The New Culture of Organisational Learning

Cultivating Communities of Practice

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Re-Inventing Learning –
The Educational Value of Communities of Practice

[Organisations and] "firms rely on **informal and social learning** strategies for development." ***** The new learning must be **social, experiential, collaborative, technology-enabled** and closely **aligned to business goals**.

Communities of Practice (CoP) can provide a fertile environment for the new learning.

*(Economist Intelligence Unit study, 2014)

What Is a Community of Practice?
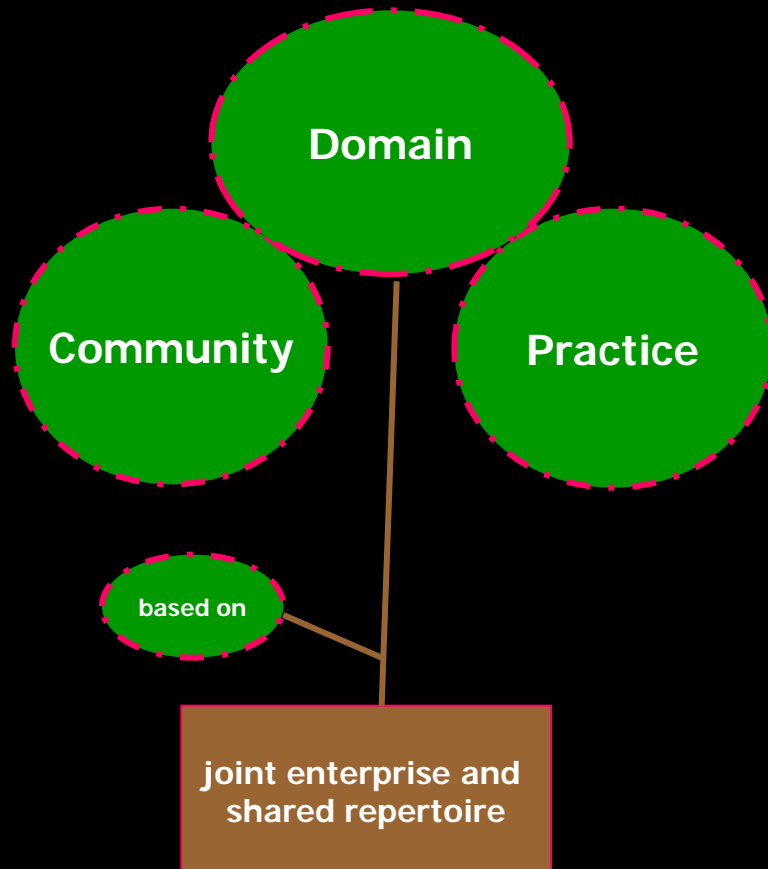
A **CoP** consists of **three components.***

Domain

Community

Practice

based on

joint enterprise and shared repertoire

1. **Domain:** joint topic, shared challenges, common purpose and goals

2. **Community:** group of practitioners who share a practice or concern, interact regularly, are socially interdependent and want to get better in their practice

3. **Practice:** finding solutions to problems by "doing"; constructing new knowledge; building a shared repertoire of strategies, tools, stories, and ways of handling typical problems.

(*** Lave and Wenger**)

The New Learning Takes Place in Networks

In the **networked economy**, learning is social, experiential, collaborative, and technology-enabled.

Practitioners need to create their **personal learning networks** and develop a **"cross-cultural"** mindset.

Communities of Practice offer them an environment where they can develop skills with people who share their learning goals.

