



## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



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**Authors: Ahmet Sayer- Patricia Huion**



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## Introduction

This chapter on community of practices (CoPs) explains how refugee teachers and teachers of refugees can facilitate the integration of refugee learners and teachers through sharing their expertise and finding new solutions in a CoP. It helps them understand how to create a CoP and/or how to participate in a CoP. This manual may also be interesting for facilitators, practitioners and officials who help refugees to integrate into the receiving countries.

In the first chapter, the definition, coinage and impact of CoPs are introduced. The second chapter discusses the context of CoPs based on social constructivism. The benefits and impact of CoPs can be found in the third chapter. The characteristics of CoPs and difference with other groups are mentioned in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter defines how to create and cultivate a CoP. Based on the information in previous chapters, the sixth chapter will explain step by step how to set up a CoP for refugee teachers and teachers of refugees. In the last chapter, the format of creating the EMERgenCeS' CoPs will be outlined.

## What is a Community of Practice?

The concept of 'Community of Practice' was first coined by anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their theory of 'situated learning' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They argued in this theory that learning is much more than obtaining knowledge, based on their observation. The term was redefined and significantly expanded by Wenger, in his book titled *Community of Practice*, emphasizing the interaction between people and their engagement in creating and sharing knowledge (Wenger, 1998).

Botha and his colleagues (2008) define a CoP as "a group of professionals informally bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge" (Stewart 2001 in Botha et al. 2008).

## Context of CoPs

The concept of a CoP stems from theories based on the idea of learning as social participation (Wenger, 1998). Within the framework of social learning theory, Wenger (1998) states that the idea of learning has changed from an individual process to a social phenomenon where individuals become active participants in the practices of social communities.

Wenger (1998) also describes the components, which are essential for him to identify social participation as a process of learning. The first component is ‘meaning’ which refers to creating new understandings of the participants’ experiences.

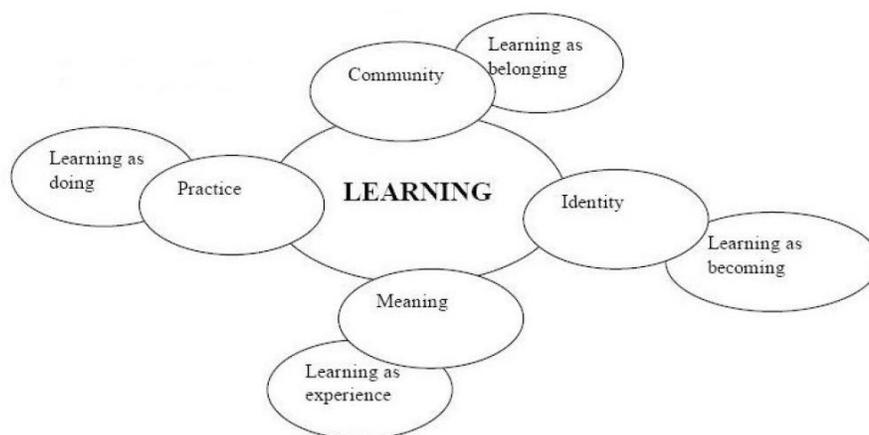
The second one is ‘practice’ where participants share how they create solutions, which tools and frameworks they find relevant, which stories they rely on or co-created, which ideas, papers, books were inspiring. Methods are identifying knowledge, problem-solving, reusing good ideas, discussing new technologies or developments, and coordination among members (Wenger, et al. 2002). Relevant for CoP members are also how they make explicit each other’s tacit knowledge, their knowing-in-practice and their lived practice (Pyrko et al., 2016).

The third component is ‘community’, or how they create a sense of belonging by co-developing ‘mutual engagement’ (how and what the community does to approach its challenges), ‘joint enterprise’ (agreement on the challenges they work about), and a ‘shared repertoire’ (the co-created end results).

