



Session Title
and
Presenter

**Can Virtual Learning Communities Build Professional Identity
for Isolated Instructors?**

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Research Question and Terms

Can Virtual Learning Communities Build Professional Identity for Isolated Instructors?

The answer is “Yes” in the face-to-face case.
The answer is “under investigation” in virtual case.

Definitions of
Learning **communities**

Communities of practice (CoPs)

Faculty learning **communities** (FLCs)

Professional identity

Isolated instructors



Community and Learning Communities

McMillan and Chavis (1986) define **community** as “a **feeling** that members have of **belonging**, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9).

Shaffer & Anundsen (1993): **Essential elements of community** are spirit, trust, mutual interdependence among members, interactivity, shared values and beliefs, and common expectations.

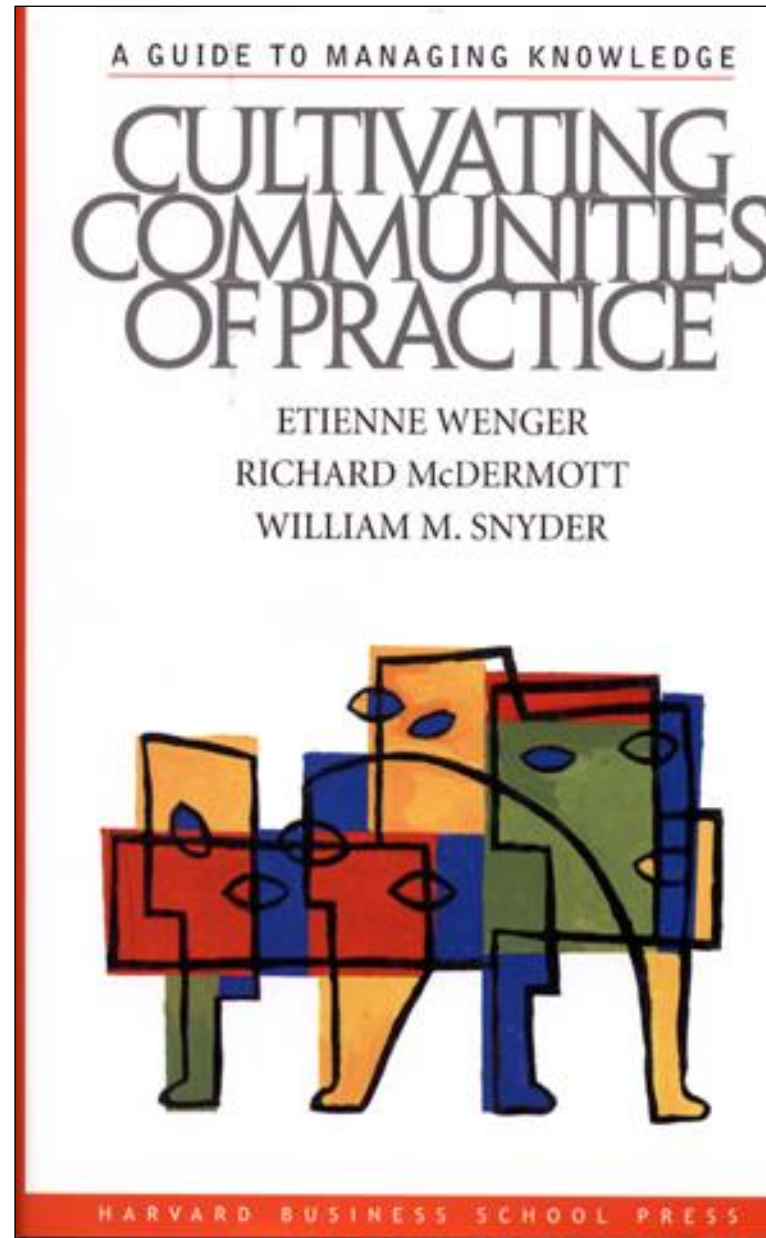
- Communities of **Practice**
- Faculty **Learning** Communities

Related Research Questions

- How do we engage learning analytics and new educational technologies to enhance work in communities?
to build community?
- Do we need to? Today, do we still need the component “community” in the field of educational technology and professional development?



