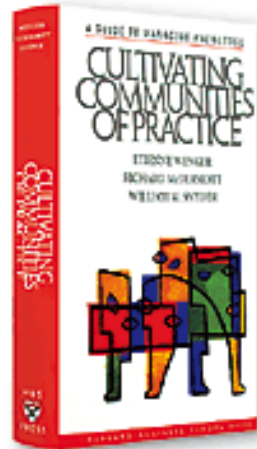# Communities of Practice 101

A Guide to Managing Knowledge Cultivating Communities of Practice

Etienne Wenger   Richard McDermott   William Snyder

Who has Communities of Practice at the ECSU?

- BVI
- DHH
  - ASL Share Shop
- Literacy
- PI OHD TBI
- AT
- DCD
- OT/PT
- Speech Language

- Regional and State CoPs
- 25+ years of existence as networks
- Federal Government Funded
- MN Department of Education (MDE) & Commissioner approve
- "Flow Through Dollars" for regional projects
- Target Projects at state level

Who is part of these CoPs

- Regional Low Incidence Facilitator
  - Legislated role accountable to MDE and MN Olmsted Plan. There are 8 RLIFs assigned to cover the 11 regions of the state. Primarily work is as liaisons between their region and MDE. They help implement state initiatives, collaborate on evidence-based practices and support the work of State/wide Specialists at a regional level.

- Statewide Specialist or State Specialist
  - Provide leadership and build state-wide capacity to develop, implement and sustain current and emerging evidence-based practices that support positive outcomes for all students, with a specific focus on students within their respective disability area/s. State/wide Specialists also field all questions from the field; provide technical assistance; and interpret policy, MN Rule and MN Statute.

Who is part of these CoPs

- **Kayna Plaisted**, Professional Development Facilitator
  - Responsible for facilitating Communities of Practice
  - Liaison between region 11 CoPs, Statewide CoPs, other region CoPs and MDE initiatives
  - Primary role is to provide CoPs with structured and engaging meetings around their domains of practice

- Members
  - Participants of Charting the Cs
  - Focus on active implementation of conference topics
  - Responsible for representing the district, taking notes, sharing information learned in CoPs with others and participating in goals

What is the Value of the CoPs

- MDE Perspective
  - The CoPs provide an opportunity to get highly qualified, director recommended district professionals together.
  - Often we are tied into working with a variety of people within the school setting who do not share our same career, successes and problems. These CoPs provide the opportunity for alike career professionals to learn, create and share together.
  - This provides opportunity for enhanced practices to reach everyone in the field and each student within our state which ultimately improves student outcomes.

Why Community of Practice?

- Knowledge markets are globalizing rapidly.

- What someone knows in Turkey could make or break your business in London.

- What a competitor's team is learning in South America could be the undoing of your project in Massachusetts.

- Success in global markets depends on communities sharing knowledge across the globe.

Who has Communities of Practice?

What is a Community of Practice

Domain

Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

Practice

Community

What is a Community of Practice

A community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements:

- A *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues

- A *community* of people who care about this domain

- The shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in their domain.

What is a Community of Practice

- Domain
  - Shared identity defined by interests
  - Key issues or problems members commonly experience
  - Well defined and specific yet long lasting (3+ years dedication)
- Community
  - Meets regularly (virtual or in person)
  - Large or small groups (sub groups within large groups)
  - Openness for communication in CoP and outside of CoP
- Practice
  - Balance between learning and production
 - Documentation of learned best practices

What are the requirements of a CoP?

