Additional information on CoP

Source: The Audiopedia. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqJ-b2MJJ2Y

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a craft and/or a profession. The concept was first proposed by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their 1991 book Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger 1991). Wenger then significantly expanded on the concept in his 1998 book Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998).

A CoP can evolve naturally because of the members' common interest in a particular domain or area, or it can be created deliberately with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a specific field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger 1991).

CoPs can exist in physical settings, for example, a lunch room at work, a field setting, a factory floor, or elsewhere in the environment, but members of CoPs do not have to be co-located. They form a "virtual community of practice" (VCoP) (e.g. Dubé et al. 2005) when they collaborate online, such as within discussion boards and newsgroups, or a "mobile community of practice" (MCoP) (Kietzmann et al. 2013) when members communicate with one another via mobile phones and participate in community work on the go.

Communities of practice are not new phenomena: this type of learning has existed for as long as people have been learning and sharing their experiences through storytelling. The idea is rooted in American pragmatism, especially C. S. Pierce's concept of the "community of inquiry" (Shields 2003), but also John Dewey's principle of learning through occupation (Wallace 2007). Examples: The communities Lave and Wenger studied were naturally forming as practitioners of craft and skill-based activities met to share experiences and insights (Lave & Wenger 1991).

A famous example of a community of practice within an organization is that which developed around the Xerox customer service representatives who repaired the machines in the field (Brown & Duguid 2000). The Xerox reps began exchanging tips and tricks over informal meetings over breakfast or lunch and eventually Xerox saw the value of these interactions and created 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.