediate responsibilities and is able to communicate them proactively when required. Again, this plays into forging strong community links that can only benefit everyone involved.

Another key insight that cannot be repeated too often across our entire community is the need to plan localization and internationalization from the earliest inception in a project. Building the requirements to take products and services to the largest and most diverse markets into the first stage of the development life cycle gives teams concrete objectives to aim for and allows them opportunities for problem-solving that otherwise would have a team fire-fighting to remedy. Talking with her in person as well as reading her book, there are many similar nuggets of advice for globalization teams to create operational efficiency where chaos has the potential to rule.

But what about content, that precious resource that in the right hands will reward enterprises with rich returns? If dealing with the issues arising from a single language in a single culture can be a real headache, what kind of brain-breaking misery can multiple languages bring on? The potential for chaos is obvious, but a clear-headed understanding of how the content behaves in the market allows a globalization team to fulfill its requirements. A consequence of understanding globalized content is that strategies may well have to be rethought. Adaptive content management uses geo alignment to bring a dynamism that keeps goals in mind while appealing to as large a market as an enterprise wishes to satisfy.

In her book, Schlegel recounts how while pinpointing failures in localized projects gives rise to conflict and stress, the opportunity to align all interested parties on the same page results in more efficient spending, increased effectiveness in underperforming markets and a better appreciation of what works and what doesn’t.

Architecture, another good Greek word, is applied in all sorts of situations like communication, computer hardware and business services. So why not content management architecture too? Given the sophistication of the processes, workflow and logistics that we now use, the need for detailed plans is a given. In gathering together all the elements involved in a project and making each element aware of its relation to diverse others, we can see how geo alignment and well-structured communities fit together. We face having to choose the best option for our needs, and a properly designed architecture enables us to do this. Traditional language skills and automated tools are available and their use is always a subject that we agree on. However, as Schlegel points out, “good architecture avoids uploads and downloads as much as possible, and avoids adding extra steps in workflows.”

One interesting aspect of content management on a global scale involves decision-making regarding terminology and vocabulary. A simple correlation between source material and target simply does not exist. A multiplicity of targets combined with possibly complex technical terms and marketing-driven brand names, for example, require a similar multiplicity of informed decisions. Add in factors relating to ensuring compatibility of software tools and translator time, then set this against always looming deadlines for deliverables, and the need for precision management is clear. “Proper localization makes the user feel that the product they are interacting was created in the country,” Schlegel states. The need for linguistic creativity and innovation must be aligned with business savvy and cultural sensitivity.

To uninformed executives, the achievement of mounting global campaigns can seem somewhat miraculous. Clearly they catch on quickly, but Schlegel gets particularly excited about breaking new ground for enterprises seeking to target their products and services to wider audiences and markets. She explains in her book that “Localizing a press release, a white paper, and a website for an enterprise launch are some of the pieces of what make a strategy. However, many companies think
they go global simply by achieving a few marketing exercises.” Her ploy is to try to adopt the mindset of a valued customer and use insights from this point of view to organize resources that can be disseminated from a head office to satellite offices. In a sense, the globalization team performs a kind of meta-logistical role that ensures that the right action involving the right resources arrive in the right place at the right time for a coordinated rollout. What CEO will not be won over by the sudden influx of international revenue? After all, is it not money that makes the business world go round?

It’s easy to couch financial results in simple numerical terms, but is this the only metric necessary to assess success? As Schlegel puts it, “volume metrics will not be enough.” Her treatment of the distinction between black-box and transparent metrics is truly insightful. Black-box metrics involve project specifics ranging from language quality parameters to workflow issues to budgetary matters and other internal factors. Transparent metrics, on the other hand, involve information relating to returns from investment, market reactions — including from competitors — and suitability of localized content. These important indicators enable future decision-making about what works and what does not. Hard information like this hones an enterprise’s competitive edge. Again, the value of well-planned globalization as an essential tool on the business workbench sells itself as a commercial imperative.

You may have your globalization teams, plans and architectures in place, but what about the people actioning the whole shebang? Talent, commitment and passion are all givens across the human resources spectrum. What do team members need in order to rise even higher above the status of gifted linguists, engineers or managers? Schlegel likes to use the term champion to distinguish these heroes of the international business battlefield. Champions advocate. They marshal forces, gathering enterprise resources in many roles and in many locations and lead the way by alignment. We always refer to competition in business, but might not always focus on being competitors. What are champions if not competitors who want to win and have the grit, determination and skills to do it?

Champions motivate by example and winners are recognizable in every culture worldwide. What better advertisement for the solid gold value of a truly professional globalization team than the standout figures of world-class winners?

Schlegel is a self-confessed globalist. As a co-founder and president of Women in Localization, she can lay claim to a place at the forefront of the language industry. It’s not easy being a linguist and certainly not easy being a woman in the language industry, especially at a high-tech giant. Nor is it easy to distinguish yourself as an innovator who commands respect from business peers. It is understandably easy for members of the language community, particularly young entrants, to feel alone, lost and to lose the motivation to stay in it. However, when we have leaders like Anna Schlegel showing us the way, our multilingual, multiservice, multipurpose journey is a lot easier. [M]