

Demystifying Organizational Learning: A Case Study of IBM

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Rationale

- “There is no stable state. Our organizations live in economic, political, and technological environments which are predictably unstable.”
- “The requirement for organizational learning is not an occasional, sporadic phenomenon, but is a continuous and endemic to our society” (Schon, 1992).

Purpose of Study

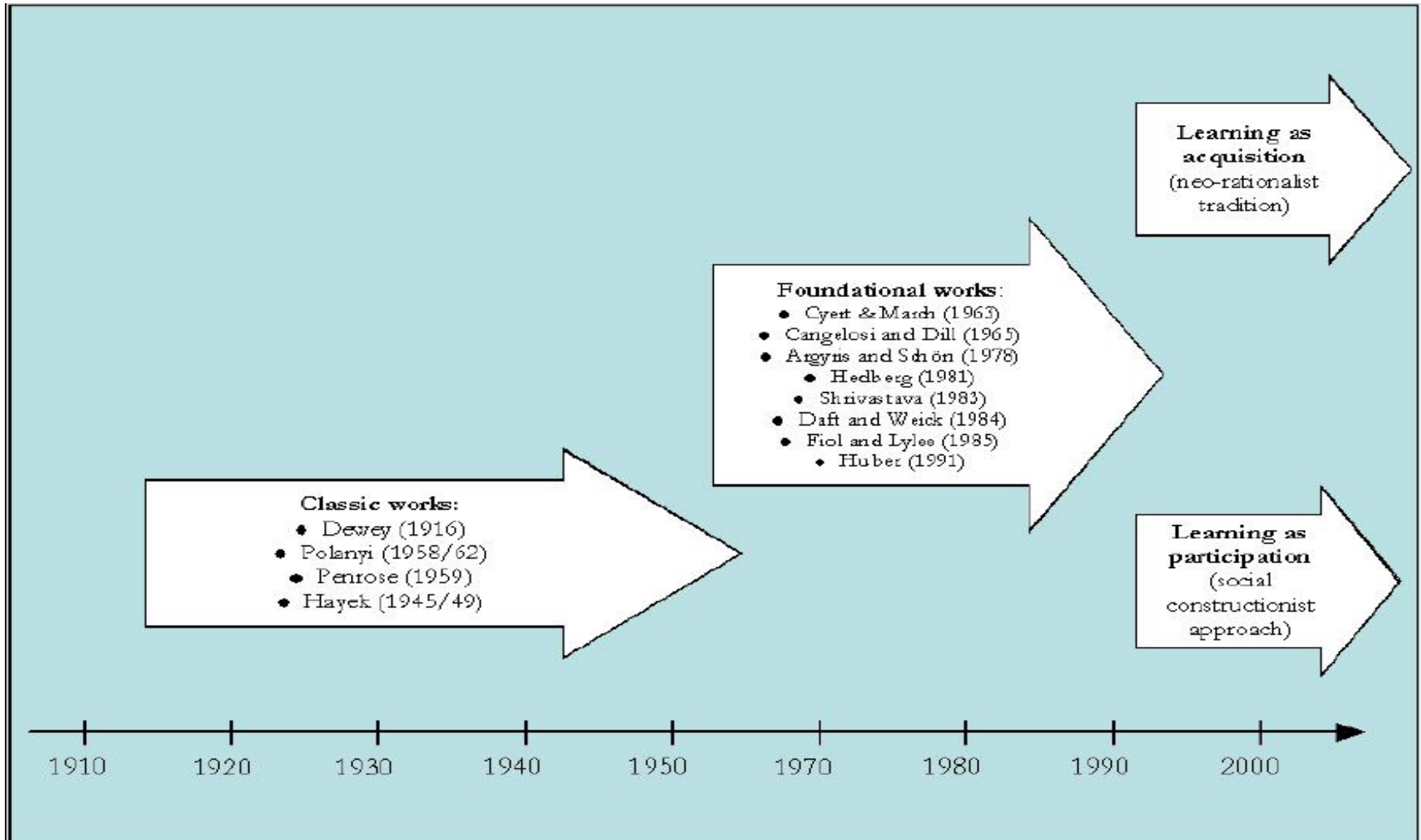
- to empirically explore the nature of virtual communities of practice (CoP) within the context of a global learning program. This study investigates whether and how the use of virtual CoP evolves and becomes embedded within organisational learning.
- to begin to build substantive theory about stakeholders' perceptions of the adoption of virtual CoP s in sustaining organisational learning (OL).

