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Building Effective Working Relationships among Academics through Participation in Communities of Practice

*Adeola Folasade Akinyemi, Vuyisile Nkonki,
Lulekwa Sweet-Lily Baleni
and Florence Rutendo Mudehwe-Gonhovi*

Abstract

This chapter addresses the significance and importance of communities of practice in the professional development of academics as university teachers. It documents the role of communities of practice in enabling and enhancing the development of a professional knowledge base, the acquisition of skills, and competencies for effective teaching practice, as well as the dissemination of practical knowledge needed within a community of teaching practitioners. It provides details of how a community of practice comes into being, and how working relations within a community of practice are fostered. There is an elaboration on how members of a community of practice come to perceive their substantive issues the same way, and how a common agenda is formed around those issues. It also discusses peculiar ways of dealing with the identified issues, and the manner in which expertise, resources, resourcefulness and experiences are exchanged and shared with improvement, change and further development of academics' teaching practices in sight.

Keywords: communities of practice, collaboration, mutual engagement, participation, problem solving, commitment

1. Introduction

Communities of practice (CoP) are group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who through joint efforts fulfil both individual and group goals. Building effective working relationships among academics through their participation in communities of practice is very important as ways of collaborating, sharing ideas, mutual engagements as well as knowledge sharing. Good working relationships among colleagues in an organisation help to achieve the aims and objectives as well as promoting good outcomes among members of the organisation. This chapter will be on communities of practice and how to build effective working relationships among academics through their participation. The types of

communities of practice existing among universities' lecturers, especially towards maintaining effective working relationships will be considered. Also, social learning theory which primarily focused on theorising the concept of community of practice will be considered as part of the scope of this chapter. The activities the academics engaged in such communities of practice and how such activities are carried out will also form the scope of this chapter. In addition, why focus on communities of practice among academics as well as relevance of communities of practice to their professional development will also be considered.

2. Communities of practice

The CoP are expedient ways of building working relationships among academics as university teachers. Building effective working relationships can only be achievable through commitment, engagement, mutual understanding, interactions, collaborations, willingness to participate and contribute, and the determination to assist others for the sake of their professional development. CoP may exist among academics within the same department or other departments in the same university. Sometimes, CoP could extend to other universities where academics from various departments in different universities relate and collaborate as groups. The common adage that says "a tree cannot make a forest", is so true and real when it comes to CoP. People must come together as a group and before such group can evolve, they must have aims and objectives to achieve. Creating such a group must be purposive, vision and mission driven. Such a group should operate informed by the guiding rules and principles for actions of group members. Hence, CoP are imperative, purposive and cannot just be accidental.

As a model of professional development, CoP is an approach to teachers' professional development which enable academics to learn from and with their colleagues within their universities' communities [1]. The concept of CoP dates back to early 1990s. [2] in their work draw from the situated learning. Situated learning came into light as a result of learning among practitioners which take place in social relationships in their workplace instead of classroom. [2] view this concept as fostering interactions among workers which is inclusive of workers that are experts and trainees. It involves forming and norming which is necessary for the process of creating professional identity for trainees. The forming stage is the initial stage of putting the group together. At this stage, each member learns about their group needs, expectations and challenges. The norming stage is the phase where the team actually starts to function and work as a team. At this stage, members begin to understand each other's work practices and ethic. Group members' roles and responsibilities are clearly defined at this stage, rules guiding the members are defined, expectations from the members are set and teamwork begin among group members. In the interactions, experts serve as professionals who are consulted by new members and offer them professional advices. Through such interactions, problems were identified, experts learn more while new members also became experts through professional support offered to them. Few years later, Wenger developed on the situated learning through an empirical study of one insurance firm where Etienne focused primarily on theorising the concept of community of practice [3]. The key premise of his theoretical work is that CoP can arise in any domain of human endeavour, or organisation. This speaks to the wider scope of application of CoP as a framework that informs, frames, and focuses on professional development activities in different organisations, including educational settings.

