

Central Regional Hub-funded project



Communities of Practice Training Workbook

Developing Communities of Practice as a pedagogy support mechanism for teaching teams in the New Zealand PTE environment

Workforce Development Ltd

G&H Training Ltd

FutureCol





Collaborative project undertaken by
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F&H Training Ltd
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This Communities of practice Training Workbook accompanies the Ako Aotearoa funded project: [*The identification of tutor practices that achieve positive outcomes for Youth Guarantee students*](#). The project identified that a Community of Practice is a critical component as a mechanism for an organisation as it assists tutors to become consciously competent as teachers.

What is a community of practice (CoP)?

- A group of people coming together and engaging in a process of collective learning in a shared profession and/or practice
- Professionals coming together in a group to learn and share
- A group that meets regularly, shares expertise and works collaboratively to improve their practice
- A group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly

i. Purpose of a CoP

To enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing and building the knowledge they need. CoPs create a direct link between learning and performance, because the same people participate in the group as well as in teams and business units.

ii. Structure & process of a CoP

CoPs are not limited by formal structures; they create connections among people across organisational and geographic boundaries. CoPs commonly:

- Are informal
- Have equitable partnership between all members
- Involve active contribution by all members to the group's objectives and activities
- Become self-organising over time
- Share leadership across the group

Some typical activities within a CoP:

- Engagement in joint projects
- Creation of resources
- Building of professional relationships
- Reflection on practice
- Sharing experiences and strategies

iii. Benefits of belonging to a CoP

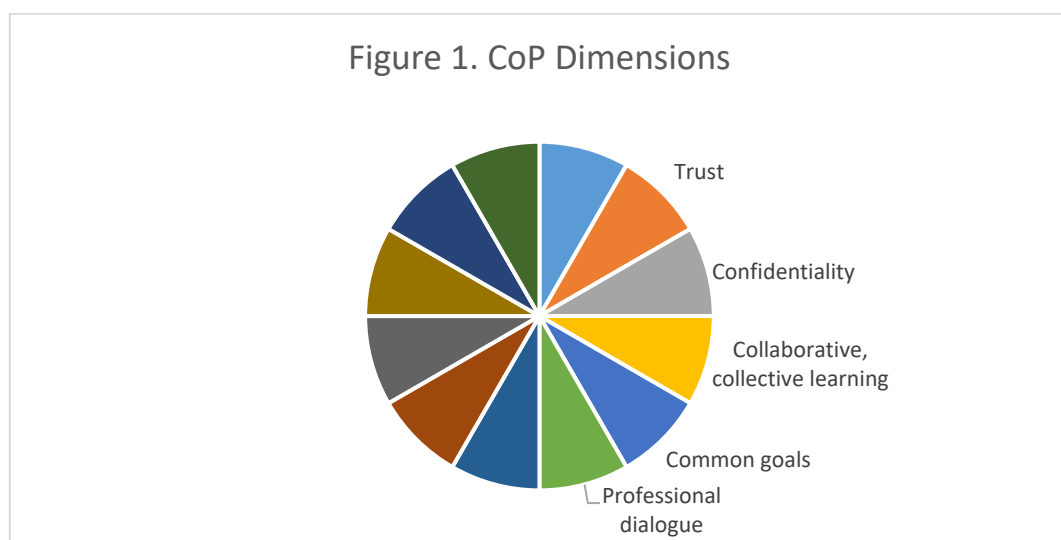
- Provides an opportunity to share knowledge, experience and skills with others
- Learn from other practitioners
- Make connections with people who share a common goal
- Provides an opportunity to develop own practice

Characteristics of an effective CoP

1. Supportive and shared leadership
2. Collective creativity
3. Shared values and vision
4. Supportive conditions
5. Shared personal practice

i. CoP dimensions

There are numerous factors which create and sustain a CoP. Therefore, a CoP can be viewed as a multi-dimensional model, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Other factors can include:

- Constructive Feedback
- Respect
- Equitable participation
- Shared roles & responsibilities
- Reflection
- Knowledge sharing
- Exploration
- Connections
- Personal development
- Professional development
- Needs fulfilment
- Support