When is an Organization an Organization?

An organization is an organization when:

- Making decisions in the name of collectivity
- Delegating to individuals the authority to act for the collectivity
- Setting boundaries between the collectivity and the rest of the world (Argyris & Schon, 1978)

What is Organizational Learning (OL)?



Author(s)	Definition
Argyris & Schön (1978)	Organizational learning is a process of detecting and correcting errors.
Daft & Weick (1984)	Organizational learning is knowledge about the interrelationships between the organization's action and the environment.
Fiol & Lyles (1985)	Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.
Stata (1989)	Organizational learning is the principal process by which innovation occurs. In fact, I would argue that the rate at which individuals and organizations learn may become the only sustainable competitive advantage, especially in knowledge-intensive industries.
Huber (1991)	An entity learns if through its processing of information the range of its potential behaviors is changed.
Lee et al. (1992)	The organizational learning process is viewed as a cyclical one in which individual's actions lead to organizational interactions with the environment. Environmental responses are interpreted by individuals who learn by updating their beliefs about cause-effect relationships.
Kim (1993)	Organizational learning is defined as increasing an organization capacity to take effective action.
Levinthal & March (1993)	Organizational learning copes with the problem of balancing the competing goals of developing new knowledge (exploration) and exploiting current competencies (exploitation) in the face of dynamic tendencies to emphasize one or another.
Day (1994)	Organizational learning is comprised of the following processes: open-minded inquiry, informed interpretations, and accessible memory.
Dimovski (1994)	Organizational learning is a process of information acquisition, information interpretation and resulting behavioral and cognitive changes, which should in turn have impact on organizational performance.
Crossan et al. (1995)	Learning is a process of change in cognition and behavior, and it does not necessarily follow that these changes will directly enhance performance.

Paradox

Organizations are not merely collections of individuals, yet there is no organization without such collections.

OL is not merely individual learning, yet organizations learn only through the experience and actions of individuals.

OL is not the same thing as individual learning

Organizational Learning

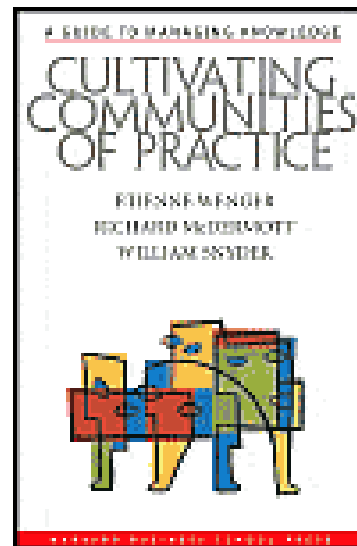
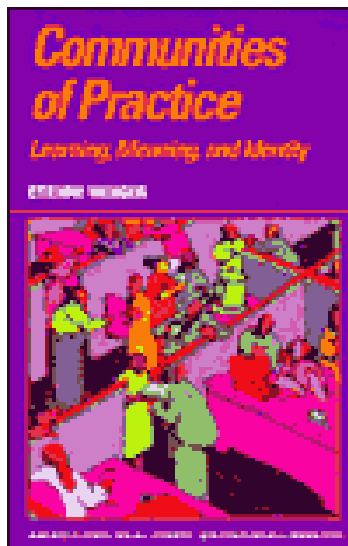
- Learning ≠ Training
- Learning ≠ Development
- Learning ≠ Attendance at Sessions
- Learning ≠ Acquisition of New or Enhanced Knowledge, Skills, Abilities

Characteristics Fostering Organizational Learning

- Shared vision
- Informal information exchange
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Legitimate peripheral participation
- Support mechanisms
 - Management's support
 - Openness to change
 - Appropriate tools, e.g., IT
- Professional group culture
- FTF interaction opportunities

Communities of Practice

CoP is a social structure focused on knowledge and enabling the management of that knowledge *by the practitioners themselves* .