It is also expected that universities' lecturers who have experience should build strong CoP where they will groom young graduates who have passion for research and teaching especially those who are willingly to go into teaching profession in

higher education institutions. The willingness to embark on this journey of professional development is critical for the success of a CoP. Once practitioners are willing to do so, then support from senior colleagues in terms of collaboration and mutual engagement is highly recommended. [4] in their study on collaboration and mutual support as processes established by CoP to improve continuing professional teachers' development claim that effective participation of teachers in CoP is key to having mutual relationships among members through engagement in collaborative learning activities. This implies that teachers are expected to be active members in CoP, and participation is key to forge mutual relationships among group members by engaging in collaborative learning activities for their professional development.

CoP are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis [5]. The people involved must identify a problem, have passion for the tasks involved and must be experts in that area. One thing that is peculiar with CoP is that, the communities occur when a group of people who have desire to achieve certain things come together, interact and jointly work together to achieve their goals. Thus, CoP can occur anywhere, in a school, university, college or in an organisation. [6] note that CoP are groups of persons who have concerns or desire for certain things they engaged with and they show willingness to learn how to improve on it by interacting often with their group members.

Learning within CoP involves three essential processes, namely:

- evolving forms of mutual engagement;
- understanding and tuning (their) enterprise;
- developing (their) repertoire, styles and discourses [3] (p. 95).

Mutual engagement among members of the CoP help them to know each other sufficiently well and interact productively among themselves. This also helps them to build trust among themselves, making them comfortable addressing real problems together and communicating with truth. Members also give and receive helping hands within the communities of practice. Hence, learning within a community of practice happens as a result of that community and its interactions.

Understanding and tuning enterprise indicates the level of learning energy among members of the community. Members share and have a common mission or objectives which are expected to be achieved. It demonstrates how much effort the community puts in keeping the learning at the centre of its initiative. Thus, the community must show leadership in pushing for development as well as maintaining a spirit of inquiry. They need to recognise and address gaps in its knowledge as well as remain open to emergent directions and opportunities.

Developing repertoire, styles and discourses shows the extent of self-awareness within the community. Members have a shared set of routines or principles of doing things which they have adopted as part of their practice. This shows how self-aware the community is about the selection, i.e. developing and its effects on practice.

2.1 What communities of practice look like?

In CoP, there are different activities taking place, these especially depend on the nature and purpose of such community. **Table 1** below gives a clear picture of what CoP look like depending on the educational functions that they are meant to serve.

Table 1 below shows that different functions served by CoPs. Different scholars and in different organisations [4] use different names for CoPs. The different names

Practices	Varieties of activities
<i>Problem solving</i>	"Can we work on this design and brainstorm some ideas; I'm stuck."
<i>Requests for information</i>	"Where can I find the code to connect to the server?"
<i>Seeking experience</i>	"Has anyone dealt with a customer in this situation?"
<i>Reusing assets</i>	"I have a proposal for a local area network I wrote for a client last year. I can send it to you and you can easily tweak it for this new client."
<i>Coordination and synergy</i>	"Can we combine our purchases of solvent to achieve bulk discounts?"
<i>Building an argument</i>	"How do people in other countries do this? Armed with this information it will be easier to convince my Ministry to make some changes."
<i>Growing confidence</i>	"Before I do it, I'll run it through my community first to see what they think."
<i>Discussing developments</i>	"What do you think of the new CAD system? Does it really help?"
<i>Documenting projects</i>	"We have faced this problem five times now. Let us write it down once and for all."
<i>Visits</i>	"Can we come and see your after-school program? We need to establish one in our city."
<i>Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps</i>	"Who knows what, and what are we missing? What other groups should we connect with?"
<i>Adapted from [6].</i>	

Table 1.
Practices and different activities taking place in communities of practice.

are learning networks, teacher clusters, teacher networks, professional and affiliation networks, learning team model, workplace learning, collaborative teacher research, thematic groups, or tech clubs, networked learning communities and collaborative practices [1, 6–9].

