

B6 - Communities of practice

Informing principles

1. Why is this important to USQ and the parent project?
2. Internal environment in USQ: Communities of Practice (CoPs) will directly support two objectives of the Program Revitalisation Project (PRP) to provide resources and professional development support for program development planning; and facilitate students' learning journeys through the provision of flexible, high quality courses and programs by working with Faculty academic learning communities to implement quality L&T practice
3. External environment: market forces demanding high quality learning experiences for students and recognition that CoPs build and sustain learning and teaching practice
 Theory and practice informing CoPs: The implementation of communities of practice being well established in the Australian Vocational Educational and Training sector (Mitchell, 2003) and business as a means of facilitating the growth and implementation of new knowledge (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). In business contexts there has been recognition of the importance of more subtle, tacit types of knowledge that needs to be shared, and CoPs have been identified as being a framework or approach where such types of knowledge are nurtured, shared and sustained (Hildreth & Kimble (2004). Lave and Wenger (1991) and Vygotsky (1978) have identified the acquisition of knowledge as a social process, and communities of practice provide the opportunity to share and articulate tacit knowledge. CoPs will facilitate professional development of members, foster sharing and development of teaching strategies to improve course quality and learning outcomes for USQ students. CoP activities will be informed by the community of practice model proposed by Wenger (1998) and successfully piloted in the CoP for first year core course leaders in the Faculty of Business, USQ.

Goals

To develop resources to support learning and teaching and professional development of academics and/or staff in leadership/management roles:

1. Establish one or two communities of practice in each Faculty, as identified by Faculty Associate Deans (Learning & Teaching) and LTECs as strategic priority areas in both PRP and LTSU Support for Faculties frameworks
2. Establish a community of practice to support winners of USQ Fellowships
3. Increase visibility and profile USQ leaders in learning and teaching through public activities of CoP members, such as teaching forums, mentoring by CoP members and publications.

Strategic alignment

USQ Learning and Teaching Plan

USQ Learning and Teaching Project 3: Enabling project – professional development

Details of Faculty support for an 18 month period

Work collaboratively with Faculty Associate Deans (Learning & Teaching) and LTECs to identify strategic priority areas where communities of practice will support Faculty L&T plans. Faculty to identify Faculty CoP leader to work as co-convenor with LTSU project leader and LTSU Faculty staff (LTD/ALS), to plan and implement monthly CoP activities.

Tasks, timelines & budgets

Tasks	Timeline	Budget
Meet with Faculty Associate Deans (Learning & Teaching) and LTECs to identify priority areas for Faculty CoPs	As appointed, or LTECs mid Apr	
Review all Faculty Learning & Teaching plans	As signed off by VC, mid Apr	
Meet with winners of USQ Learning and Teaching Fellowships – collaborate with Christie White (LTSU)	Assoc Fellows - Mar, Senior Fellows - June	
Establish Faculty CoPs for identified priority areas	End April	
Identify priority issues each CoP – first meeting	May 2008 - Jun 2009	
Monthly CoP meetings – as determined by members	May 2008 - Jun 2009	Refreshments Admin support
Monthly reports	End of month	
Interim and final evaluation	Oct 2008, May 2009	Admin assist – Data gathering & collation
Final report	Jul 2009	

Total Resources/ Budget Required

1. Administrative support – organise meetings, take & circulate minutes, implement actions – one day a week April – 2008 - July 2009. Existing LTSU staff or PRP support staff?
2. Refreshments for 90 CoP meetings @ \$20 per meeting = \$1,800. Note: 5 Faculty + 1 Fellowship (6) x 15 meetings (monthly from April 2008- June 2009) = 90 meetings

Required documentation and policy rewriting

Identify if any USQ policy needs to be written or changed to see this initiative take place (identified also in the timeline) N/A

Professional development requirements

In recognition of high workloads, Faculty and LTSU staff will be mentored through CoP approach by project leader – using Just In Time approach. Two/three months into the project, Faculty co-convenors will be invited to participate in a CoP for convenors, to build CoP leadership capacity and prepare for project sustainability after June 2009.

Scholarship opportunities

CoP members will be encouraged to participate in LTSU PD activities, to research and publish, and to present to Faculty and USQ community, in relation to their L&T activities.

Communication plan

Through designated monthly communiqués with Faculty Associate Deans (Learning & Teaching) and LTECs

Monthly PRP reporting process

Evaluation strategies

Interim evaluation (October 2008) and final evaluation (May 2009), qualitative data to be gathered & collated by administrative assistant, for continuous reflection and improvement

Evidence of implementation of some assessment and curriculum change in L&T practice, reflecting shared & increased pedagogical awareness by CoP members

Increased participation in LTSU PD activities, research and publication activities and at least one L&T presentation by each CoP to Faculty and USQ community

References

Hildreth, P.J. & Kimble, C. (2004). Knowledge networks: Innovation through communities of practice. London: Ideas Group Inc

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, J. (2003). Effectively structuring Communities of Practice in VET. Melbourne: Australian National Training Authority. (Retrieved June 25, 2006)
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Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. (M.M. Lopez-Morillas Cole, A.R. Luria & J. Wertsch, J. Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. & Snyder, W. (2002). Cultivating communities of practice. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.