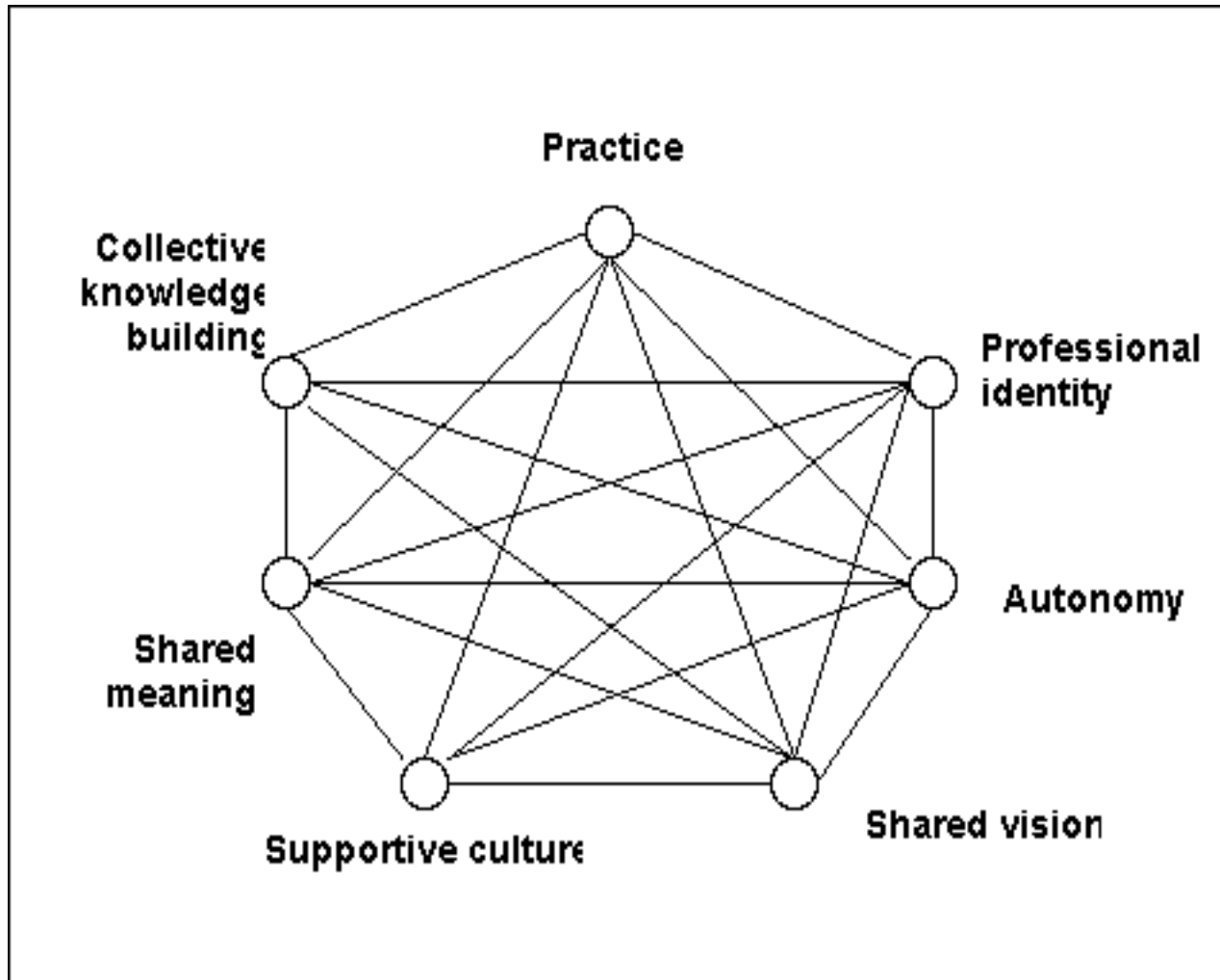


(Wenger, 2004)

Definition of Communities-of-Practice

- Communities-of-practice are informal personal networks that support professional practitioners to develop a shared meaning and engage in knowledge-building among the members (Hara, 2000)

Attributes of Communities-of-Practice:



Communities of Practice

Organizational benefits of CoPs:

