Communities of Practice

The term Community of Practice was coined in the 1990's by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave but communities of practice have been around for as long as groups of people have assisted each other to learn.

Communities of Practice in the community services industry can be formed around any subject area including working with clients, governance structures, innovations and management techniques.

Communities of Practice provide an opportunity for practitioners and/or managers to

• Problem solve

• Request information

• Seek experience

• Map knowledge and identify gaps

• Discuss innovation

The difference between Communities of Practice and training or workplace learning is that Communities of Practice are based on peer to peer learning through participants sharing their knowledge, as opposed to a teacher and student structure.

A successful community of practice

• Engages relevant participants

• Has participants set topics & direction

• Includes unstructured time for discussions

• Has open dialogue between participants to encourage learning

Find a Step by Step Guide for Designing and Cultivating Communities of Practice click here

"Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" Ettienne Wenger

"What makes them (Communities of Practice) successful overtime is their ability to generate enough excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members"

Wenger, McDermott & Snyder

Wenger Etienne, 2011, Communities of Practice; a brief introduction, National Science Foundation.

Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge, Har-vard Business School Press.