2.2 Benefits of communities of practice

Participating in a CoP should have an impact in academics' professional development, as group members and as individuals. The benefits of communities of practice according to [10–17] are as follows:

- a. Allowing employees to manage change. CoP offer opportunities to link people with common interest and it is an avenue of maintaining connections with peers. Teachers form CoP in response to changes originating from the school system such as inadequate access to professional development.
- b. Providing access to new knowledge. In a community of practice where teachers collaborate directly, use one another as sounding boards, and teach each other, it empowers the individual teacher, opening access to new knowledge and skills.
- c. Fostering trust and a sense of common purpose. As teachers in the CoP share ideas and experiences, they often develop a shared way of doing things, a set of common practices and a greater sense of common purpose, thus helping them to develop professionally.
- d. It helps in adding value to professional lives. CoP often form around topics teachers have invested many years in developing. They do not just focus on common interests alone but also on practical aspects of a particular practice,

everyday problems, new tools, ideas and developments in their fields, things that are working out fine and those that are not working perfectly.

- e. It promotes professional recognition among practitioners. In CoP, the collaborative support offered to members bring about recognition of talents and skills among group members. This gives room for showcasing talent among group members and such talents are embraced to support group members who need assistance.
- f. Encouraging loyalty and commitment amid stakeholders. Mutual engagement among group members and willingness to support make the group members to be loyal to one another. Members are committed to achieving their stated goals, thus, it is expected of individuals to be committed to their roles to make their community successful.
- g. Improving efficiency of processes. Working as groups with determination and dedication bring about productivity. Thus, in CoP, interactions, collaborations and mutual engagements among members bring about efficiency and development.

2.3 Types of communities of practice

CoP is seen as an essential model that enhances professional development. There are different types of CoP and these depend on the nature and purpose of such CoP. [3] argues that CoP are present everywhere and different kind of people are part of such community. The CoP could be at place of work, high school, university, college, home, civic or leisure places. Different activities and engagements are meant to take place in such community, however, group members have their objectives to be achieved. For instance, CoP among university lecturers are meant to promote professional development such that professional assistance and support are rendered to group members through mutual engagements, collaborations and interactions. According to [5, 18], the different types of CoP are:

- Small or big CoP
- Short-lived or long-lived CoP
- Co-located or distributed CoP
- Homogeneous or heterogeneous CoP
- Inside boundaries or across boundaries CoP
- Spontaneous or intentional CoP
- Unrecognised or institutionalised CoP
- Virtual CoP

In order to have a clearer picture and comprehensive types of CoP and detailed activities in each type of CoP, [19] highlight different types of CoP based on structural features of CoP. The structural features of CoP are categorised into four categories namely:

- a. Demographic Category
- b. Organisational Category
- c. Individual Category
- d. Technological Category

2.3.1 Demographic category

Under demographic category, three types of CoP are recognised as:

- Young or old CoP. This type of CoP specifically outlines the period of time a community has been in existence. Some CoP have been in existence over a period of time, thus, they are old CoP, while some are just being formed, hence such are referred to as young CoP.
- Small or big CoP. Every community have their group members and the number of members for each community determine the extent of the size. Group members of a small community are usually few while in a big community members are many and in most cases they are up to hundreds in number.
- Short-lived or long-lived CoP. Some CoP came into existence just to cater for immediate need of their group members just for a temporary arrangement for the purpose of achieving some things. These types of CoP are short-lived, because they are formed for a temporary time. Long-lived CoP are those that are formed to exist permanently and the group members did not have any time frame of how long such communities will be in existence.

2.3.2 Organisational category

The following three types of CoP are listed under organisational category:

- Spontaneous or intentional CoP. This type of CoP came into being to meet the group members' spontaneous needs through sharing and interaction. The CoP is formed intentionally for the purpose of meeting the needs of group members.
- Inside boundaries or across boundaries: In some organisations, CoP exist within the organisation, this type of CoP is known as inside boundaries. The across boundaries CoP exist across the organisation unit or departments.
- Unrecognised or institutionalised: In some organisations, there are some relationships that exist among workers which made them to form CoP, though such CoP are formed within the organisation, they are unrecognised because such are formed by relationships that exist among some workers. The institutionalised CoP is being recognised and official position is being given to group members.