Influences on the success of a CoP

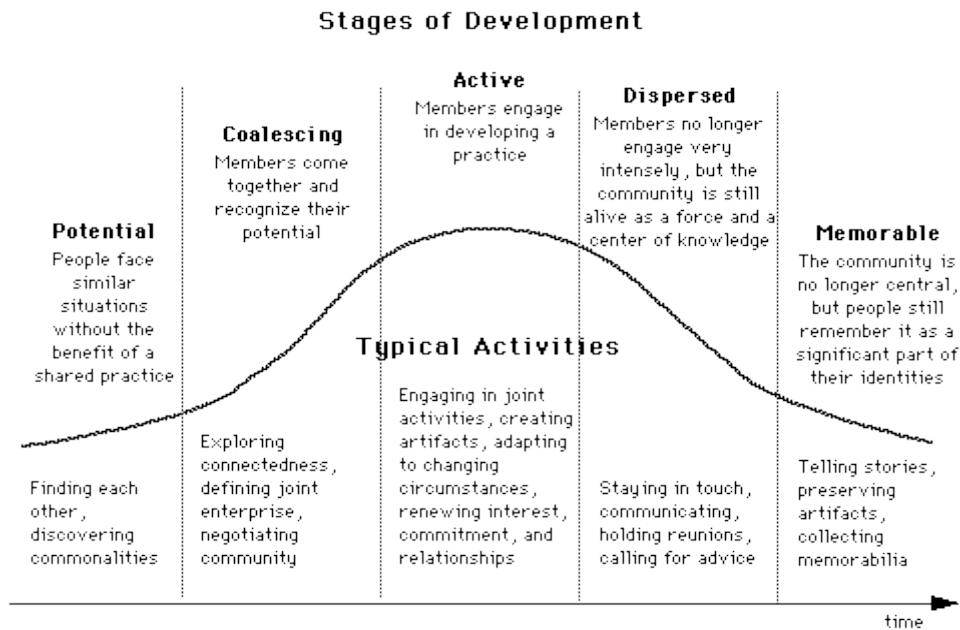
i. Enablers

- Participation is legitimised by the organisation
- Negotiated context
- Organisational support is provided
- Leveraging of existing practices
- Maintaining agreed purpose & focus of the CoP
- Common goal/s
- Clear expectations
- Level of commitment from all members
- Shared leadership
- Needs analysis

ii. Potential barriers

- Egos
- Unclear boundaries
- Time constraint
- Peripheral participation
- Personal attacks
- Unclear purpose
- Large, overwhelming groups
- Accessibility
- Exclusion
- Perceptions

Stages of CoP development



(<http://co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml>)

Stages of group development

Group Development is a dynamic process. Adding to the diagram above on the five phases of a CoP's development, we can also consider the stages of group development that occurs within each of these phases over time. There is a process of five stages through which groups pass through. This includes: forming, storming, forming, performing, and adjourning.

Forming	The first stage in the life of a group is concerned with forming a group. This stage is characterised by members finding out the purpose of the group. Members at this stage either engage in busy type of activity or show uncertainty or apathy.
Storming	The next stage in this group is marked by the formation of dyads and triads. Members seek out familiar or similar individuals and begin a deeper sharing of themselves. Continued attention to these 'sub-groups' creates a differentiation in the whole group and tensions may appear. There is often conflict about controlling the group.
Norming	The third stage of group development is marked by a more serious concern about performance. Efforts are made to establish various norms for how the group will work together. Members begin to take greater responsibility for their own contributions to the group and the need for an authority figure becomes relaxed. There is solidification of the group structure and a sense of group identity.

Performing	<p>This is a stage of a fully functional group where members see themselves as a group. Each person makes a contribution and the leader is also seen as a part of the group. Group norms are followed.</p> <p>The group may redefine its goals and show an autonomous will to pursue those goals. The long-term viability of the group is established.</p>
Adjourning	<p>In the case of temporary groups, such as project teams, which have a limited task at hand, there is also a fifth stage of group development.</p> <p>The group decides to disband. Some members may feel happy over the performance, and some may be unhappy over the stoppage of meeting with group members. Adjourning may also be referred to as mourning, i.e. mourning the ending of the group.</p>

CoPs vs teams

Element/Activity	Communities of Practice	Teams
Objective	To share knowledge and promote learning in a particular area.	To complete specific projects
Membership	Self-selected; includes part- time and marginal members.	Selected on the basis of the ability to contribute to the team's goals; ideally full-time
Organisation	Informal, self-organising, leadership varies according to the issues.	Hierarchical with a project leader or manager
Termination	Evolves; disbands only when there is no interest.	When the project is completed (a team may evolve into a community)
Value Proposition	Group discovers value in exchanges of knowledge and information.	Group delivers value in the result it produces.
Management	Making connections between members; ensuring topics are fresh and valuable.	