Subject Matter Expertise + Learning Skills

Professionals are challenged to

- stay **current and ahead** of their field;

- **adapt fast** to new tasks and situations;

- improve their **learning** skills, including networking skills, cross-cultural communication skills, team skills, negotiation skills, visionary thinking, and social media skills.
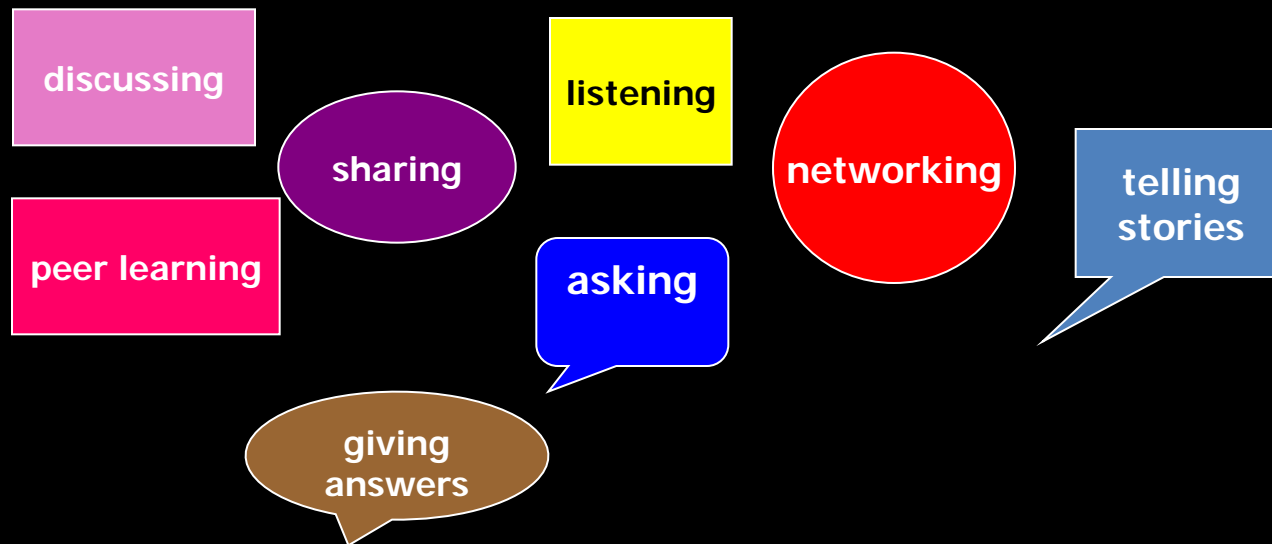
Out of the Lab, into the Practice

Communities of Practice can provide a fruitful **environment** for networking, exchanging, collaborating, even "failing" – and thus support **substantial learning** in the 21st century.

When used in a smart way, technology can enable **collaborative learning in CoP** across teams, departments, organisations, countries, and cultures.

The Learning Experience in CoP: What's in It for Me?

Learning in Communities of Practice is an **active**, **contextualised** and **constructive** process. Members are in charge of their own **learning experience**. The **practice** is the **curriculum**, defined by members.

discussing

listening

sharing

networking

telling stories

peer learning

asking

giving answers

Professional Facilitation Drives the Learning

Professional **CoP facilitation** can steer the learning process, prevent overload, and help members to make **fast progress**. Learners are encouraged to

- define their learning goals;

- analyse and discuss the problems they want to solve;

- develop and try out solutions;

- implement their solution;

- evaluate and review the results gained from their actions.

What a CoP Can Achieve

Individuals, teams and organisations may **benefit from**

- finding **innovative**, **practice-based** solutions to their problems;
- improving their **work and learning processes**;
- advanced **strategic thinking**;
- a **shared repertoire** of tools, strategies, artefacts;
- a motivating and engaging **learning culture**;
- committed members who are ready to act as **change agents**;
- **collaborative learning** as a sustainable form of knowledge management.

Potential Risks of CoP

CoP can promote the new learning. Still, sponsors need to be aware of potential risks, such as

- allocation of **roles** (someone needs to take **leadership**);
- lack of **resources** (facilitation, time and infrastructure);
- lack of **empowerment** (hierarchical systems);
- lack of **supportive organisational culture** (lack of trust and mutual respect, fear of losing control);
- lack of **learning skills**;
- lack of **tailored technology**;
- lack of fast **quantitative** measurement.

Curious? Excited? Ready for the New Learning?

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