2.3.3 Individual category

The following two types of CoP are identified under this category

- Co-located/distributed. In this type of CoP, a CoP is co-located when members meet at the same place because of the proximity they share. This is usually feasible when the community is still growing. When the community is fully grown with many members who do not stay in same location, then the CoP will be distributed. Members in distributed CoP will be expected to meet regularly by organising seminars, conferences in the same venue for their meetings.
- Homogeneous or heterogeneous: This type of CoP is determined by the cultural background of members. When members are from the same discipline or areas of specialisation, such CoP is homogeneous. The CoP is heterogeneous when group members are from different disciplines and areas of specialisations.

2.3.4 Technological category

In technological category, most CoP now meet virtually because of moving towards digital age and most organisations depend on the use of technology of different forms. Virtual CoP is an advantageous for member to meet irrespective of distance barriers unlike in face to face CoP.

3. Building effective working relationships among academics in communities of practice

Good working relationships are essential for production and collaborations among academics. Many times people struggle with their challenges and shortcomings in their own silos. [3] contends that CoP result in three structural elements, which are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. These elements usually result in one having a sense of belonging and participation by members vary from individual to individual [5]. Sharing ideas allows for reflection, better understanding, better navigation of knowledge, creation of new knowledge and ideas, and creates confidence among participants [20]. They argue that dialogic negotiations of knowledge can result in friendships being created over time. However, constructive negotiations in CoP have nothing to do with friendship but rather common interest and goals [3].

CoP can either be formal or informal [2] and in both instances there is need for engagement and collaboration [3]. Research has shown that learning often takes place in non-formal situations through interaction as they share experiences and ideas [21]. CoP generate trust and positive working relationships, because group members have sense of belonging, which enable professional development among group members [22]. Trust is a key element for engagement and productivity. Without trust it is difficult for academics to engage in productive dialogue, be at liberty to share their knowledge and expertise, it is difficult for one to be vulnerable in an environment where they do not trust the people they are expected to engage with. According to Poultney [23], due to the trust that CoP generate, it is easier for participants to connect and collaborate resulting in effective professional development for academics. Research has shown that positive working relationships give participants a sense of belonging [24] and as a result take ownership and responsibility for their development [25]. Sense of belonging and ownership create positive energy among the academics and their desire for all to develop encourages collaboration and engagement. A positive environment allows participants to share their expertise, share their experiences without fear of prejudice or being judged,

allowing for positive criticism from team members thereby resulting in continuous development and shorter times of task completion.

Tips for creating successful CoP as suggested by [26] are;

- Clarify who the community is for-this will help in identifying the focus and content that is needed for that particular community
- Get those people together regularly-this helps build trust among the players and get easier to create a safe space for the team members to ensure that they are comfortable sharing their areas of expertise and identify strengths, which will benefit the community.
- Start by sharing stories- allows you to find the gaps and new areas of interest and develop connections, which will allow for collaborations.
- Create opportunities for learning, building trust, adding value, and supporting each other- allows participants to identify areas of interest that they might be interested in trying out.
- See what works and turn up the good-gives room for the community to evaluate and see what is best for them and drop the things that are not working well.

It can, therefore, be concluded that it is important to create and sustain positive working relationships in CoP for effectiveness, networking, sharing of ideas and positive change. CoP allow members to work in flexible and informal environments where everyone is a potential knowledge contributor.

4. Wenger social learning theory

Social learning is routinely conflated with various thoughts, between the thought itself and its potential outcomes. This nonattendance of sensible clearness has limited our capacity to assess whether social learning has occurred and given that this is valid, what kind of acknowledging has happened, how much, between whom, when, and how [27]. [27] argue that to be seen as social learning, a cycle must:

- show that a change in comprehension has happened in the individuals being referred to;
- display that this change goes past the individual and gets organised inside more broad social units or organisations of preparing; and
- occur through social associations and cycles between performers inside a casual network.