Qualities and skills of CoP participants

The people who make up a CoP bring their unique personalities, qualities, knowledge and skills. These dimensions contribute to the formation and character of the CoP. Knowing what you bring to the CoP group helps you and the other participants work out how you will work together.

- What specific skills and knowledge do you bring to the group? This could include subject-matter expertise, previous experiences, and/or social aspects.
- And what are your core interpersonal qualities that will contribute to the essence of how the CoP will function and develop.

Skills	Interpersonal Qualities
Effective listening	Commitment
Leadership attributes	Willingness to contribute
Giving and receiving feedback	Interest in own professional development
Mentoring	Interest in supporting other people's professional development
Ability to adapt to change	Share experiences and knowledge
Transfer new learning	Build rapport and trust
	Learn from others

Models operating in a CoP

- i. Trust
- ii. Feedback
- iii. Communication
- iv. Leadership
- v. Group dynamics

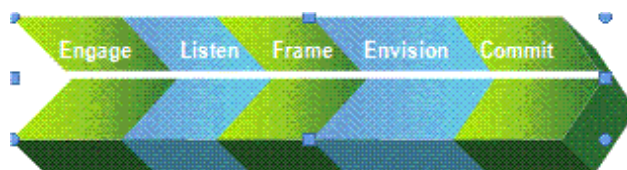
i. Trust

An important consideration in the development of a CoP is for group members to seek commonalities in terms of interests, academic or professional backgrounds, and personal interests such as family circumstances. These factors can influence the development of rapport and trust in the group.

Cultivating the Relationship: Building Trust

Behaviours that build trust	Behaviours that break trust
Proactive listening	Not paying attention
Sharing	Being competitive
Actions parallel words	Preventing contributions from others
Non-judgemental	Blaming others for mistakes
Acceptance of others	Acting contrary to words
Authenticity	Having a hidden agenda
Active seeking of different perspectives	Closed mind to new ideas and perspectives
Encouraging others to succeed	Critical and disapproving
Positive outlook	Discouraging others
Honour and respect confidentiality	Breaking confidentiality

The Five Step Trust Process



Engage – group members offer something of value in an open discussion about subjects or issues key to others

Listen to each other and hear what is important and real for each person; earn the right to offer suggestions and/or solutions

Frame the situation/issue with caring, constructive language, in terms acceptable to everyone. Articulate a point of view

Envision an alternate reality and discuss options, including win-win descriptions of outcomes and results, including emotional states. Clarify benefits. Explore future opportunities

Commit to agreed actionable next steps that imply significant commitment and movement on the part of each person

(Adapted from Best Practice Learning Solutions, 2012)

ii. Feedback

Feedback is a reciprocal exchange between two or more people. In a CoP, all members are mutually responsible for giving and receiving feedback at times during the meetings. The first step is for the group to agree on the process for feedback during the first CoP meeting.

Giving effective feedback: A four step process

STEP	PROCESS
Context	Describe the situation. Be as specific as possible. Give the feedback in a timely way.
Behaviour	Describe the situation/behaviour as clearly as possible. Avoid drawing conclusions.
Impact	What were the results - positive or negative - of this situation / behaviour?
Next Steps	What specifically should be changed or repeated in response to the feedback? Why should this change be made?

