

Process Work Communities of Practice Framework

Practice is a shared history of learning. Practice is conversational. Communities of Practice are groups of people who share an concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Etienne Wenger



Australia New Zealand
Process Oriented Psychology

Background

The concept of Community of Practice (CoP) comes from the fields of cognitive anthropology and educational theory, developed initially by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger as a theoretical description of the nature of learning as a community activity^[2]. This work was based on studies of groups of apprentices such as tailors, midwives, and meat cutters as they acquired knowledge and skills through participation in informal groups in their areas of vocation. The key insight was that learning and relationship in community are inseparable. Thus, rather than there being a discrete activity of knowledge acquisition, learning is embedded in community engagement, warm relationship, and storytelling.

Learning in community is already a crucial element of Process Work training and learning; we already have many informal Communities of Practice, both within formal training programs and in the community, just not named as such.

This community theory of learning was later expanded upon by Wenger^[2] as an intentional process for developing knowledge and skills. This expansion of the original work has been extended to many fields and disciplines, vocational or otherwise.

Wenger identified CoP as being composed of three areas – a domain of knowledge, a notion of community, and a practice:

1) Domain

The community of practice has an identity connected to a shared domain of interest. **Being a member implies a commitment to the domain and involves having a shared competence that others do not have.** It need not be an expertise that is widely recognised or respected in the wider society. For us, this domain is Process Work.

2) Community

Members of a CoP get together around their shared interest in their domain. They tell stories, share information, help each other. They engage in sustained interaction to develop a shared repertoire of information, resources and practices. They need not meet every day, but **to be in a community of practice they must be meeting, interacting and together.**

3) Practice

Not just sharing ideas and interests, members of a CoP meet around actual practice. “They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories,

tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice”^[3]. **They are practitioners.** They may be meeting to intentionally share information about their shared vocation, or maybe meeting informally and not consciously focusing on their practice, yet in both instances if discussing and sharing on their practices they are engaging in a CoP.

These three elements in combination define, nurture and develop a Community of Practice.

The Potential Value of Communities of Practice for Process Workers in Australia/New Zealand

Process workers, like any practitioners, need to ongoingly develop their knowledge and skills for working with individuals, families, communities and organisations.

Many graduates of formal Process Work programs report a sense of isolation moving forward as graduated practitioners. This is in part due geographical distance but also because there are Process Work practitioners from different schools that don't know each other exist – we might be living quite close to other Process Workers but not know it.

There are also practitioners in a wide range of fields integrating Process Work into their practice who have studied Process Work informally and are therefore even further removed from other Process Workers in community.

People passionate about Process Work can also feel isolated because we are likely living among community members, friends and colleagues who know little about the paradigm (and might think it a bit weird).

Communities of practice offer a way we can feel more connected to each other and be safe places to tell our many stories and in doing so learn from each other and develop our skills, resources and networks. CoPs are a great way to foster friendship, creativity, empowerment, and collegiality while providing a powerful antidote to the painful isolation many of us feel.

The ANZPOP PWCoP welcomes anyone who integrates Process Work into their professional practice, whatever their field, and wherever/however they learnt Process Work.

Developing Process Work Communities of Practice (PWCOP) in Australia/New Zealand

ANZPOP is committed to fostering excellence in Process Work practice in Australia/New Zealand. We believe that supporting Process Work practitioners by promoting and helping to host PWCOP is a great way to further this goal.

Our initial plan was to support the development of locally based PWCOP in various parts of Australia/New Zealand, however, the pandemic has changed our direction and we are starting the program online.

Who?

PWCOP is for people who integrate Process Work into a professional or social change role. They may be people who:

- have been to some workshops or done a training program in Process Work, and who try to integrate it into their work, paid or unpaid work – it doesn't matter how much they know or where, how or with whom they learnt it
- feel isolated or could use more support in their efforts to use Process Work
- are drawn to connect with others who use Process Work
- want to learn from and with others and share what they know
- are maybe looking for people to collaborate with in either work or social change contexts.

Some examples of the professions Process Work is used in include psychotherapy (individual, relationship, family), facilitation, coaching, education, conflict resolution/mediation, activism/social change, creative arts/performance, organisational development, leadership development, business management, training, and social work.

How?

Communities of Practice work best when they are allowed to evolve over time by the participants involved, rather than be directed by an externally imposed framework (which suits our paradigm well).

The PWCOP will start with some simple structures which will then be modified over time based on the interests of those attending.

Details of the dates, times etc for each COP meeting will be on the webpage: <https://anzpop.org/process-work-communities-of-practice/>

References

1. <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>
2. Lave, Jean; Wenger, Etienne (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>
4. Wenger, Etienne; McDermott, Richard; Snyder, William M. (2002). *Cultivating Communities of Practice (Hardcover)*. Harvard Business Press; 1st edition.