- ❑ Potential to overcome inherent problems of a slow-moving hierarchy in a fast-moving economy
- ❑ Effectiveness in handling unstructured problems and sharing knowledge outside of the traditional structural boundaries
- ❑ Provide a means of developing and maintaining long-term organizational memory

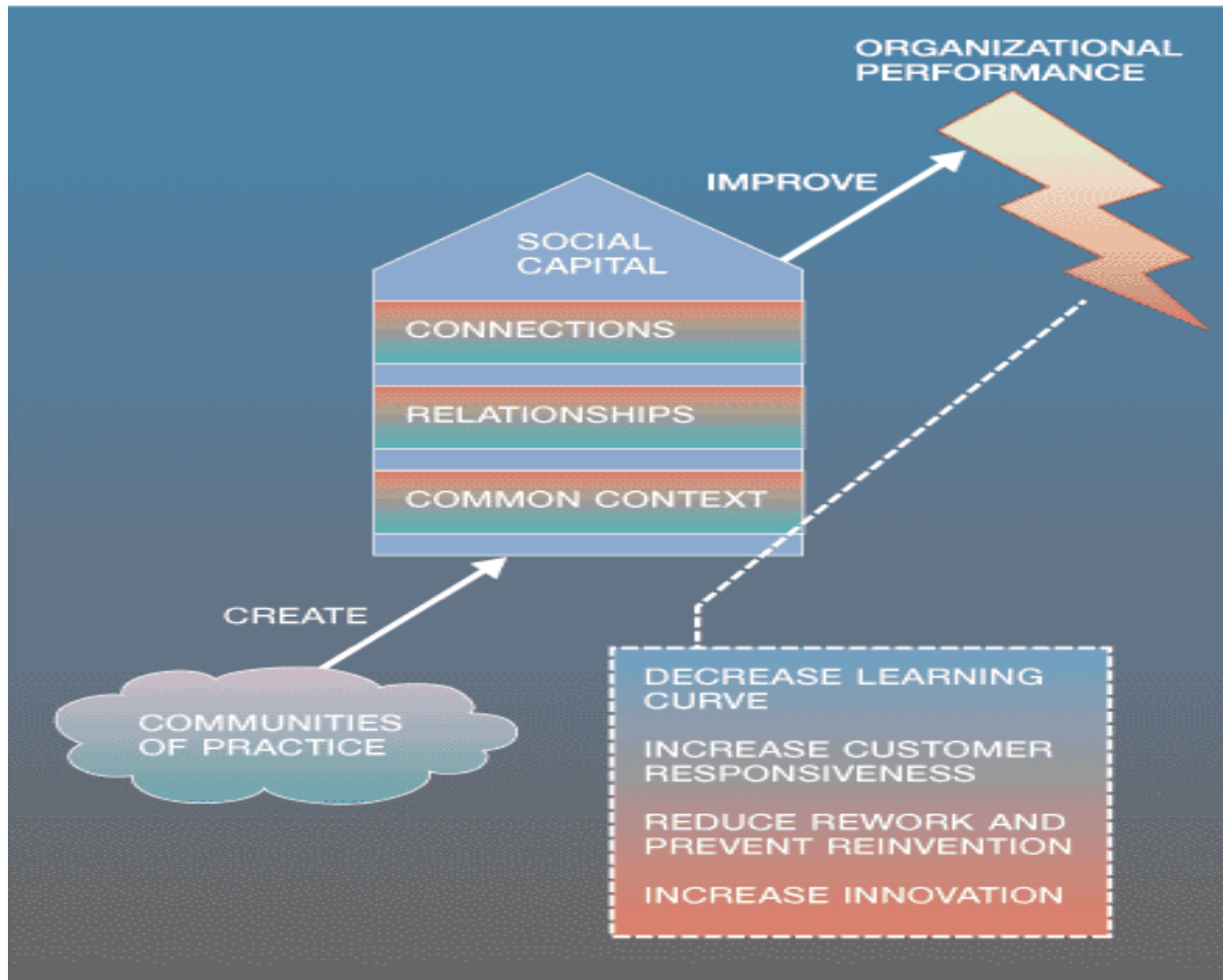
(Lesser & Storck, 2001)

