Learning and Organisational Resources for Communities of Practice

Type of resource: Managing, supporting and evaluating (individual and collective, and informal and formal) learning
Type of scenario: Reification

NeedCoP: Understanding the perceived needs of CoP members

Summary
- Objective: for the CoP coordinators, to analyse the objectives and needs of the CoP members.
- Scenario: use of a questionnaire, presentation of the results, and elaboration of adapted activities.
- Tools: online survey services.

Objectives
The objective of this activity is for CoP coordinators to gain a sense what CoP members wish to gain from their involvement in the CoP, in terms of whether they are focused on developing their own expertise or developing the community. In examining the responses of members to the questionnaire, CoP coordinators can develop a sense of the sorts of activities that CoP members will perceive as most useful in developing their knowledge and/or practices. The activity can also be used to encourage CoP members to discuss their different views of how the CoP can support the development of their knowledge and practices.

Scenario
CoP coordinators give the following statements for CoP members to respond to. This can be done on-line or on a paper based inventory. The wording of the items can be amended to fit with the context of each particular CoP, e.g. "group" can be replaced with the name of the CoP. In addition, if items are not relevant they can be removed.

Beside each statement please thick the box that most accurately reflects your interests.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Not relevant
1. Within this group, I am interested in developing my expertise*.						
2. Within this group, I am interested in helping others to develop their expertise.						

Beside each statement please thick the box that most accurately reflects your interests.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Not relevant
3. My focus in participating in this group is to change how we all do things.						
4. Within this group, I am interested in the views of experts*.						
5. Within this group, I am interested in the views of peers.						
6. I'd rather participate in shared activities than listen to what the experts have to say.						
7. The best thing about being involved in this group is the way that it allows me to change my practice.*						
8. The best thing about being involved in this group is the helping the group as a whole to develop.						
9. …					x	
10. …	x					

The responses are scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with the scores for items with an '*' reversed (items 1, 4, and 7). The lower the overall score, the more CoP members are interested in developing their own practice than developing communal activities. CoP coordinators can use this tool to examine the focus of individual members, as well as to examine the differences between CoP members.

The CoP coordinator can use items 9 and 10 to check if there are important activities missing from the questionnaire. In the guidance to the questionnaire, CoP members can be advised: "If the items do not reflect your interests in the CoP, please add an additional item that reflects your interests as item 9. If there are activities that would like the CoP NOT to engage in, please add it as item 10."

The results of the poll can be displayed with a diagram in "spider" or "radar" allowing comparing the individual views and collective on the items contained in the questionnaire. This would allow discussion of the similarities and differences between CoP members' views of the most useful focus of CoP activities.

This activity can be followed by the activity "**ObjectivesActivities**: Connecting individual objectives with CoP activities" for matching identified needs with activities.

Tools to support activity

- Online support for surveys such as Survey Monkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com) or GoogleDocs (http://docs.google.com). These tools also provide functionalities for representing data in tables or graphs.
- Doodle can be used for presenting the answers to the CoP members in real time (http://doodle.ch).

Example of use by a community of practice

This tool is still in development. The items need to be trialled with a number of CoPs and the order of the items probably needs to be changed. Once the items have been trialled with around 100 CoP members then the alpha reliability of the scale can be investigated, which could lead to the amendment or removal of some items.

This resource has been used by a community of PhD students participating in a Doctoral Programme in Educational Sciences (UK). Two resources '**NeedCoP**' and '**AnalysingLearningProc**' were combined into a single questionnaire. The final item from **NeedCoP** ('The best thing about being involved in this group is the helping the group as a whole to develop') was left off the questionnaire because it was not seen as relevant to the Doctoral Programme. Other items were taken from **AnalysingLearningProc**. The wording of the items on the questionnaire was amended to fit with the context of the doctoral programme. In each case, the acronym 'CoP' was replaced by the word 'Doctoral Programme'; the word 'expert' was replaced by the word 'tutor'. The wording of item 'My focus in participating in this group is to change how we all do things' to 'My focus on the doctoral programme is to change the ways in which we work together'. This was done to clarify the meaning of the item. The questionnaire was administered electronically using 'Survey Monkey'.

The questionnaire appeared to be a useful measure of participants' perceptions. The 'not relevant' response was only used by one participant in relation to one item of the questionnaire. The resource is focused on establishing CoP members' preferences in the sorts of activities that they engage in as part of the CoP. In this way it can be used by CoP co-ordinators to design activities that will both relevant to CoP members' needs and are focused around CoP objectives.

Further resources

- This activity can be followed by the activity described in the resource "**ObjectivesActivities**: Connecting individual objectives with CoP activities". This may help debating on the similarities and differences between the members' individual objectives and make decisions about the activities to carry out with the CoP.
- This activity can be combined with the activity "**AnalysingLearningProc**: Analysing individual learning processes" in order to compare the members' objectives with their preferred personal learning activities.