A clearer picture of what these researchers mean by social learning is that learning must take place through interactions with others within the same group by utilising the social learning hypothesis by [3].

The initial work of [2] was the stepping stone for [3] social theory of learning on CoP which tested long-standing thoughts about learning. Specifically, they contended that learning is not an individual effort but a social cycle that is arranged in a social organised setting. A vital reason of his hypothetical work is that CoP can emerge in

any space of human undertaking, as long as people share a common personality in their school of thought. As such, learning happens in various social practices through support in shaping the development of a bigger project some time. Etienne's investigation of learning in settings other than formal instructive settings can help a large number of us working in education to think differently about learning.

The four main premises of social learning by [28] are:

- We are social beings. This shows that there should be social participation of all members of the CoP.
- Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises.
- Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises.
- Meaning - our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful.

As Wenger puts it, CoP develop in stages and phases such as formation, integration and transformation [5]. Learning develops through active participation in the different stages.

Wenger's framework is used to address complex 21st century learning [29]. The theory centres around the vital worth made by social learning, recognising the sorts of significant values, flowing a model learning. The recognised values are the direct value, potential value, applied value, realised value, enabled value, and transformative value. Wenger's work is adopted from education with a view to professionalise teachers. The body of knowledge is much more alive, which is the community being engaging with the practice and hopefully to engage with each on what the practice is and what good practice is and what not good practice is and so forth. In a social theory of learning, CoP contemplate that learning takes place in a social setting and demands both participation and reification for meaningful learning.

The traditional approach to learning is described as a vertical view of learning where somebody assumes that one person knows and that information is passed to somebody who does not know [30, 31]. Social learning is the horizontal view of learning assumes that you and I are in a partnership and we negotiate what is it that we know is and how we understand it in our own contexts.

In this theory, learning occurs in cycles and starts in conversations, designs, problem solving, bench-marking and many more. Social learning should generate different types of values that describe a specific cycle [32] like engaging as learning partners in debating, creating a document together, going to a field trip together. Immediately you get to know each other and a person understands you, have fun, one feels inspired. This is the first cycle of learning and value one gets from just participating, called immediate value. Immediate value generates from enjoying to be in each other's company, producing great ideas and inspirations and forming new connections and collaborations among each other. The main idea or activity will be producing a particular purpose. In the quality of the conversation among stakeholders, sharing different world views, different angles of solving a problem, and creating networks, produce a potential value. The potential value is a second cycle of learning which may or may not end up profiting participants.

Learning does not end with the potential value in the theory by Wenger, but proceeds to the trying of the feedbacks you receive from the gathering as the third cycle termed applied value. In this cycle one learns when going back into the organisation and applying the new ideas, follow-up in connections and do a new project together.

The cycle is accompanied by the change in practice as the result of the learning partnership activity. In a way people create multiple opportunities of learning. The creative nature of the CoP is when participants put acquired knowledge into practice. Creativity involves re-learning and generation of new knowledge leading to the fourth cycle of the realised value. One can see the changes in an institution.

Whether the implementation of new knowledge is a success or a failure one needs to have feedback loops because it is important for further learning. The feedback develops the learning loops to make learning relevant, adaptive and dynamic. A project Support team and community leadership roles are crucial in the learning process because activities such as logistic preparation, facilities, technology, and agenda design to mention a few need to be considered. It is the key aspect of the learning process to develop the implementation strategy. To acknowledge the strategic value, the nature of the vital discussions is the fundamental piece of social learning among the partners and permit them to accommodate their exercises into the master plan. This is called the enabling value. Notwithstanding, learning is not being restricted to an improvement and execution, it can likewise create new points of view or new meanings of achievement, and it can much trigger more extensive social and institutional changes, named transformative value or reframing value [32]. The transformative value or last cycle is the most dramatic aspect of learning.