The fourth and the last one is ‘identity’, a way of talking about how learning changes who we are (Wenger, 1998).

Furthermore, Wenger (1998) maintains that these components are interconnected and interchangeable in terms of their connection to learning. He explains the relationship between these components and learning in the model below (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Components of social theory of learning: an initial inventory



Source: Wenger (1998, p.5)



## Benefits and Impacts of CoPs

CoPs offer benefits on the individual, community and organizational level (Millen et al, 2002).

Participating in a CoP allows individuals to increase their skills, know-how, personal productivity, job satisfaction, personal reputation and sense of belonging (Millen et al., 2002). CoPs can also connect people who in everyday life do not find it easy to interact with each other (Cambridge et al.,2005). Finally, CoPs are platforms for ‘authentic communication, mentoring, coaching and self-reflection’ which offer opportunities for learning (ibid.)

The community benefits as the collaboration with others increases the awareness of the challenges and possibilities among the community members and as the community gets more access to the expertise, resources and experience of community members. Furthermore, the frequent interactions and collaboration fosters trust between community members.

On organizational level, CoPs have a positive impact on operational efficiency, cost savings, level of service or sales, speed of service or product development (Millen et al., 2002). Lesser and Storck (2001, p. 836) add to these the following: new employees’ learning curve decreases, rework is reduced and the reinvention of the wheel is prevented and new ideas are more easily generated. Goncalves (2019) also mentions sharing of best practices and finding and retaining talent.

Apart from the benefits and impacts which are stated above, Wenger and his colleagues (2002) classify the benefits of working in a CoP in terms of time as short-term and long-term at the individual and organizational level. The summary of those benefits of CoPs can be seen below (Table 1).

Table 1- Summary of benefits of CoPs

	Benefits on the individual level	Benefits on the organizational level
Short term	CoPs improve: -individual skills and know-how, -personal productivity, -job satisfaction, -access to expertise -problem-solving -team working	CoPs improve an organization’s business offer: - an arena for problem solving - quick answers to questions - time and cost savings when searching information -better quality of decisions



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-well-being</li> <li>-helping with challenges</li> <li>-having fun with colleagues</li> <li>-meaningful work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-different perspectives on problems</li> <li>-coordination, standardization, and synergies across units</li> <li>-more daring to try new things (risk-taking)</li> </ul>
Long term	<p>CoPs foster professional development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- forum for expanding skills and expertise</li> <li>- networking for keeping updated in the field</li> <li>- strong sense of professional identity</li> <li>- enhanced professional reputation</li> </ul>	<p>CoPs develop organizational capabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-increase retention of talent</li> <li>-increase;             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ability to innovate</li> <li>ability to foresee technological developments</li> <li>ability to take advantage of new markets, trends, products</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Characteristics of CoPs

Wenger adopts the four characteristics of social learning for CoPs into domain which corresponds to joint enterprise, community (community and identity) and practice.

#### **Differences between CoPs and Other Groups**

A community of practice differs from other forms of organizations such as teams, formal workgroups and an informal network in several ways. Wenger and Snyder, in their book “*Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier*”, provide a snapshot comparison of a community of practices with other groups (see the table below).

Table 2 Comparison of CoPs with other groups

### A Snapshot Comparison

Communities of practice, formal work groups, teams, and informal networks are useful in complementary ways. Below is a summary of their characteristics.

	What's the purpose?	Who belongs?	What holds it together?	How long does it last?
Community of practice	To develop members' capabilities; to build and exchange knowledge	Members who select themselves	Passion, commitment, and identification with the group's expertise	As long as there is interest in maintaining the group
Formal work group	To deliver a product or service	Everyone who reports to the group's manager	Job requirements and common goals	Until the next reorganization
Project team	To accomplish a specified task	Employees assigned by senior management	The project's milestones and goals	Until the project has been completed
Informal network	To collect and pass on business information	Friends and business acquaintances	Mutual needs	As long as people have a reason to connect

