

You, me, and a COP: How to locate or create a community of practice to boost your teaching effectiveness

Abstract

Do you want to improve your mentoring relationships? Do you need additional resources to enhance your teaching pedagogy? A Community of Practice (COP) may be just what you need to boost your teaching effectiveness. A COP has the unique ability to increase the reach and impact of educators through mentoring, resource sharing, and connecting through shared experiences. During this session, we will guide participants through our experience of developing a COP, joining a COP, and strategies for starting a relevant COP in their network or at their college or university. We will discuss the Hub of MOBTS, as well as share examples of the new knowledge and insights derived from our own COP, highlighting the benefits of a COP and how we have used it to improve our teaching, research, and service.

Keywords: *Communities of Practice, Pedagogy, Mentorship*

Introduction

At every career stage faculty members need specific support to advance their careers but to also maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life. Through mentorship or the lack thereof, faculty life can be made easier or more difficult. The use of Communities of Practice (COP) aims to increase the reach and impact of educator mentoring by which members may share important insights, discuss challenges, and offer lessons learned (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). As many of us are still dealing with the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that have infiltrated higher education, COPs are arguably more important than ever to help faculty members improve teaching, research, and service, while also encouraging the importance of mental and emotional well-being so that we can appropriately support the students we serve.

COPs thrive on members setting the agenda and other operational concerns themselves, thus, mentoring and learning from others is multi-directional. The purpose of this session is to describe how a COP can enhance one's teaching effectiveness and to engage with attendees about how to find or create a COP targeted to meet one's needs and interests. After participating in this session, attendees will be able to:

- Discuss how COPs can support them in their teaching effectiveness;
- Explain how to leverage a COP;
- Determine how a COP can help them; and
- Describe how to find or create a COP.

In addition to achieving these learning objectives, attendees will also be able to discuss and use the Hub of MOBTS, a management education repository (see <https://hub.mobts.org/>).

This focus on the Hub serves to illustrate a COP, immediately available to all participants. At the

end of the session, we will provide the participants with a list of targeted questions and additional resources aimed to help participants develop and maintain relevant COPs. We will also upload this information to the Hub to further establish the Hub as the go-to repository for resources for the MOBTS community.

This session is intended for all attendees at MOBTS, at all career stages. Anyone can find value in creating or locating a COP to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their respective areas (Satterly, Cullen, & Dyson, 2018). Attendees already involved in a COP can especially add value to this session by sharing their own experiences with other attendees.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

The very foundation of COPs is the ability for members to be able to learn with and from each other. While varying contexts engender different COP manifestations and learning opportunities, Monaghan (2011) identifies several shared attributes. A COP tends to arise independently in any life domain, where members share a desire to learn about a particular topic in that domain. Accordingly, in the education career domain, one may seek out a COP based on teaching, research, or service, but further specify one's unique learning needs, such as seeking out a COP targeted to teaching online. Not only does learning occur within a COP, but so does the simultaneous generation of new knowledge by its members. The benefits extend to where members also enjoy enhanced meaning and identity as a result of their membership and participation in a COP.

COPs can be multifunctional and multifaceted, designed to serve the evolving needs of members to address their general concerns and linking members through their interest areas and needs. Additionally, in terms of format, COPs are flexible and can be adjusted and adapted to align with the needs of members by being online or offline. For example, one of us has

experience with starting a COP within their academic department, providing faculty with the opportunity to meet, informally, on a monthly basis to discuss a teaching topic of interest, e.g., engaging students, grading, and giving feedback. COPs may also exist between members with informal ties, such as via social media outlets (e.g., Reddit and Facebook) that especially emerged as useful resources to faculty, across a wide range of colleges and universities, during the pandemic. Finally, our own COP is both online and offline, and more recently, also contributes to and leverages the resources available via the Hub of MOBTS.

Essentially, COPs require purpose, people, and practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Through guiding participants to consider how a COP may meet their goals in their career or life, reflect on who they may connect with, and by demonstrating the dynamic nature of a COP, we intend to put the theoretical underpinnings of COPs into practice in our session.

Session Description

The overarching goal of this session is for all participants to be able to clearly describe a COP, determine how it is established or how to find an existing COP, and how it can be used to improve mentoring, resource sharing, and teaching effectiveness. Ultimately, this session is meant to be interactive and to help participants use the knowledge and insights that they have gained throughout their career to mutually support those around them. We will use a combination of personal reflection, think-pair-share, and group discussion to meet our session objectives.

First, we will briefly introduce the hosts and present our learning objectives. We will also describe the session's structure, including how the hosts established their own COP, how we have used the Hub of MOBTS to support our COP, and how we plan to further enhance our

COP. Through a series of individual reflection questions, we will invite participants to reflect on times in their career when they needed a COP and how they were able to navigate those times without support. We especially want to highlight how COPs can be useful for academics at all career stages. For junior and mid-career faculty, senior faculty play a critical role in mentorship and information sharing. However, junior faculty may also serve a vital mentorship role to senior faculty, particularly in light of a dynamic and rapidly changing world, as experienced within our own COP. Thus, the benefits of the COP are mutual.

The COP established by the hosts exhibits a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences and we will share how the COP has been beneficial, why we joined and/or established this COP and other COPs, and strategies for how to improve or strengthen an existing COP where one already belongs. We will ask participants to focus on one to two questions that are the most relevant from a list of provided prompts. We will also distinguish which questions are first intended for individual reflection and then for think-pair-share and small-group discussion. Some examples of the questions that will guide this reflection exercise include:

- Do you have prior or current experience in a COP?
- What types of information, coaching, or mentoring are you missing in your career or personal life?
- Identify your biggest challenges when meeting potential peers or mentors who might support or share your goals. What are some obstacles you may seek to overcome?
- List your mentors or colleagues whom you trust the most. Are these individuals willing to share information with you and others?
- Where might you find existing communities? Does your college or university have any COPs that are accessible for you to join?

Next, participants will move into small groups of two or three attendees to discuss their own experiences, how they believe COPs can be beneficial to them, and any apprehensions they may have regarding joining or creating a COP. Throughout, the hosts will focus on addressing participants' concerns so that they can clearly describe the benefits of a COP. The hosts will continue to facilitate the discussion and address any questions and concerns that participants may have regarding COPs and their use for improving and enhancing overall career and personal well-being.

Session Timeline

Brief Description of Activity	Time Needed
Welcome and introductions.	5 minutes
Provide examples of a COP, as well as discuss the Hub of MOBTS.	10 minutes
Ask the audience to individually reflect on where they are in their career and where they would like to be in their career.	5 minutes
Ask the audience to engage in a think-pair-share activity on the above reflection prompt.	5 minutes
Facilitate a guided small-group discussion on how to find or create a COP.	20 minutes
Debrief with the large group on takeaways from the small-group discussion.	10-12 minutes
Concluding remarks and handout.	3-5 minutes

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