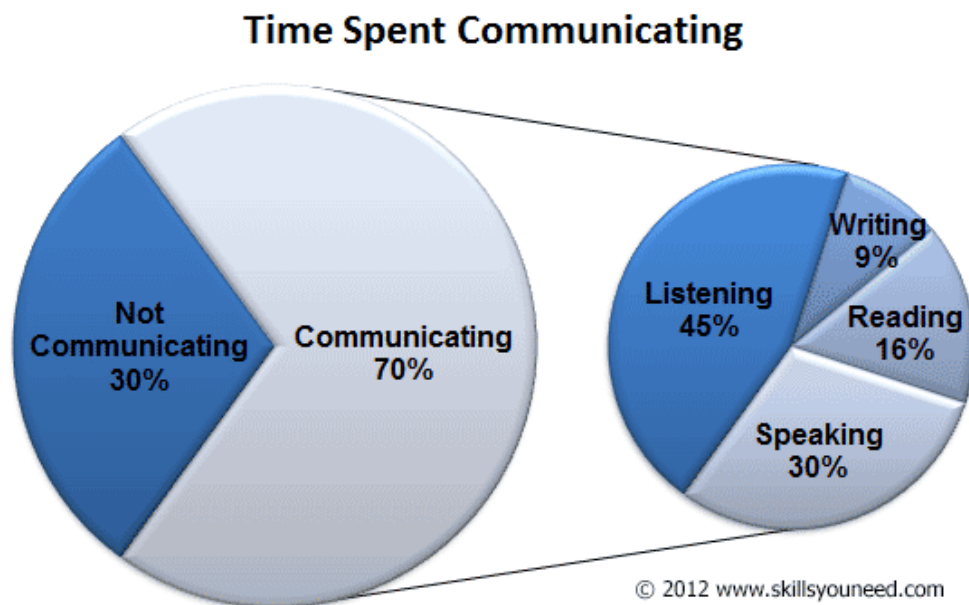
Strategies for effectively receiving feedback

- Seek feedback on a regular basis
- Be open to what you hear
- Let the person finish what they are saying
- Ask questions to clarify anything you are not clear on or would like further information about
- Ask for specific feedback if this is not provided
- Take time after you have received the feedback to evaluate and understand the information
- Consider specific actions from the feedback provided
- Paraphrase what you have heard to ensure you have understood the feedback

iii. Communication: Listening & Questioning

Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood and communication between people breaks down.

Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication. Of this, an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing (Adler *et al.*, 2001).



What sort of listener are you?

1. Are you a 'lazy' listener or are you actively listening all the time?
2. Do you have poor concentration and memory or are you able to fully concentrate on the speaker?
3. Do you debate what the speaker is saying or do you carefully consider what they are saying and reserve judgement until they are finished?
4. Do you create distractions by doodling, gazing around the room, or daydreaming or do you fully concentrate on the speaker and what they are saying by taking notes and remembering the key points in their message?

10 principles of effective listening

1	Stop talking	When somebody else is talking listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them. Stop, just listen
2	Prepare yourself to listen	Focus on the speaker. try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated
3	Put the speaker at ease	Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue. Maintain eye contact but don't stare – show you are listening and understanding what is being said
4	Remove distractions	Focus on what is being said and avoid unnecessary interruptions
5	Empathise	Try to understand the other person's point of view. Look at what they are saying from their perspective
6	Be patient	Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it. Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone
7	Be non-judgemental	Aim to be impartial
8	Listen to the tone	Everybody will use pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations – let these help you to understand the emphasis of what is being said
9	Listen for ideas, not just words	The ability to link together pieces of information. Requires proper concentration and letting go of distractions
10	Observe non-verbal cues	Gestures, facial expressions and eye movements can all be important. We don't just listen with our ears but also with our eyes

Skills of Effective Questioning

i. Types of questions to avoid

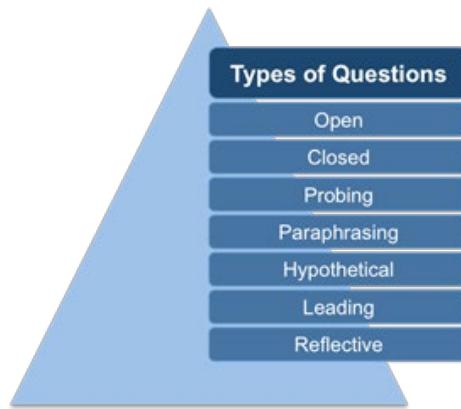
1. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. Both parties gain little understanding or direction from such closed questions. Instead, consider asking questions that start with "What," "How," "When" and "Where."
2. Avoid leading questions. Leading questions are questions that are asked to lead another person to a certain pre-determined conclusion or insight. These questions can be perceived by the other person as manipulative and dishonest. Leading questions often end up only eliciting a 'yes' or 'no' answer; for example, "You did what I suggested, right?"
3. Avoid frequently asking questions that begin with "Why."