Source (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, pp. 2)

## How to Create a Community of Practice ?

To start a CoP the following steps have to be followed:

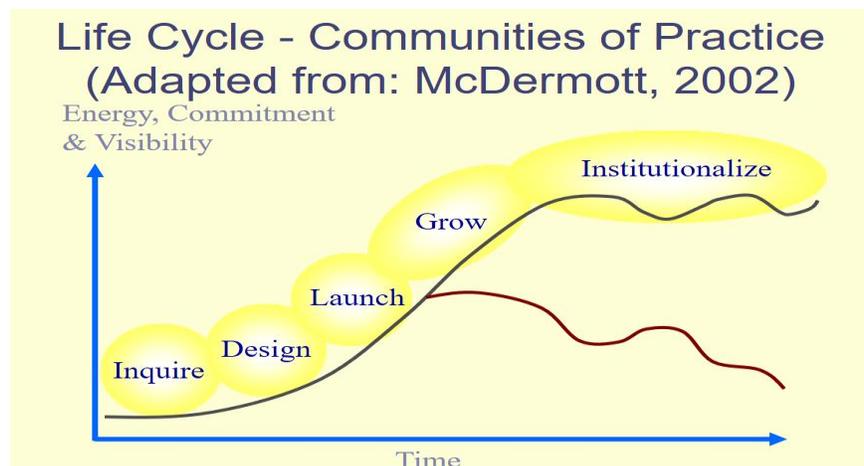
- identify its purpose and scope, its relevance and influence;
- appoint the coordinator, define who will be the members, how new members will be introduced, how and when members will meet and how conflicts will be dealt with;
- be transparent about knowledge stewarding (share, store, use, update) and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the community;
- create resonance with the existing culture;
- define members' benefits and how the CoPs will help them to get these benefits;
- appoint community leaders who connect to the community, find new members, organize activities and keep the flow of conversation;

- decide which platform will invite members' open communication;
- establish a way of sharing and preserving the knowledge generated (real-life experience storytelling, gathering insights from chats, if necessary appoint someone else than the facilitator to collect this knowledge (Gonçalves, 2019).

## How Does a CoP Grow?

The following model gives the lifecycle phases of communities (Cambridge et al., 2005)

Figure 2 Lifecycle of CoPs



Source: (Cambridge et al., 2005)

The audience, goals, and vision of the CoPs are identified in the inquire phase. In the design phase, activities, processes, technologies and roles that support the communities' goals are determined. Before launching, prototype the CoP. A good way to do this is to try out the community in a small group. In the launch phase, the community rolls out to a broader audience and engages newcomers. The grow phase enables members to share knowledge, to network, to create group projects and to attract new participants. Finally, in the sustain phase, knowledge is created and all outputs are evaluated so that the community can start with new challenges. If the community is successful, it becomes institutionalized as a core value-added capability of the sponsoring organization (Cambridge et al., 2005).

According to Wenger and his colleagues (2002), the success of a CoP over time relies on “their ability to generate enough excitement, relevance and value to attract and engage new members” (Wenger et al. 2002, pp 50). They offer seven practical guides to maintain and support the growth of voluntary communities of practice:



- design for evolution
- open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
- invite different levels of participation
- develop both public and private community spaces
- focus on value
- combine familiarity and excitement
- create a rhythm for the community

In a CoP, it is significant to ensure that both formal and informal interactions add value. Wenger et al. argue that “rather than attempting to determine their expected value in advance, communities need to create events, activities, and relationships that help their potential value emerge and discover new ways to harvest it” (2002, p. 60).

CoPs are neutral and safe places to share knowledge and ideas; however, to remain vibrant, a CoP needs divergent thinking and activity that attract members together in a shared sense of adventure (2002, pp.-62).

### Step by Step Plan of Creating the CoP EMERgenCeS

When we combine, the approaches discussed above the following format to create the EMERgenCeS CoP emerges. To avoid confusion, each partner creates a CoP to co-create new knowledge regarding refugee teacher integration and educational well-being.