Definition: Community of Practice (CoP)



Communities of practice 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 **ongoing basis**.
(Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4)

Context

- situated learning in the workplace; corporate, NGO world
- spontaneous, self-organizing
- no prescribed structure
- focus on gaining competence in practice; meeting long term
- model came late to higher ed., now finding its way

Definition: Faculty Learning Community (FLC)



A **faculty learning community** (FLC) is a **specifically structured** learning community of faculty and staff in higher education that includes the goals of building **community**, engaging in **scholarly teaching**, and the development of **SoTL**.

(Cox, In Press)



16
Recommendations
for Designing,
Implementing,
Facilitating, and
Sustaining
FLCs

1. Size & Length: **8-10, one year (rarely one semester)**
2. Membership: **Voluntary, application**, pledge
3. Affiliates: **Students, staff**
4. Diverse: **Multidisciplinary**
5. Meetings: **2 hours, every 3 weeks**, over lunch
6. Social (**Food, community**)
7. Leader/Facilitator **Prepared**, FLC member
8. Proposer: **preliminary** goals, objectives, budget, topics, curriculum
9. **Commitment & Trust Through Community**
10. **Assess Impact, Change**
11. **Evidenced-Based, SoTL**, course project, deliverables
12. **Present Outcomes**
13. Online/Distance/**Virtual**
14. Enablers: lunch, books, professional expenses
15. Embed in T&L Center
16. Adapt to your institutional culture

Implementation Science: People follow the lead of others they know and trust

Professional Identity

A **professional identity** is a person's viewpoint of who they are as a professional serving in a domain of expertise involving high expectations in the application of special knowledge and skills. The **view of self in a profession** consists of beliefs, values, motives, and experiences used to define and guide growth and skillful practices involving cognitive and moral reasoning (Sticker et al., 2019)

Isolated Instructors

- Instructors new to the profession in Higher Education
 - Just earned doctoral degree
 - Coming from another profession
- Instructors new to a different university
- Sessionals (part-time, adjunct)
- Instructors trying new teaching approaches or research areas
- Instructors having a common interest and located at distant universities



Evidence F2F
FLCs Build
Professional
Identity for
Early-Career
Instructors
(Cox, 1995)


- Tenure study at Miami University, a research-intensive university
- Tenure-track hires 1977-78 through 1988-89
- 477 new hires, 106 (22%) in FLCs for early-career faculty, 371 (78%) were not
- 72% in FLCs tenured vs 55% not in FLCs tenured; p-value is .005
- No causal claims that FLC leads to positive tenure decision
- Conclusion: time invested by instructors in a year-long FLC for early-career instructors does not affect tenure outcomes adversely

Research Question by Van Galen Dickie (2021)

Dickie, M. v. G. (2021).
The protégé effect and
virtual communities of
practice. *Learning
Communities Journal*,
13, 155-174.

How and to what extent, a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP), designed as a 'supportive workplace', can enhance the professional identity of migration agents in sole practice as determined by 'self' and 'other' perceived competence and confidence?

Note: Can VCoPs Build Professional Identity for Isolated Instructors?



Protégé Effect Project

Dickie (2021)

- How employers, professional bodies and workplaces can address the need to provide a supportive workplace for practitioners who work in sole practice, offsite, or in isolation.
- Australian National University Migration Law Program from 2013 to 2014.
- Qualitative study of 31 newly registered migration agents (protégés) were placed in the VCoP with two experienced agents (facilitators) for 18 months.
- Parameters applied to the sampling were migration agents who (1) were in their first 18 months of practice and had no current mentor or supervisor and (2) were sole practitioners or working in small firms of less than five agents with at least one active client file.
- 18 Australian migration agents completed the project.

Isolated Australian Migration Agents

Dickie, 2021

Compare:
New Instructors

Fractured Landscape Of Practice:

- Conflicting Entry Requirements
- No Requirement For Supervised Practice
- Vulnerable Client Base
- Competing Professional Bodies
- 80% Sole Practitioners



Methodology and Data

Dickie (2021)

Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2016)

- Qualitative research that seeks to inductively distill issues of importance for specific groups of people, creating meaning about those issues through analysis and modelling of theory.
- Theory can develop through the research itself (rather than research testing the accuracy of theory)

Initial coding, focused coding


78 semi structured interviews

400 memos

315 site interactions

Cluster maps used to develop the categories.