As such it is significant that every one of these pieces ought to be set up and there should be a unique stream among them for figuring out how to have any kind of effect in this day and age. The value creating cycles makes one to be aware of where to focus attention. Setting of goals before you start a project with partners and choosing what conditions to follow, should be set up. The framework can also be used to evaluate the project and follow indicators to each cycle. Embedding social learning in the project is a strategic imperative. This is not only meant for students but also CoP in terms of academic staff development. The last cycle dimension takes the assumptions of where world ought to be in applying the flexible process in the ever-changing world operations especially in the academic environment. Therefore, social learning theory on communities of practice are bothered about learning in having the effect in the quickly evolving world, the principles of the game-changing: science is changing, innovation is changing, and international affairs is evolving. In reality, things are excessively powerful and complex.

5. Different activities academics undertake in communities of practice

CoP are described with three measurements [3], namely:

- The mutual engagement tying individuals into a social substance. Being remembered for “what is important” in a gathering is a necessity for being occupied with a network’s training.
- Community individuals build up a mutual collection, a common arrangement of shared assets, for example, schedules, words, instruments, methods of getting things done, stories, and ideas. The ideas, language and apparatuses exemplify the historical backdrop of the network and its point of view on the world.
- The joint endeavour in comprehending what the network is about. The joint venture characterises the aggregate cycle in a constant arrangement and it makes among members’ relations of shared responsibility become a vital piece of the training.

Right now, there is huge, contending pressures for transformation in higher education. Numerous scholars decide to change pedagogy and curriculum mirroring pedagogical research together with supportive learning and collaboration. A few changes, be that as it may, are forced by institutional approaches reacting to the more extensive higher education setting [33]. CoP may assist educators to revise their tasks at hand and diminishing open doors for communitarianism dynamic enhancing professional skills development with common commitment as the fundamental purpose within their various communities. [33] investigation on educational program change is an example of revising tasks at hand and focus on professional development by using an integrated method to course design and supportive learning. Also, educators engaged in a joint venture to revise the curriculum plus the significant alterations in university policy. CoP model promise the accomplishment of educational objectives by tending to instructors' necessities, as opposed to just raising requests on staff, to fortify commitment, joint efforts, assemble abilities and offer accepted procedures.

Mutual engagement is evident in [34] who note that globally, high schools have seen themselves faced with changes relating to changing educational program systems, new plans for teacher capacitation and empowerment together with their shifting roles. In reality, changes that underlie the expansion of combined activity between instructors incorporate collective teaching, soundness between subjects, and circulated decision making. These changes call for meeting and coordination between teachers to manage late changes and the going with multifaceted nature of work and continuous cooperation.

On a similar note, engagement in higher education, schools and districts that are associations in their privilege yet face expanding information challenges [6] is necessary. CoP hold the guarantee of empowering associations among individuals over these conventional structures to defeat considerable hierarchical issues. Another examination directed in [35] express that a topographically scattered yet disciplinarily affectionate community can work as a steady, non-various levelled CoP depending on the extent of mentorship, plus the creation of social resources. These scholars state that the most important imperative is to have one committed person to drive meetings and cycles of the CoP via Skype or email in a synchronous or asynchronous learning environment. It is also essential to analyse the organisation in CoP terms to gain better insight into its development, to distinguish its qualities and shortcomings, and to guarantee its continuation and shared collection.

The primary importance of CoP is for teacher preparation and breaking barriers between managers and subordinates [6]. For example, there is mutual engagement among staff members in the development of manuals and publications that were absent in their profession [6]. This gathering of auditors in the public sector was from various nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to shared work, stories, and relics made over the seven years of their endurance time giving a feeling of coherence and reason. There was no segregation of participants based on their seniority levels because of the CoP model used. Meaning, the CoP promotes lifelong learning within the organisation to fulfil the common institutional goals and initiatives.