Snapshot Comparison

In perspective with other organizational groupings.

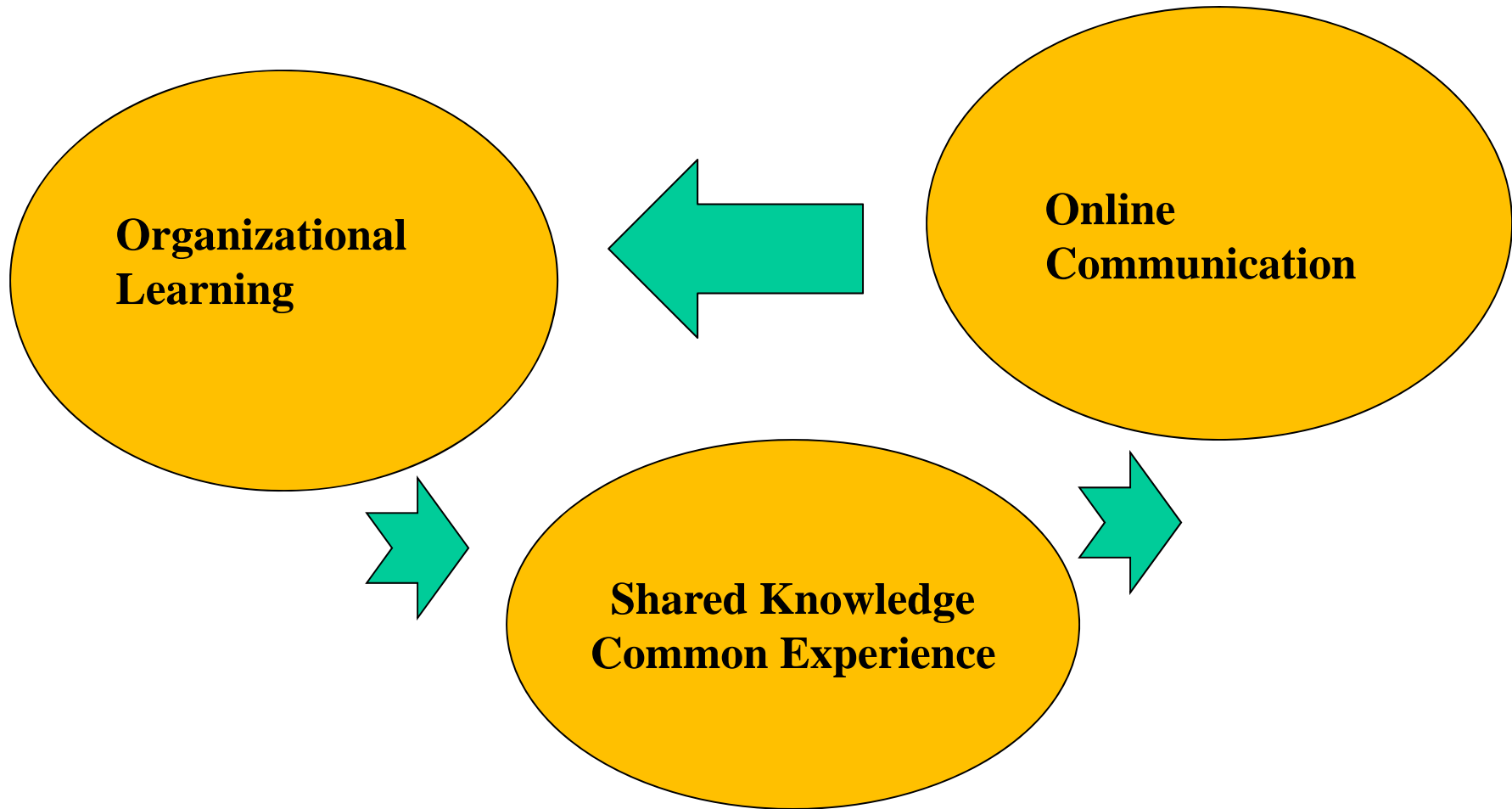
	Who belongs	Purpose	Cohesiveness	Duration
Formal organization	Hierarchical reporting	To deliver a product or service	Organizational goals	Until next reorganization
Project Team	Management assigned	To accomplish a specific task	Project goals	Until project is complete
Community of Practice	Voluntary, invited or self-selected	Build & exchange knowledge	Passion, identity, commitment	As long as interest remains
Informal network	Friends and acquaintances	Collect & pass on information	Mutual needs, friendship	As long as reason to connect exists

