

Community of Practice (CoP)

General assessment

The results of the Delphi studies conducted by the SLIDE project partnership show that interviewed experts consider Community of practice averagely suitable for students (on a scale from 1(min) to 5 (max) score 2,7/5) including students with learning and behavioral difficulties (2,8/5 score).

Communities of practice work on 2 main levels:

In the short period, they foster the design and implementation of innovative strategies for organizations and schools but also the improvement of the work experience for community members (particularly with regard to a sense of participation, belonging, teamwork and the ability to make a contribution to the group and receive adequate help).

In the long term, they can boost the development of organizational competencies (the capacity for strategic implementation, knowledge development, organizational creativity, risk and conflict management, communication skills) and support professional development through upgrading a sense of identity and the expansion of professional skills and professional social network.

<http://amsacta.unibo.it/6838/1/Turrini%20M.%20%282021%29%20-%20Le%20comunit%C3%A0%20di%20pratica%20nella%20scuola.pdf>

Aim

The aim of a community of practice is to create a safe networking environment in which people/institutions with the same goals and needs can share and develop their experiences and knowledge.

In other words, a Community of Practice is an informal group, usually organized by people with the same view, interest and aims, who share a collective goal to achieve or topic to develop

and deal with. These are for example groups of forums to share ideas and interest, where participants join to learn from each other focusing on trying to find a solution or an innovation, depending on the topic. Although CoPs are usually informal aggregations, they have a facilitator to start discussions, coordinate CoP functioning and ensure an appropriate atmosphere.

Communities of Practice meet in person or online, to analyze and speak on subjects related to peculiar field/matter or interest.

This creates the possibility to share different experiences, compare methods and solutions that help members to solve a problem or upskill their knowledge.



Based on Allan, B. (2008). Knowledge creation within a community of practice

Target group

People/institutions with common interest in a specific field. The target can be whoever with the same interest or knowledge, either they are stakeholders, students, teachers, workers, etc.

Description

Origins:

Although it can be said that the definition of Communities of Practice was coined recently, CoPs are not a modern invention, they are not a phenomenon born in the internet era and strictly dependent on recent technological innovations. CoPs have always been there.

Social structures have been based on communities of practice since ancient times. One of the concepts that underlies CoPs and can help to better understand them is that of *apprenticeship*. Communities of Practice are for the apprentice like a kind of living curriculum because being a member of a CoP in itself defines a whole set of knowledge and skills without which, one cannot join the chosen community. Recently this type of social aggregation structure has been rediscovered especially in the labor market. Within companies, CoPs have become increasingly popular as they have been identified as a key factor in the dissemination of knowledge within organizations and a tool of personal and professional growth for workers.

Internet and intranets has contributed to the spread of the CoP phenomenon while adding nothing significant to it, under the point of view of its functioning and aims.

Main structure:

The concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) was formulated by Étienne Wenger, who defined these organizations as “groups of people who share an interest in something they do and learn to do it better while interacting regularly”. Wenger identifies three characteristics that distinguish a CoP from any other aggregation. What defines a CoP is the presence of a “**domain**”: a topic that unites all its members. Indeed, membership in it implies a sense of belonging and a commitment by each person regarding the “domain” around which it is formed. The second requirement of a CoP is that the people of which it is composed learn and share, on an ongoing basis, what they know (**community**). Third, a CoP must be made up of professionals who develop a common and shared repertoire of norms, procedures, information, symbols, objects, tools and problem-solving methods (**practice**) [E. Wenger, “Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity” 1998].

Communities of Practice can be more or less visible. They range from literature newsgroups or social media groups to a group of colleagues discussing in front of the coffee machine about this or that problem to solve.

Communities of Practice can thus be found everywhere. This is at least at the potential level. Indeed, not every group of people sharing a job can be said to be part of a Community of Practice.

How do you recognize a CoP?

The factors that differentiate a working group from a community of practice are at least two. The first is the time limit. A community of practice cannot have a time limitation. It is evident that a CoP also has its own “life”. While for the work group the achievement of the purpose means the end of the group, for the CoP the purpose is to improve work practices and this task has potentially no end.

The other difference, more important than the time limit, is the fact that a work group usually is promoted and organized by an external will (often the employer). CoPs, on the other hand, arise spontaneously on the impetus of the need that some people feel to improve their work practice and knowledge and mitigate their sense of loneliness. CoPs cannot be managed from the outside. Their management is left to the members who belong to them.

Evaluation

The evaluation of a Community of practice job and results are not measurable or easy to standardize. CoPs can be considered to work successfully whether:

- There is cooperative interaction within members of the group
- There is an actual ongoing process of knowledge creation
- There is an actual ongoing process of new skills acquisition
- There is an actual ongoing process of problem solving

Knowledge created and problem-solving skills acquired by members become a Cop patrimony and make the basis for further CoP activities

Problem behavior risk

The method helps develop transversal soft skills such as autonomous work, as you are one while offering your contribution, your solution or your experience; collaboration with others, as after you have shared your knowledge you have to be able to listen to others, to take comments and to work together with other members to grow and feed the community; but also ethical communication, motivation and self-organization.

Under this perspective, it can be a useful method to develop these skills in students.

Effort

The first effort is to either find an already existing CoP suitable for the teachers' goals and field of interest, or to start a new one (see below for instructions).

In the case of starting a new one it is fundamental to have clear in mind what is the field of interest so to receive adequate participation requests from future members.

Degree of innovation

On a scale from 1 (max) to 5 (Min) the experts involved in our Delphi study have rated the method 2,2.

Experience with the method

On a scale from 1 (max) to 5 (Min) the experts involved in our Delphi study have stated to be experienced with the method 2,3.

More details here <https://www.humanreef.com/blog/how-to-build-a-community-of-practice>

Brief instruction how to implement a Community of Practice

To start a CoP these are the main steps:

1. Create a group or start from an existing one
2. Define your goals starting from the interest you have in common
3. Start your Cop with a kick off meeting and keep working on it and keep it alive!

At the beginning there should be one person or a restricted group of persons starting the conversation, launching the CoP and the first meeting so to somehow break the ice and let the CoP begin and continue.

Search access, links, websites

[Community of Practice Start Guide](#)

[Communities of Practice \(CoP\)](#)

Literature

<http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice>

[https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/#:~:text=A%20community%20of%20practice%20\(CoP,both%20individual%20and%20group%20goals](https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/#:~:text=A%20community%20of%20practice%20(CoP,both%20individual%20and%20group%20goals)

Wenger, E. (2004). Knowledge management is a donut: shaping your knowledge strategy with communities of practice. *Ivey Business Journal*, Jan/Feb, 1-8.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. Harvard Business School Press.

Wenger, E. & Snyder, W. (2000) Communities of practice: the organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 139-145.

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https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/diverse-hands-touching-white-paper-mockup-pink-wallpaper_12193220.htm#query=community&position=10&from_view=search&track=sph Image by rawpixel.com on Freepik



Useful Tools

[The Communities of Practice Playbook. A playbook to collectively run and develop communities of practice](#)