ii. Guidelines for useful questions

1. Where possible, use open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are those that are not answered with just a 'yes' or 'no'. They generate thinking and reflection on the part of the person you are talking with.
2. Focus questions on the 'here and now'. The goal questioning is to help the other person to go forward by changing how they look at a situation or problem, identifying realistic actions to take, and learning from those actions.
3. Ask questions to clarify what the other person is saying. Clarifying questions help both parties to understand the key point of what he or she is saying. Clarifying questions often lead to discovering the root cause of issues.
4. Ask questions about the other person's perspectives, assumptions and actions. We can learn a great deal by closely examining our thinking. Therefore, ask questions about their thinking, assumptions and beliefs about current priorities.

iii. Types of questions

There are several different types of questions you can ask. Have a clear idea of why you are asking a question in a particular way and at a particular time.



Open Questions

Used to encourage the other party to open up, so that you can gather information. Open questions often start with why, what, where, which, and how.

'How was that useful?'

'What did you do to keep yourself on track with your goals?'

'How would you respond to this?'

'What do you think?'

Probing Questions

Used to clarify something that has been said or to find out more detail about it. Your verbal and nonverbal cues need to be neutral or supportive when asking probing questions. This type of question is useful in uncovering details.

'Why do you think this is the case?'

'What do you mean by that?'

'What are your options for solving the problem?'

'Is there an option that you have not yet considered?'

Closed Questions

These questions require a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Such questions should be used sparingly because they tend to make any conversation one-sided; however, in some instances an affirmative or negative answer is all that is needed.

Reflective Questions

Frequently used to check and clarify your understanding. This style of question reflects back to the speaker what they have just said and allows them to fully explain and then explore their understanding of a situation.

Leading Questions

Used with care because they imply that there is a right answer to the question, which contradicts the core principle of effective listening. They can be useful in situations where you require a desired answer or need to influence people's thinking.

'So would it have been better to...?'

'Do you think we should have...?'

Hypothetical Questions

Allow the questioner to gauge how the other person might act or what they think about a possible situation. They are effective in getting the person to think up and discuss new ideas or approaches to a problem.

'What would you do if...?'

'What would happen if...?'

Paraphrasing Questions

Are one of the best ways the questioner can check their own understanding of what the speaker has said. Paraphrasing is repeating back what the speaker said to check what they have heard and understood.

'What I heard you say was that.....Is that right?'

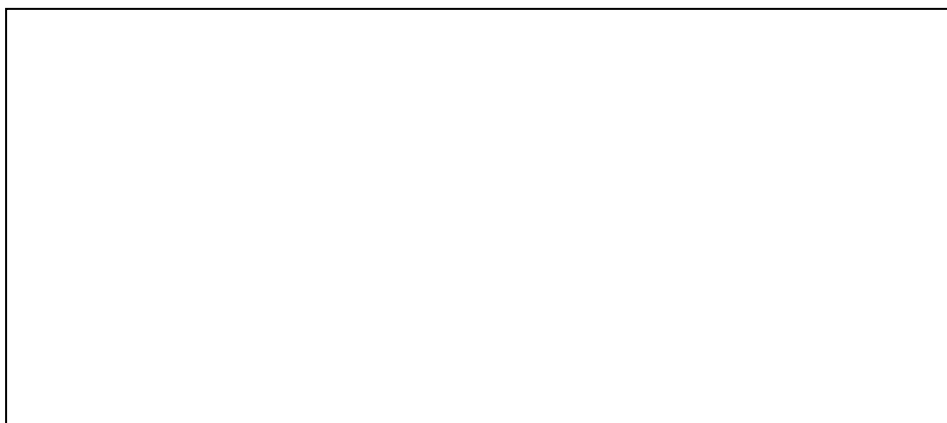
iv. Leadership

Leadership roles that are distributed across participants and mostly non-hierarchical can build strong communities of practice. Leadership in CoPs is seen as an act of service, that is, not leadership in terms of telling others what to do, but helping the group develop itself as a learning partnership (Wenger & Trayner, 2012).

