

# Virtual Community

A Community of Practice for the Peer Workforce

<https://virtualcommunityblog.wordpress.com/>



**Academy of Peer Services**

Advisory Council Meeting

September 12, 2016



## Objectives

- Define community of practice (CoP)
- Recall the initial plan for the Academy CoP
- Show prototype for one element – the “Virtual” CoP
- Discuss benefits and challenges
- Brainstorm opportunities



## What is a Community of Practice?

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- A **community of practice (CoP)** is a group of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic.
- A CoP may **evolve** from a common interest or it may **be created** to increase knowledge and expertise.
- Through the process of sharing experiences members learn from each other, and develop personally and professionally.

( [Wenger 1991](#) )



## What is a CoP? (continued)

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**Communities of practice (CoP)** are not new.

This type of learning practice has existed for as long as people have been learning and sharing their experiences through storytelling.

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger coined the phrase in their 1991 book, 'Situated learning' ([Lave & Wenger 1991](#)), and Wenger then significantly expanded on the concept in his 1998 book, 'Communities of Practice' ([Wenger 1998](#)).



## What is a CoP? (continued)

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- A famous example of a community of practice was Xerox customer service representatives who repaired machines in the field.
- The Xerox reps exchanged tips and tricks over informal meetings and eventually Xerox saw the value of these interactions.
- Xerox established the **Eureka project** to allow these interactions to be shared across the global network of representatives.
- The **Eureka database** has been estimated to have saved the corporation \$100 million.



## Community of Practice: Benefits

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### Benefits of a Community of Practice:

- Camaraderie
- Shared values
- Increased learning
- Study cost savings / effectiveness
- Accountability
- Accomplishment
- Stronger voice for advocacy / change



## Where is a Community of Practice?

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- **A CoP** can exist in many different settings (or hybrid/combinations of settings.)
  - **Online (anytime) meetings:** discussion groups, newsgroups, social media-Facebook, LinkedIn...
  - **Live meetings:** Lunch room at work, library, community center, church, or elsewhere in the natural environment of the community.
  - **Hybrid or live combined with virtual meetings:** Phone conference, Skype, Zoom, GotoMeeting, etc...



## Community of Practice: Elements

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### Structural elements of a CoP:

- **Domain** (common ground and sense of identity share among the members)
- **Community** (individuals who interact, respect, and trust one another and are eager to share and learn from one another)
- **Practice** (knowledge, information, ideas, stories, and concepts that the community members share)



## Community of Practice: Formats

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### Different formats:

- **Topic-based** (different presenters at each meeting)
- **Issues-based** (members bring issues to discuss)
- **Solutions-based** (members share best practices)
- **Event-based** (members work together to organize or present an event)
- **Support-based** (members support each other)
- **Co-supervision** (members work on specific professional development activities together)



## Community of Practice: Development

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### Forming, norming, storming, performing

- A CoP encourages members to reflect on their work in relation to the domain (Moore, 2008).
- CoPs may disseminate best practices, generate and steward knowledge, and encourage innovations.
- CoPs go through a process of development, coalescing and maturing over time.
- If it functions well, a CoP develops a body of shared knowledge and resources that helps all of the members in their work.



## Development (continued)

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### Forming, norming, storming, performing (cont.)

- As the CoP develops, participants begin to have a sense of identity as members of the CoP (Wenger et al., 2002)
- A CoP encourages interaction among members who are active and engaged and who see themselves as collaborators and peers (Gunawardena et al., 2009; Moore, 2008)
- A CoP can be especially supportive for individuals who are engaged in developing knowledge and practice in a new field of endeavor.



## In-Person Community of Practice: Case Study

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### Monroe Association of Recovery Specialists (MARS):

- Formed in 2008, following a 12-week Intentional Peer Support Training in Rochester, NY.
- Members of the class wanted to continue to meet to practice skills and share practical tips and ideas.
- Established as a local chapter of the National Association of Peer Specialists (NAPS)
- **Still meets on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of each month!**



## Community of Practice: Barriers

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### Barriers in forming a Community of Practice:

- Finding time
- Agreeing on shared values
- Finding a location (possibly neutral territory)
- Settling on a specific goal
- Determining objectives and outcomes
- Establishing leadership (shared vs. authority)



## Initial Plan

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### Design Phase

- Step 1:** Identify Critical Areas / Develop Survey
- Step 2:** Focus Groups / Survey at NYS Conferences
- Step 3:** Create Prototype Discussion Forum



## Initial Plan (continued)

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### Development Phase

**Step 1:** Develop volunteer leadership positions

**Step 2:** Invite people to join (live and virtual communities)

**Step 3:** Hold regional forums (live and virtual)

**Step 4:** Recruit people to report on events, submit job openings, and other areas of interest to the peer workforce



## Virtual Community

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### Benefits to a “virtual community”:

- Finding time – (can be any time)
- Eliminates the time needed for travel
- Finding a location – (anywhere there is internet)
- Develops leadership and facilitation skills
- Collaborative learning
- Means for an emerging profession to “find its voice”
- Tool for advocacy efforts
- Able to reach larger numbers
- Able to reach people who are otherwise isolated



## Virtual Community

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### Challenges to a “virtual community”:

- Design and testing
- Organization and management (list management)
- Facilitation and leadership
- Managing conflict
- Scaling up
- Confidentiality (members and people they support)
- Getting and keeping people involved



## Process to Establish a CoP

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- **Decide a goal (common purpose)**
- **Consider membership rules (who can join)**
- **Do outreach to target members (explain benefits)**
- **Establish a regular time to meet**
- **Set an agenda**
- **Create ground rules and statement of values**
- **Meet in hybrid locations as needed**  
(live and phone conference or skype)
- **Rotate leadership (shared vs. authority)**
- **Communicate regularly**
- *Don't give up!!!*



## Presenter

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**Rita Cronise,**

International Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS)  
Adjunct Faculty, Rutgers University  
Academy of Peer Services

Advanced Level WRAP Facilitator  
Intentional Peer Support Facilitator

*E-mail:* [rita.cronise@rutgers.edu](mailto:rita.cronise@rutgers.edu)

*Prototype site:* <https://virtualcommunityblog.wordpress.com/>