Communities of Practice



(Lesser & Storck, 2001, pg 3)

Developing A Community of Practice



Research Questions

- How can virtual CoPs be utilized in an OL program?
- What are the benefits and challenges in using virtual CoPs for OL?
- *Virtual CoP → the entity of all processes of communication, collaboration and connectedness.*

Context

IBM implementing an International Corporate Volunteer (ICV) program to foster OL

- Called as Corporate Service Corps (CSC) in partnership with a Canadian non-profit organisation- DOT (Digital Opportunity Trust) - so that the employees work on cross-border volunteer projects, alone or in teams, for a period of two weeks to one year. Employees work with small businesses, government agencies, non-profit and charity organizations, and associations in varied industries.

Methodology

- An embedded naturalistic case study (Patton, 1980; Yin, 1984) The qualitative design for this study draws upon Glaser and Strauss (1999), Miles & Huberman (1994), Patton (1980), and Strauss & Corbin (1997).
- Qualitative Approach will be taken in this study
 - emergent design
 - case study
 - grounded theory

Methodology

- Data collection & Analysis
 - Guided by qualitative methods outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1999), Miles & Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1997).
 - Questionnaire
 - Semi-structured interviews with IBMers from all levels
 - Organizational artefacts (meeting minutes, web sites, program materials)
 - Field notes

