Communities of Practice leadership roles and activities that create and sustain peer connections

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Abstract

Communities of practice provide a context that creates and sustains peer connections for both academics and professional staff to engage in supportive and sustained learning situated in their higher education practice. However, for such communities to be successful they need to develop informal leadership structures, often unsupported by the institution, and develop leadership skills that effectively meet the needs of members, while negotiating the institutional leadership terrain. A developing body of current literature suggests that well led and structured communities of practice are successful in leading change and building the peer connections that can transform learning and teaching practice. The role of a community of practice facilitator, or leader, requires significant skill to manage upwards, downwards and across formal leadership structures in higher education. Communities of practice are member driven, so the facilitator role is quite different from traditional hierarchical management roles. It requires the capacity to foster an environment that builds and sustains a dynamic and engaged community, provide opportunities for peers to share and grow their practice, and consciously address shared member, but also institutional goals.

The three elements of Communities of Practice (CoPs) building community, sharing practice and building domain knowledge provide a robust framework for creates and sustains peer connections both academics and professional staff. The workshop will draw on findings of an ALTC Teaching Fellowship - Community, Domain, Practice: Facilitator catch cry for revitalising learning and teaching through communities of practice - and findings of the ALTC Leadership project - Identifying, building and sustaining leadership capacity for communities of practice in higher education – to explore aspects of the leadership capacity of facilitators of CoPs to increase their success in engaging peers in activities to transform their teaching practice to enhance
student learning outcomes. Resources developed in the ALTC Fellowship and Leadership project will be provided for workshop participants.

The workshop aims to identify aspects of the leadership roles of community of practice facilitators, based on survey and interviews findings of the ALTC Leadership project, and the experience and sharing of practice of the participants. Participants will conceptualise, articulate and plan the development of their facilitator/leadership role as it relates to the opportunities and challenges of their particular context. They will identify, assess and develop relevant leadership aspects as they relate to leadership capabilities and competencies within the different phases and different contexts of communities of practice within the higher education sector.

Reference list