Prior to Protégé Project, academics identified 7 features considered crucial for establishment of a viable VCoP.
Dickie (2021)

- 1) Accessible technology
 - 2) The domain of practice
 - 3) Goals
 - 4) Consistent and reliable facilitators who promote collaboration
 - 5) Communication in a risk-free environment
 - 6) A specific community of practitioners
 - 7) A collaborative space
- 


Protégé
Project added
8 structural
features that
mimic a
supportive
workplace
(Eraut, 2007)
Dickie (2021)

Aspects of Architectural Wayfinding, Structural Components of an Office

- 1) A private sign-in facility for all protégés.
- 2) A landing page providing access to the Protégé VCoP site rooms.
- 3) Shared spaces for discussion conceived as 'a café' where peers might discuss problems or successes of their case work without revealing client details of the case. This was also space where protégés could socialize.
- 4) The facilitators 'office' which allowed protégés to discuss personal or problematic issues they did not want to share with their peers.

Protégé
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(Eraut, 2007)
Dickie (2021)

Aspects of Architectural Wayfinding, Structural Components of an Office

- 5) Shared audio and video spaces as meeting rooms for continuing professional development or group meetings.
 - 6) A private chat forum for protégés.
 - 7) A library with resources, such as legislation and relevant case law.
 - 8) An events calendar for both social and formal announcements.
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Protégé Website

slide thanks to
Van Galen Dickie



Design of VCoP Platform

Dickie (2021)

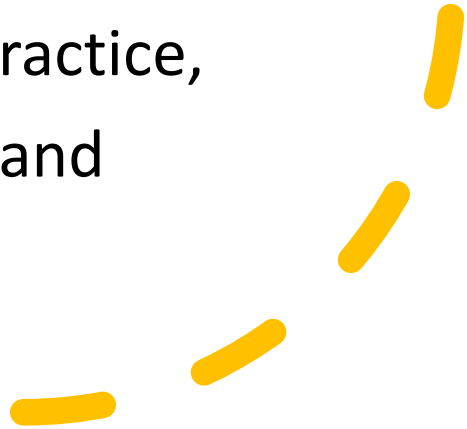
- **Restrictions on the numbers of participants in the VCoP.** Limiting numbers ensures that members of the VCoP remain in a bounded and safe group.
- **A means of confidential engagement, and enforceable protocols** to ensure that conduct within the VCoP and practice advice are of the standard expected by the broader profession.
- **Forum and conference rooms**, which allow participants to interact both synchronously and asynchronously to construct a sound knowledge of practice, policy, law, and procedure.
- **A specific design component** that requires members to undertake professional and reflective activities, such as discussions with an experienced agent as a mentor.
- **Professional development opportunities**, including those that allow practitioners to apply what they have learned to guide others to an understanding of legal policy or practice issues.

Project Underpinned by Four Theoretical Concepts

Dickie (2021)

Note: New
Instructors

Theoretical concepts provide insight into how individuals are called to the profession, and how they maintain that identification until they actualize their goal. They demonstrate the important role a personal narrative and reflection play in the process of professional identity formation.

- Building a bridge between past and present,
 - Focusing on client-centered practice,
 - Navigating the unpredictable and
 - Co-creating knowledge
- 

Findings

Dickie (2021)

- 1) The development of the protégés professional identity was not directly influenced by how protégés perceived their own or others' competence and confidence, but by how they learned to practice in the VCoP.
- 2) The deliberate design of a VCoP was able to mimic the role a supportive workplace would play in developing a professional identity through exposure to peers and different ways of practice, and that this exposure and the subsequent recognition of aspects of self in others, enhanced and assisted the development of a professional identity.
- 3) The adoption of a professional identity occurs through a personal identification and recognition of aspects of the self that allow an individual to imagine they can undertake the role.

Findings

Dickie (2021)

- The findings acknowledge the role of individual values and self-image in forming a professional identity.
- They add new knowledge on the importance of recognizing these qualities in others as a crucial factor in imagining, maintaining and actualizing a professional identity.
- Note: Community was not a component of this project.