There are a range of leadership roles that can be assumed by group members. Each leadership role is responsible for undertaking one of these processes on behalf of the group:

1. **Agenda activists:** Drive the learning forward
2. **Community keepers:** Weave the social fabric
3. **Critical friends:** Reflect on the process
4. **Social reporters:** Create a shared memory
5. **External messengers:** Communicate with external audiences
6. **Value detectives:** Make value-creation visible
7. **Organisational brokers:** Connect with other stakeholders

What type of leader role do you take in a group?



v. Group dynamics

What is Group Dynamics?

A group can be defined as several individuals who come together to accomplish a particular task or goal. Group dynamics refers to the attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of a group, how groups form, their structure and process, and how they function. Group dynamics are relevant in both formal and informal groups of all types.

Factors Affecting Group Behaviour

The success or failure of a group depends upon several factors, including:

1. Group member resources, structure (group size, group roles, group norms, and group cohesiveness)
2. Group processes (the communication)
3. Group decision making processes, power dynamics, conflicting interactions)
4. Group tasks (complexity and interdependence)

Virtual Communities of Practice: Video conferences

Video conferences (VC) offer a personal, relational online learning environment for meaningful group interaction. However, the community feeling does not automatically emerge because groups use electronic communication. It takes a lot of time and a lot of interactions. It requires sharing goals and sharing experiences.

i. Benefits of video conferencing to facilitate CoPs

1. Participants feel included because they can experience everyone, including body language
2. Little time delay
3. Groups can access and consult with others outside their own environments
4. The live atmosphere is more relaxing than an audio or text-only setting and encourages more conversation and better problem-solving (Sallnas, 2005)
5. Questions can be handled immediately
6. Quick set-up time enables groups to share topics of immediate, timely interest
7. Multiple sites can exchange the same information simultaneously, optimising consistent messages
8. Motivates individuals to share ideas openly
9. Serves as a catalyst for CoPs to act purposefully
10. Enable effective distributed meetings

ii. Potential challenges

1. Works only as well as the equipment and connectivity allow
2. The face-to-face group can think more positively about themselves and downplay the remote members
3. Talk can become more task-oriented and less social
4. The site which has the main CoP coordinator has higher status – other sites may feel less involved or at a disadvantage
5. Make sure group roles and expectations are made explicit

iii. Strategies for effective video conference CoP meetings

- Plan each VC CoP meeting carefully
- Plan collaboratively ahead to balance participation, presentations and active discussion
- Provide reading material ahead of time
- Complement VC meetings with follow-up peer contact (via online postings)
- Participants have opportunities to get to know each other before VC-ing – ahead of time and preferable face-to-face

- Ongoing communication to and amongst the group members, and ongoing work towards achieving goals. Continuous communication lowers stress and frustration
- Establish a web portal for collecting and containing resources
- [Monthly] online chat sessions
- Synchronous online application (for example, Elluminate) that enables members to present and share documents
- Keep the structure of the group meetings simple and transparent
- VC-ing should be complemented by other communication methods, both one-way and interactive
- Create an email distribution list
- Plan group discussion topics

Areas to Explore in the Project

i. Context Variables

1. At what stage of a CoP's development is video-conferencing most or least effective?
2. What technological configurations and support are necessary or sufficient in using VC in CoPs?
3. What personal factors (motivation, experience, personality), if any, are predictors for success in using VC in CoPs?
4. What kinds of tasks lend themselves to VC-ing for CoPs? (e.g., complexity, content, importance, consequence)
5. What time-frames work best for VC-ing for CoPs? (e.g., session length, task duration, group membership)

ii. Process Variables

1. How does VC-ing impact CoP participation and decision-making? What processes can optimise these behaviours?
2. How does the structure of VC-ing impact CoP processes?
3. How does CoP group size impact VC-ing interaction?
4. To what degree do CoP members need to meet each other and/or get acquainted before using VC-ing?
5. How does VC impact CoP group dynamics?
6. How does VC-ing impact 'group-think'?