- CoPs are simultaneously loose and tight
  - Tight: nondiscretionary, nonnegotiable
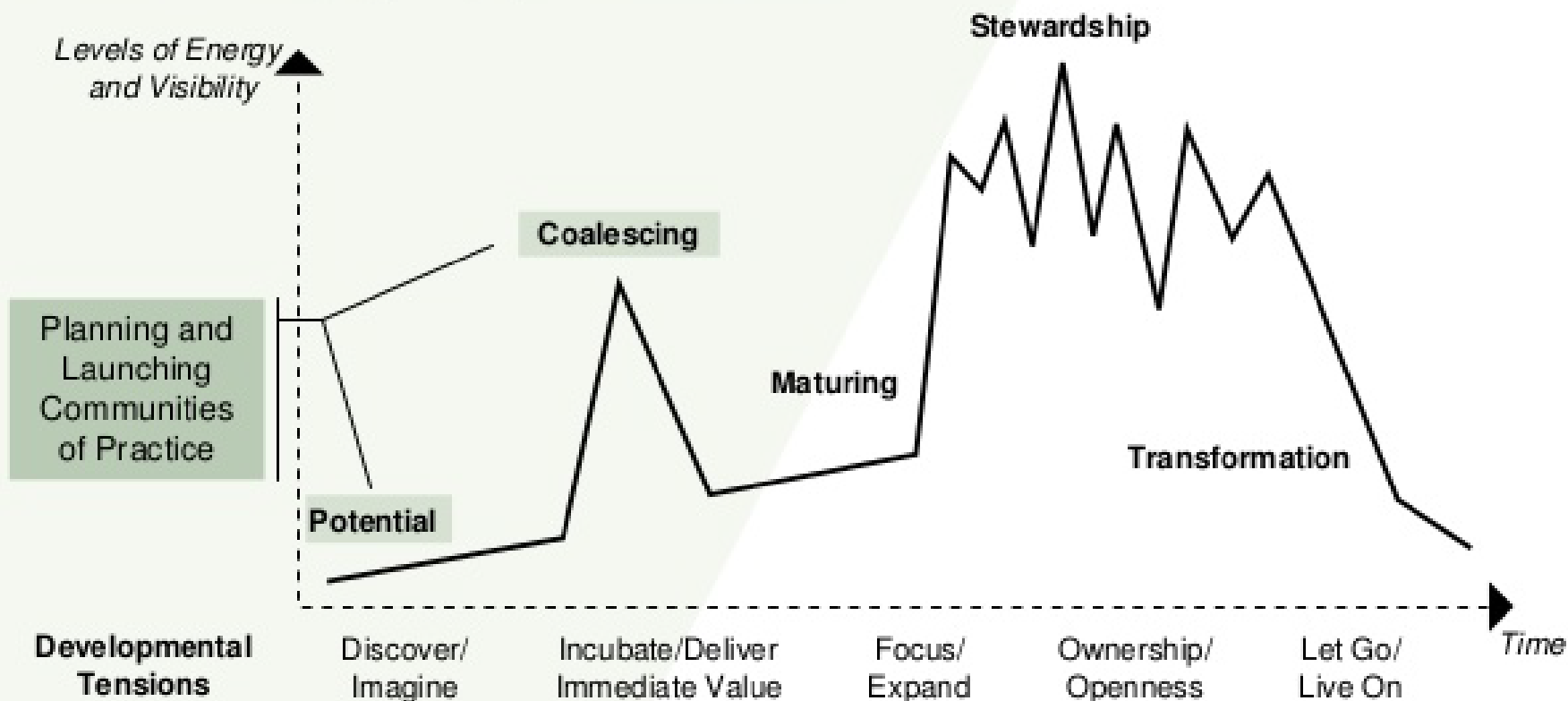 - Loose: empowerment to make decisions

TIGHT	LOOSE
Domain: Key disability area of interest, defining common problems/issues, long lasting efforts on a topic	Domain: Establish your own interests, defining your own common problems related to your area of interest
Community: Meets regularly, open communication in CoP meetings and out of them	Community: Options of large or small groups, choice in meeting times, communication as you are comfortable in large group
Practice: Balance between learning and production, documentation of best practices to share outside of CoP	Practice:Your voice in what will be learned, your choice in what will be produced and how to share these best practices

Degrees of Participation in a CoP

Outsider

Coordinator

Core Group

Active

Peripheral

Wenger et al (2002)
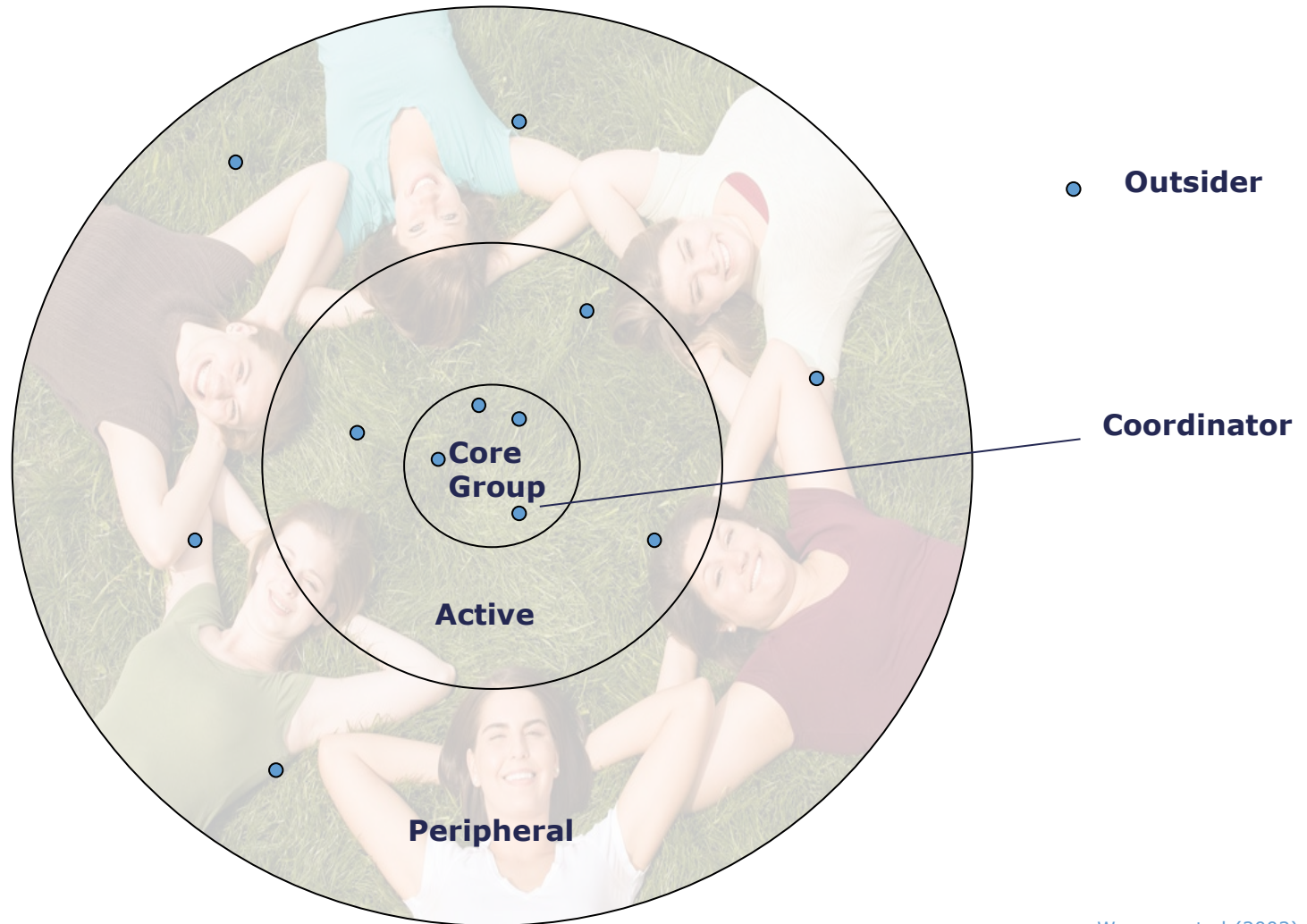
What are the stages of CoPs?