Protégé Project Outcomes

Dickie (2021)

- Data from the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA) confirms that fifteen of the eighteen Protégés chosen for this study are still working as migration agents.
- OMARA statistics demonstrate that these agents have passed one critical time factor (7 to 9 years) in their career and are entering another.
- Despite the growth in the number of migration agents since 2012 (from 4,649 to 7,252), OMARA activity reports for the first half of 2019 confirmed that only 13% of agents have been in practice for seven to nine years.
- This places the protégés into a small cohort of agents that have achieved longevity.
- Testimony by the protégés demonstrated the personal impact the experience within the VCoP had on their confidence to continue working.

Sessionals (Adjuncts), VCoP, and Professional Identity (Cottom et al., 2018)

- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- Worldwide campus, online and face-to-face courses at over 142 satellite locations
- Majority of Worldwide courses taught online by globally dispersed adjunct faculty
- In 2017, 1,700 adjunct faculty taught 86% of the courses at the Worldwide campus
- Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence created two VCoPs to enhance online teaching of adjuncts
- 18 and 11 members, met for 8 weeks
- Outcome: Increased sense of belonging indicated increased professional identity

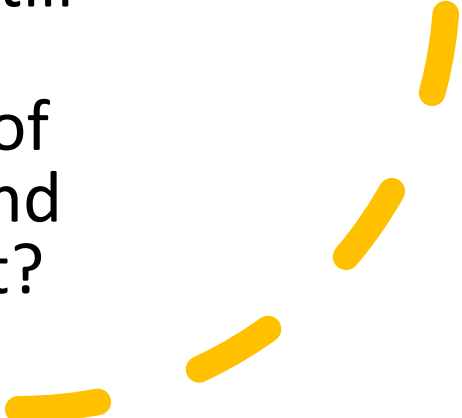
Your Changes as a Result of the F2F CoP Participation (Questionnaire)

More
Research
Questions
Given F2F
Results
Kwong et al., 2016

Slide: Thanks to Eva Wong & Theresa Kwong, Centre for Holistic Teaching and Learning, HKBU		Hong Kong BU (CoPs 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6)			Beach & Cox (2009) 6 universities in US (Table 5)				
U. S. Rank	vs	HKBU Rank	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	P-value
01. Perspective on teaching and learning /other aspects of higher education beyond discipline		8	3.71	0.84	35	3.93	1.11	369	0.1520
02. Interest in teaching process		2	3.94	0.87	37	3.86	1.08	361	0.6121
03. Understanding and interest in scholarship of teaching		7	3.74	1.14	33	3.80	1.14	368	0.7722
04. View of teaching as an intellectual pursuit		5	3.82	0.83	35	3.74	1.16	364	0.6011
05. Comfort level as a member of the university community		3	3.91	0.96	37	3.55	1.18	374	0.0340
06. Total effectiveness as a teacher		10	3.68	0.92	36	3.55	1.14	354	0.4309
07. Awareness of ways to integrate teaching/research experience		6	3.76	1.04	35	3.41	1.27	365	0.0633
08. Technical skill as a teacher		12	3.50	1.00	33	3.38	1.46	341	0.4309
09. Awareness of how to serve student learning needs		4	3.84	0.98	38	3.33	1.19	354	0.0031
10. Confidence in addressing student needs in/out of class		9	3.69	1.01	38	3.29	1.20	352	0.0235
11. Understanding of your role at the university		11	3.59	0.99	38	3.26	1.23	358	0.0575
12. Awareness of how diversity influences/enhances teaching and learning		1	4.11	0.88	36	3.25	1.30	351	0.0000
13. Research and scholarly interest with respect to discipline.		13	3.48	0.96	34	3.18	1.27	366	0.0918

*P-value in **BLUE** signifies that there is a significant difference at $\alpha=0.05$

Conclusions: Related Research Questions

- Can Virtual Learning Communities Build Professional Identity for Isolated Instructors?
 - How do you engage learning analytics and new educational technologies to enable work in communities?
to build community?
 - Do you need to? Do you still need the component “community” in the field of educational technology and professional development?
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Thank You!
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