Communities of Practice for New Employees

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Topics Covered

- Definition of Community of Practice (CoP)

- CoP at the University of Idaho

- Benefits of a CoP

- Creating a CoP

- CoP at Your Library (Discussion groups)

Definition/Characteristics

- A joint enterprise understood and continually renegotiated among members.
- Binds members as a social entity through involvement in common activities.
- Members have a common background or interest.
- Members have a common goal or purpose.
- Informal relationship based on trust and group identity
- Voluntary membership

(Source: Hildreth, Paul and Chris Kimble. *Knowledge Networks: Innovation through Communities of Practice*. Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing, 2004.)

CoP at the University of Idaho

- Five new tenure-track librarians hired in one year
- Evolved out of desire for mentorship toward research and publishing
- Planning meeting with expert in CoPs
  - Group goals and expectations defined by larger faculty group
  - Refined by new librarians who drafted charter document and group agreement
- Charter document approved by larger faculty group: the new Community of Practice

CoP at the University of Idaho

- Membership completely voluntary
- Members of CoP agreed to meet once a month for an hour to discuss research ideas in non-judgmental environment
- Listserv created to facilitate discussion among members
- Meetings consist of two parts
  - Half hour presentation of research by one member
  - Open forum for other members to discuss research ideas or problems

Benefits of CoP

- Safe place to gain feedback for research ideas or projects
- Ability to find collaborators for projects
- Sharing information about calls for proposals or projects currently underway
- Ensure communication among librarians from different library departments
- Combats isolation and worry connected to publishing requirements

Creating a CoP

Group should:

- manage itself
- assign jobs to members
- plan and schedule work
- take action to remedy problems

## Task and Maintenance

- 75 percent of effort
  - get the work done
  - constant improvement
- 25 percent of effort
  - effective decision making
  - implement decisions
  - resolve problems
  - resolve internal conflicts

Creating a CoP: Lessons Learned

- Need
- Small group of founding members
- Make sure goals and expectations are clearly expressed
- Should not create additional burden for members
  - If gap in presentation schedule, do conference recap
  - Presenting should be optional
- Optional not mandatory attendance
- Don't be afraid to reevaluate and make changes if necessary
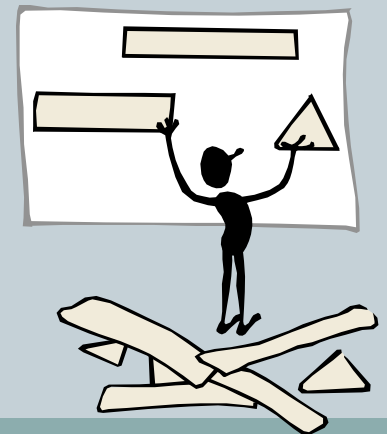
Questions for Discussion

- Do you think a CoP would work at your library?
- If yes, how would you make it work?
- If no, how could you apply these principles to another learning group?
  - Keeping current with the profession
  - Writing groups
  - Article discussion groups
- Do you currently have a successful learning organization?
- What suggestions do you have to share with the group?