The jagged line represents the level of energy and visibility that the community typically generates over time.

Levels of Energy and Visibility

Stewardship

Coalescing

Planning and Launching Communities of Practice

Maturing

Transformation

Potential

Developmental Tensions

| Discover/ Imagine | Incubate/Deliver Immediate Value | Focus/ Expand | Ownership/ Openness | Let Go/ Live On |

Time

What are the goals of CoPs?

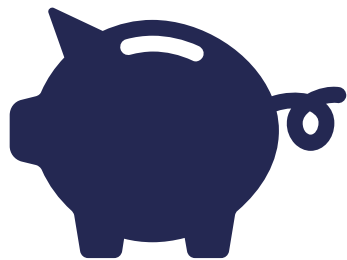Each stage of development has different related goals

- Stage 1 Potential
  - Domain: Defining the scope of the common issues
  - Community: Finding people who already network on the topic
  - Practice: Identifying common knowledge needs

What are the goals of CoPs?

Each stage of development has different related goals

- Stage 2 Coalescing
  - Domain: Establish the value of sharing knowledge about domain
  - Community: Develop trusting relationships for communication
  - Practice: Discover the specific knowledge needing to be shared
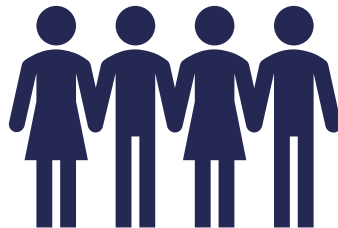
What are the goals of CoPs?

Each stage of development has different related goals

- Stage 3 Maturing
  - Domain: Defining the role in the organization & relationship to other domains
  - Community: Managing the boundary between collegial and congenial conversations
  - Practice: Shift from learning into organizing the communities knowledge

What are the goals of CoPs?

Each stage of development has different related goals

- Stage 4: Stewardship
  - Domain: Maintain relevance of the domain, find a voice in the organization
  - Community: Keep the meetings lively and engaging with intellectual focus
 - Practice: Keep the community on the cutting edge of research

How to Measure Value in a CoP

- You cannot merely count things such as documents created or trainings completed

- These static measures only become useful in context of stories that explain the causal relationship between the work done within the CoP and the effect of the application of the work with students.

- The best way to assess the value of a community is to collect stories with the artifacts

What do we do from here?

- Define our Domain (Rider)
  - Everyone in the room should be able to clearly state what our domain is and how we are addressing it

- Build our Community (Elephant)
  - Create relationships that allow for trust and communication

- Shape our Practice (Path)
  - Outline how we will share and document our practice
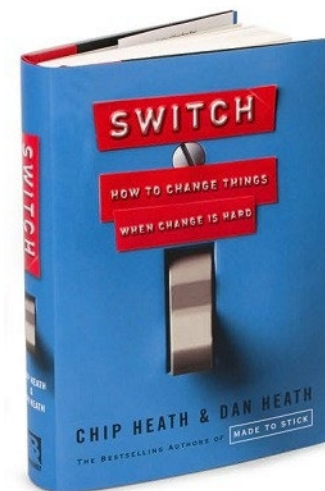
Resources

- Wenger, E., McDermott, R. A., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., Many, T. W., & Mattos, M. (2016). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Thank you!

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