CoP Agenda 2017

i. Options for CoP meetings' discussions and focus

- Change management skills – how to champion change
- Credibility skill building
- Appreciative Inquiry as a model for the group interactions
- Making decisions
- Problem solving
- Conflict resolution
- Motivating others, motivating self

Other?

ii. Between meetings: Commitment to own development

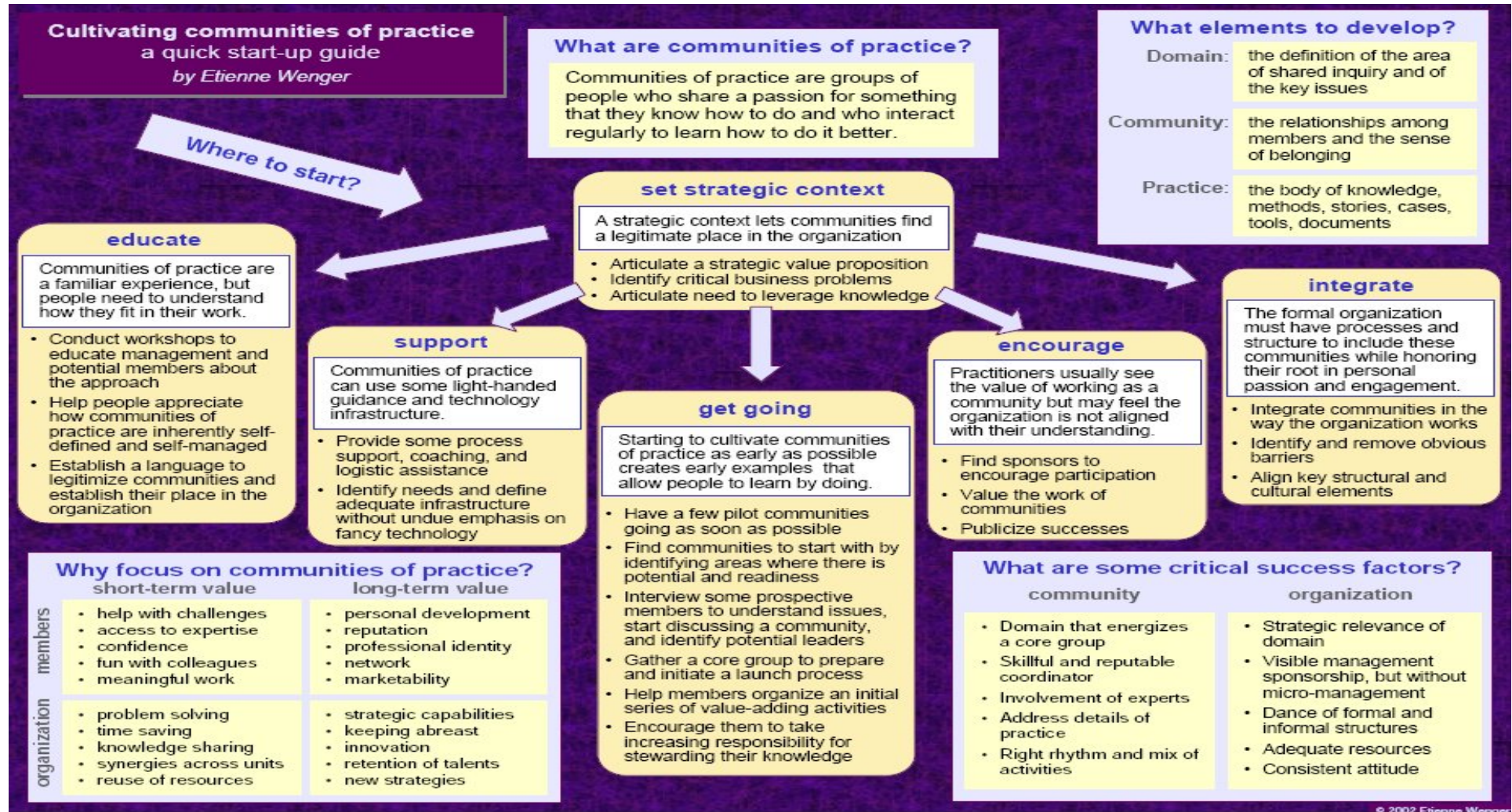
As well as contributing to and getting the most out of the CoP meetings, your professional development doesn't stop once the meeting has finished. It is vital that you continue to focus and work on developing your practice between meetings. This also enables you to bring fresh ideas and suggestions to share with the group at each meeting. So, what can this look like? How will you use the time between the CoP meetings to continue working on the development of your practice?

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