#### **Inquiry**

Scope: EMERgenCeS focusses on the increase of learner’s wellbeing in educational institutes of refugee destination countries through exploring the possible ways of integration of refugee teachers, starting up conversations with teachers of refugees, refugee learners and their parents, and educational policy makers.

Relevance: there is a shortage of teachers in the receiving countries; refugee learners and teachers of refugees might need mediators; refugee teachers need support to connect to the educational institutes in the receiving countries.



**Influence:** create awareness of the possibilities of collaboration amongst the stakeholders: refugee teachers, teachers of refugees, refugee learners and their parents, educational policy makers.

The ultimate goal is both to create models of educational entrepreneurship as well as an in-service training for refugee teachers.

## **Design phase**

**Platform:** a platform with high accessibility will be chosen by each partner.

**Coordinator:** each partner of the consortium appoints a coordinator, a refugee teacher who sets the agenda of the CoP.

**Community:** Community members will have grown into social entrepreneurs as crammers, counsellors, content developers or as teachers including volunteers, co-teachers.

**Knowledge stewarding:** CoPs agree on respecting each other's contribution. Information is anonymized. Participants understand that we seek patterns of integration and that these will be published and shared with educational policy makers.

**Culture:** a focal point for each CoP is the concept of decolonization pedagogy. What are the ways to gain entrance into and be successful in the educational system of the receiving countries while maintaining one's cultural integrity and the competences held high in the country of origin. For this we refer to the chapter on decolonization pedagogy and to the digital assessment rubric

## **Launch**

**Members:** Each CoP starts with a limited group of refugee teachers who also meet face-to-face in the design group (prototyping). New members are invited based on their expertise or their practice: teachers of refugees and policy makers. Together they agree on a code of conduct within the CoP and a meeting frequency.



Community leaders are refugee teachers who connect and seek new stakeholders, who are well connected to the outside community of refugees and who are expert conversationalists. As the EMERgenCeS CoPs are multilinguistic they speak both the language of the receiving country, English and one of the languages of the refugee teachers.

## **Sustain**

Members benefits:

On an individual level, each CoP monitors how skills, know-how, personal productivity, job satisfaction, personal reputation, sense of belonging, connection with new people and learning through 'authentic communication, mentoring, coaching and self-reflection' are influenced.

On the community level, each CoP archives which new insights become clear through the collaboration with community members. For trust building we refer to the next chapter. On organizational level, each CoP details if and how educational institutes become more efficient, save costs, increase teachers' and learners' well-being, decrease the integration trajectory of refugee teachers, adopt good practices from colleagues, and generate new approaches

Knowledge management:

Print screens will be used to bolster findings; digital storytelling will allow us to tap into the tacit knowledge, knowledge in practice and lived practice. The harvested knowledge will be preserved through the collection of good practices, the methodological manual, the assessment rubric, in five academic papers, a refugee teacher training course, a staff training week and a final conference.



## CoPs of each partner

### To conclude we introduce the CoPs of each partner:

Picture

Platform:

Coordinator: name +short bio

Community members: name + preference social entrepreneurs as crammers, counsellors, content developers or as teachers including volunteers, co-teachers.

Prototyping recommendations: which changes were introduced after the testing period and why?

Code of conduct

Community leader: name + short bio + network and languages

Members' benefits

Examples of skills, know-how, personal productivity, job satisfaction, personal reputation, sense of belonging, connection with new people and learning through 'authentic communication, mentoring, coaching and self-reflection' are influenced.

Examples of which new insights became clear through the collaboration with community members. For trust building we refer to the next chapter.

Examples of how educational institutes become more efficient, save costs, increase teachers' and learners' well-being, decrease the integration trajectory of refugee teachers, adopt good practices from colleagues, and generate new approaches

Knowledge management:

Digital stories



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