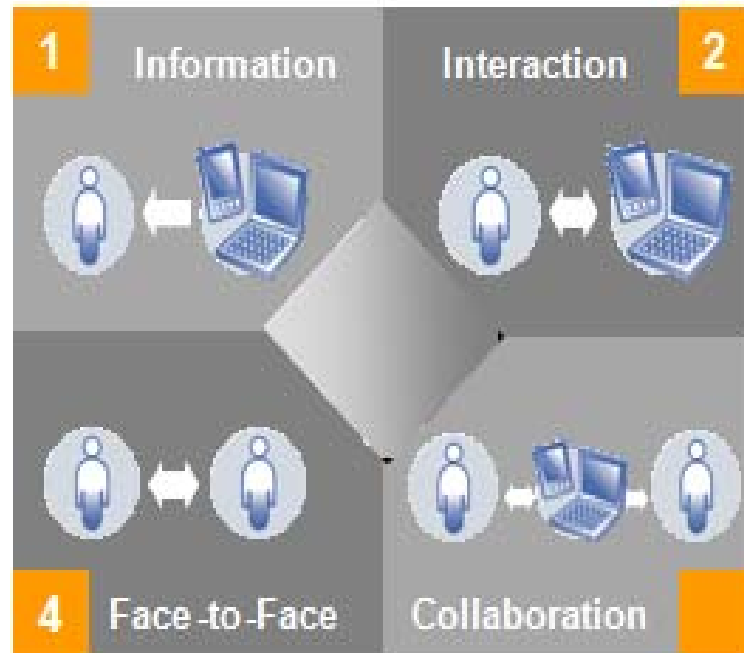
Overview of OL Tools

Static reference materials

Intranet KM Repositories
Quick views
On-line books & videos
Web lectures
Pod casts

Face to Face learning

Instructor led training
Facilitator driven learning
Workshops & Seminars
One-to-one coaching



Interaction with media

E-learning overview modules
Tutorials and Simulations
System emulations
Gaming

Access to experts

Virtual classrooms
Webinars
Communities of Interest
Messaging and chat services
Online FAQ databases

IBM CSC - Egypt Team 1 Collaboration Space

Activity Goal - Utilize LotusLive Space to collaborate on work for CSC Egypt Team 1 - hosting reports, working docum [... \[more\]](#)

[Add Entry ▾](#)[Add To Do Item](#)[Add Section](#)[▶ Reports](#)[▶ Meeting Agendas](#)[▶ Meeting Minutes](#)[▶ Questions](#)[▶ Stakeholders](#)[▶ Presentations](#)[▶ Sub Team 1](#)[▶ Sub Team 2 \(SOW 2\)](#)[▶ Websites & Resources](#)[▶ Previous CSC Teams - Deliverables & Work Products](#)[▶ ITDO Information](#)[Activity Outline](#)[Recent Updates](#)[To Do Items](#)[Trash](#)[Sections ?](#)[Reports](#)[Meeting Agendas](#)[Meeting Minutes](#)[Questions](#)[Stakeholders](#)[Presentations](#)[Sub Team 1](#)[Sub Team 2 \(SOW 2\)](#)[Websites & Resources](#)[Previous CSC Teams -
Deliverables & Work
Products](#)[ITDO Information](#)[Commercial Registry
Concepts](#)[Templates](#)

Preliminary Findings

“We don't really do much in social media with our NGO implementation partners. We provide a virtual CoP for our participants to blog, share pictures and post videos. A small area is given to each NGO partner to provide an overall summary. But otherwise we don't do much more than that.”

“The important question to ask is what value would we create by doing more in this arena. If we had a clear answer to that question we'd invest more in this space.”

Concerns regarding the use of virtual CoPs

Privacy

Multi-tasking

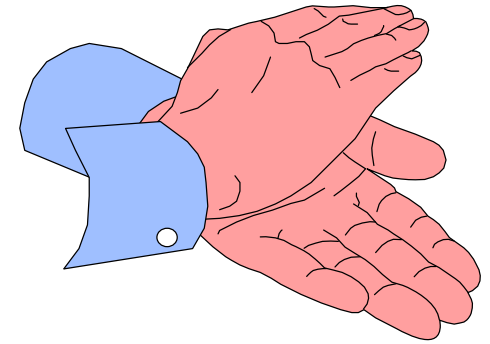
Not focusing on content

Not being sure in terms of the factors that makes one feel more engaged with the online collaboration tools.

Conclusion

Although previous studies confirmed the important role that the quality of dialogue plays in the cultivation of effective communities of practice this study shows that despite the quality of exchanges, virtual CoP are not necessarily utilized due to some alternative channels of communication.

Thanks for your Valuable Contribution!



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