A joint undertaking is another significant movement for academics in CoP. A variety of researchers and reformers has required the reinforcing of coordinated effort between instructors by methods for advancing networks of teachers in schools [34]. The action requests that foundation chiefs should convey the command to continue or create networks of training in their orders considering variety contemplations regarding instructive level, residency, word related insight, and gender in the arrangement of teacher groups for creating organised responsibility on accomplishing learning results. Notwithstanding sorting out different groups,

school pioneers could expand teachers' joint duty and responsibility for undertakings and group execution. The joint venture in administration, for example, choices are not made by a solitary individual; rather, choices arise out of collective exchanges between numerous people, occupied with commonly subordinate exercises. [36] converses with the school-based insight and the joint endeavour that scholastics could take part in. CoP can drive methodology, create new lines of business, take care of issues, advance the spread of best practices, build up individuals' expert aptitudes, and assist organisations with selecting and holding ability [11].

The joint venture can be experience in community projects are also activities academics can create solid associations with guardians and communities implies another method of working for governments, for administration organisations, and teachers [37]. For instance, in Thailand, such CoP resulted in upgrading of educational programs, employing volunteer teachers for co-curricular exercises, and raising funds for assets [37] in adjusted congruity. It is the kind of CoP model that administrations can advance through preparing, consolation and backing, yet in addition to stretch out the result of gathering pledges and upkeep and development of structures. Thus, CoP in schools enhances opportunities of collaboration among staff in implementing changes to educational programs, new plans for teacher professional development and to the instructors' functions. The collaborative effort deepens understanding in teachers' responsibilities. Therefore, there is shared collection of responsibilities between instructors by implanting coordinated effort into the school culture.

The idea of collaboration of academics from various disciplines (psychology, anthropology, computer science, and education) embarking on research with a purpose of changing teaching and learning processes and approaches is supported by [38]. [39] recommend CoP sighting examples like addressing faculty challenges and concerns related to academic writing. The writing communities were created across-disciplines holding dialogues for the process of academic writing departments, then facilitating conversation and collaborative activities connected to the process of academic writing. Therefore, in a joint venture activity, there is mutual engagement and mutual collection of ideas towards achieving the institutional goals.

6. Why focus on communities of practice

According to [3], five key function are offered in CoP. These are:

1. Educate members through sharing of experiences and ideas within the practice
2. Support members through collaborative engagements
3. Cultivate members' imaginations and ideas for them to start learning and sustain the learning process.
4. Encourage members through support and endorsing their work and expertise through dialogue
5. Integrate members' new knowledge and ideas to enable change within the practice or organisation

There are a number of characteristics which promote and drive the CoP for teams. These characteristics create opportunities for team members to develop. **Figure 1** below by [5] demonstrates how CoP contribute to individual members as well as for the organisations for both long term and short term.

Why focus on communities of practice?		
	for members	for organizations
Short-term value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• help with challenges• access to expertise• confidence• fun with colleagues• meaningful work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• problem solving• time saving• knowledge sharing• synergies across section/districts• reuse of resources
Long-term value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• personal development• enhanced reputation• professional identity• networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• strategic capabilities• keeping-up-to-date• innovation• retention of talents• new strategies

Figure 1.
Why focus on communities of practice for members and organisations. Adapted from [5].

CoP offer support for team members and builds confidence. Individual member gains more information about their practice and they are able to put it into action as they know that they have a reference point, they have cheerleaders and they have literature that supports their properties in the workplace. When an individual is confident about their work from the support that they get from teammates, they constantly feel motivated to do their work effectively. The members know they are not doing work as a duty anymore but they feel in whatever they do they have the support of the teammates or of the organisation and they have some backing from the people who share with them the same beliefs, passions and goals.

The nature of CoP creates opportunities for learning and development. Team members learn from each other as shown by Bandura’s social learning theory [31]. Feedback from others is essential as it helps you to develop further as you take time to reflect on your work, improve on areas that are highlighted, and come back to practice with better or improved strategies. Feedback allows one to carry out an action research on what they are doing within the workplace. CoP enables knowledge sharing and reduces duplication. An opportunity for co-contribution to knowledge is created.

