Guidelines for Establishing Communities of Practice

Approving authority	Learning and Teaching Committee
Approval date	6 February 2006 (1/2006 meeting)
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Next scheduled review	2012
Document URL	http://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Establishing Communities of Practice.pdf
TRIM document	2016/7006116
Description	These guidelines outline the purpose, membership, and operating principles for Griffith University's Communities of Practice. The guidelines recommend a process for establishing Communities of Practice at Griffith and the conduct of members within the Community.

Related documents
Academic Plan

[Introduction] [Purpose] [Membership] [Goals, Terms of Reference and Operating Principles] [Coordination and Support] [Maintenance] [Evaluation and Measurement] [Closing a Community of Practice] [References]

1.   INTRODUCTION

A community of practice is a group of practitioners with a common sense of purpose who agree to work together to solve problems, share knowledge, cultivate best practice and foster innovation Communities of practice are characterised by the willing participation of members, and their ongoing interaction in developing a chosen area of practice.

Communities of practice are learning forums where members teach and learn from each other and, irrespective of their position within an organisation, regard each other as fellow practitioners, teachers, colleagues and sources of knowledge.

The following guidelines provide a framework for establishing and facilitating communities of practice at Griffith; they are not intended to be prescriptive, as communities of practice may vary according to their particular purpose and membership. The guidelines aim to support the facilitation and establishment of communities of practice, provide a consistent high quality experience for participants, and thereby contribute to optimising the outcomes for community of practice members and for the University. The guidelines provide a formal recognition of the value of the contribution provided by communities of practice, and highlight their role as a consultative forum and information conduit that can support Griffith's work on its strategic priorities in learning and teaching.

The guidelines are based on a community of practice lifecycle. During the establishment phase of a community of practice, when members are first joining and the forward program and communication tools, such as web pages and email lists, are being established, more facilitation support is required. As the community of practice matures and becomes more self- supporting, the intention is for facilitation and support to be increasingly shared across members.

2.   PURPOSE

Communities of practice have been established at Griffith University as a strategy for promoting best practice in learning and teaching in the area of engaging disciplines by fostering interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum design and development. In cultivating interdisciplinary at Griffith, communities of practice may focus on one or more of the following priorities

2.1 Problem solving

Most communities of practice have an element of problem solving within their sphere of practice. A community brings together expertise from a variety of sources to focus on solving a common problem, thus providing benefits to members and their elements.

2.2 Knowledge creation and sharing

One of the main tasks of communities of practice is to develop new knowledge that will improve the quality of learning and teaching at Griffith. A knowledge development community may decide to focus on finding, collating, organising and distributing the knowledge that their members use every day. This involves the community in organising shared information processes and focusing on filling knowledge gaps.

2.3 Best Practice

A community of practice focuses on developing, validating and disseminating best practice and may have as one of its projects the documentation and dissemination of such practice.

2.4 Innovation

Communities of practice may be based around issues of common interest to professional peer groups, with a focus on new and emerging areas of knowledge where there may be the opportunity to innovate. These groups can provide the basis for rapid dissemination of new ideas and resources.

3. MEMBERSHIP

Unless the purpose indicates otherwise, or a recommendation comes from within the community, Griffith communities of practice are for staff of Griffith University. Membership may be drawn from across the University. The scope and purpose of a community of practice shall be explained prior to inviting members to join so prospective members can self-select on the basis of its relevance to them.

4. GOALS, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OPERATING PRINCIPLES

In addition to the overarching goal of meeting the University's strategic priority of cultivating disciplinary and inter disciplinary collaboration, each community of practice is encouraged to determine its own specific goals. This will be accomplished by a survey of potential members' goals and expectations, and the results will be presented at the first meeting for discussion and agreement.

Once agreed, goals and terms of reference will be published on the University's communities of practice Quickplace and will be periodically reviewed in consultation with members. A Communities of Practice web page is under consideration.

The following operating principles indicate the conduct of communities of practice at Griffith and are intended to assist members to clarify their expectations of each other and the community

- Meeting dates will be publicised at least one month in advance

- Members expect to encounter at least one new learning from each meeting;

- Members contribute regularly to the community

- Meetings will not have a formal agenda, but items for sharing and discussion will be forwarded to the Chair and coordinator for circulation before the meeting

- an index of members identifying their areas of knowledge and experience will be developed

- Privacy and confidentiality is maintained within the community;

- Views expressed are those of individual practitioner members; and

- A summary of the discussion is circulated to members after each meeting

- The position of Chair will rotate with a new chair being nominated each trimester

5. COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

Each community of practice catalysed will require initial support and facilitation. Griffith University provides a coordinator for its communities of practice, venues for meetings, maintenance of a CoP Quickplace, catering when required, and administrative support. Such resources are targeted at communities of practice with university-wide membership. Ideally, the communities of practice should be largely self-supporting as this is an indicator of their value to members and the wider University community. The strategies listed below may help to encourage a community of practice to become self-supporting.

- Members can be encouraged to take an active facilitation role at meetings and other activities, and to share information and expertise and capture knowledge.

- Meetings and information sharing can draw from wherever the expertise lies, including within the group, from non-members and/or other agencies, and share this information as appropriate.

- During the establishment and maturity phase the lead agency can facilitate a community of practice by providing online operational support through the following activities.

- An email discussion group may be set up to encourage member's engagement and share expertise and information.

- A web page may be a useful tool, and can include public and private domains to encourage information and expertise sharing.

- Links to information about communities of practice can be made from the communities of practice web page.

6. MAINTENANCE

When a community of practice has matured it ideally becomes largely self-supporting and the coordination/support role diminishes. The coordinator will undertake the following activities to help ensure that the community of practice is continuing to function well and work towards its goals.

- Maintain a watching brief regarding participation of members in email discussion and the web page.

- Updating of the web page and email discussion list.

- Organising of venues and catering.

- Stimulating meeting attendance and email discussion.

- Monitoring of participation.

- Attendance at meetings.

- Feeding the community of practice useful reference material and information.

- Sharing information on visiting experts and other relevant events.

7. EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

The 'health' and relevance of the community of practice will be evaluated by seeking regular feedback from members and periodically evaluating outcomes. Such evaluation will also facilitate identification of emerging issues. Evaluation will be timed to feed into planning cycles to ensure relevance to members' needs and University priorities. Evaluation will include

- the level of participation in email discussion, presentations and meetings;

- the range of members involved;

- attendance at meetings;

- outputs achieved, such as better practice checklists and toolkits;
- evaluation of the uptake and usage of these checklists and toolkits; and
- member satisfaction.

8. CLOSING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A community of practice may be closed in any of the following circumstances:

- the group is no longer active;
- it has achieved its principal purpose;
- it has been assessed by the lead agency as no longer serving its original purpose, is no longer considered to be an organisational priority, or has drifted from its agreed mission;

Suitable processes for closing a community of practice may need to be taken into account. Issues to consider include:

- Consulting members regarding closing the community of practice.
- Recognising the group's achievements
- Acknowledging member's contributions
- Notifying members that the community of practice is closed, via email and at meetings as appropriate.

9. REFERENCES

http://www.agimo.gov.au/resources/cop/guidelines

Wenger E., McDermott R., and Snyder W., (2002) "Cultivating Communities of Practice". Boston. Harvard Business School Press.

Learning and Teaching at Griffith: Communities of Practice