Sharing of information allows for more learning and you remember more than having idle information at the back of your mind. When you teach others, you also learn. Sharing of ideas helps an organisation when it comes to empowering employees within the organisation it reduces challenges when an individual who never shared the information that they had about their practice leaves their job without proper training to those remaining behind. When an individual leaves a job, they leave with their expertise and if not careful, you are stuck as an organisation resulting in daunting hand over take over processes. This results in the new incumbent taking longer to perform their duties effectively thereby delaying in yielding results. The community of practice adopts a common approach, which allows scaling [26]. People own the practice, decentralise things, and create consistencies. Community members can act as enablers of change. It is easier for a group to have a voice in an organisation than it is for an individual to try and convince the organisation for change [26].

A community of practice allows for collaboration on common issues and challenges to create better practices. As a team or as an organisation when you are collaborating it allows you to see the challenges together, brainstorm the challenges, come up with ideas on dealing with the challenges and improve based on what findings and the recommendations on what to change and how to change. This result in

a continuous developmental process. According to [40], 'human communities can develop a sort of collective intelligence that is greater than the individual members. Different experiences and sharing allows us to build on each other's experience and improve our practices. CoP therefore are worthy focusing on as they have benefits to the individual and organisations, academic institution included.

7. Relevance of communities of practice to professional development

The relevance of CoP to professional development cannot be overemphasised, it is very important that in CoP, the relationships, interactions and collaborations among group members must not be taken for granted. Such relationships, interactions and collaborations have ways of moulding group members towards their professional development. For instance, academics in their various universities must value their engagements with the members of their CoP. Many achievements towards professional development could be made through CoP, thus, this must be valued and appreciated.

The relevance of CoP to professional development according to [41] are;

- Connect people. It gives group members opportunities to interact, most especially those who do not have the opportunity to interact, either on frequent occasions or not at all.
- Provide a shared context. This serves as an avenue for easy flow of communication and sharing of information, ideas, talents, personal experiences as a means of building understanding and moulding members for better exposure and insight.
- Enable dialogue. Group members have the opportunities to interact through their mutual engagements. This brings about opportunities to exploring different possibilities and new ways of solving problems, creating new ideas through collaborations.
- Stimulate learning. There are diverse ways of learning in CoP among group members. This serves as an avenue for reliable communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection. Group members are moulded by specialists in the CoP and they offer them professional support needed for them to be professionals in their own fields.
- Capture and share existing knowledge. The continuous existence of the group made it easy to help group members to improve their practice. This is done by providing a medium to identify solutions to common problems in the group and a process to pull together and evaluate best practices.
- Introduce collaborative processes. Collaborations among group members must be keen to bring about interactions, sharing of ideas, encourage trust and positive relationships.
- Help people organise. Group members are determined to achieve the aims and objectives of creating their CoP and this brings about concrete results.
- Generate new knowledge. The willingness for mutual engagements brings about transformation of practices among group members and also brings about opportunities to accommodate variations in needs and technologies.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has pointed out the relevance, importance, and significance of CoPs for the professional development of academics as university teachers. In particular, the enablement, enhancement and support it proffers towards the realisation of a sense of community among academics as teaching and learning practitioners. How academics in their roles as teachers can improve, change, and/or further develop their teaching practices through engagement, sharing, recognition, and validation of each other's work are discussed in details. The forming and norming of CoP practices, the different forms that they take, and the various educational functions that they serve are elaborated on. How a CoP comes to have a common understanding of issues that beset them, form a common agenda around the issues, operationalise and develop strategies for dealing with their substantive issues of their practice are highlighted in the chapter. More importantly, this chapter provided details of how effective working relations are developed and nurtured in a CoP.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author details

Adeola Folasade Akinyemi*, Vuyisile Nkonki, Lulekwa Sweet-Lily Baleni
and Florence Rutendo Mudehwe-Gonhovi
Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa

*Address all correspondence to: aakinyemi@ufh.ac.za

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