Developing a community of practice to enhance faculty capacity to foster student, staff, and faculty wellbeing
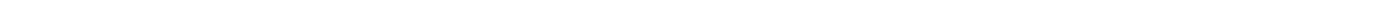
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people sharing similar interests or professions. The concept was first proposed by Jean Lave, a cognitive anthropologist, and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in the book *Situated Learning* which they co-authored in 1991 (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Creating a community of faculty who are interested in faculty and student wellbeing aligns with other UBC initiatives related to wellbeing in learning environments (e.g., Academic Tenacity TLEF 2017-2020, Wellbeing Liaisons) and responds to the call to action outlined in the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges to embed health into campus operations, academics, and campus culture.

Background

The idea for a Community of Practice (CoP) to support student and faculty wellbeing developed in response to faculty members expressing a need to have a platform for sharing knowledge on how they can promote student and faculty wellbeing. Additionally, this CoP acts as an avenue for faculty and staff to engage and develop a sense of community around the topic of wellbeing and show the connection between wellbeing and social sustainability.

Approach

The project consisted of three phases: 1) Recruiting and Engaging Stakeholders, 2) Needs Assessment, and 3) Community of Practice Charter development. In the first phase of the project, key stakeholders were recruited from the mentors (Michael Lee, Judy Chen, Diana Jung) who are affiliated with UBC Wellbeing and Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT). A needs assessment survey was developed for the Community of Practice, and disseminated to interested faculty, staff affiliated with CTLT, and teaching assistants. Phone interviews were conducted with 2 faculty members as well to gather their input. A total of 17 individuals from various Faculties expressed interest in being a part of this Community of Practice, and 8 expressed interest in joining the Community of Practice in a leadership role. These 8 individuals were invited to form the leadership group of the Teaching & Wellbeing Community of Practice, and to develop a charter for the Community of Practice.

According to Wenger, seven actions help to cultivate communities of practice. The following seven factors were taken into consideration throughout the development of this Community of Practice:

1. **Design the community to evolve naturally** – the community of practice charter was designed as a living document to ensure that the community of practice can be adaptable to changes and shifts in leadership.

2. **Create opportunities for open dialogue within and with outside perspectives** – the community of practice charter makes explicit that there are opportunities for stakeholders within and beyond the university for open dialogue regarding campus wellbeing.

3. **Welcome and allow different levels of participation** – while the community of practice charter speaks about commitment to the community, the group is kept open to ensure that faculty members can participate in a manner that aligns with their schedules and comfort level. The leadership group participates in the organization of the community. We anticipate active members who will be attending and engaging with the CoP regularly, as well as members who may participate in more sporadic, drop-in basis.

4. **Develop both public and private community spaces** – based on the needs assessment, it is identified that faculty members would appreciate having both a virtual and in-person platform for the community of practice to occur. The in-person community of practice meetings offers a public avenue to share community space, while the virtual avenue allows for private resource sharing and networking.

5. **Focus on the value of the community** – an evaluation of this community of practice will be in place with assistance from two graduate students. The evaluation will reveal how members value this community of practice and how participating in this community benefits members.

6. **Combine familiarity and excitement** – aside from sharing and developing resources and teaching practices that promote student and faculty wellbeing, this community of practice offers exciting opportunities to share and discuss actionable insights for potential policy change to improve student, staff, and faculty wellbeing.

7. **Find and nurture a regular rhythm for the community** – in terms of pacing of this community of practice, the needs assessment was beneficial in identifying the preferred frequency of meeting times as well as topics of interest.

Summary

Faculty members have great interest in fostering a teaching and learning environment conducive to student, staff, and faculty wellbeing. There is interest and need for a well-organized community of practice to support this interest. The needs assessment revealed that faculty members would benefit from a community of practice that offers not only a space to share best practices for teaching and learning for student and faculty wellbeing, but also

actionable outcomes that could foster cultural change within the campus. Faculty members are interested in a community of practice that is flexible in structure, occurs regularly on a monthly basis, and offers resources both in person and online.

Recommendations [Next Steps]

The community of practice will benefit from external evaluation to investigate whether this community improves faculty members' capacity to support their own as well as students' wellbeing.

References

Lave, J., Wenger, E. (1991). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-42374-0.; first published in 1990 as Institute for Research on Learning report 90-0013

Wenger, Etienne; McDermott, Richard; Snyder, William M. (2002). Cultivating Communities of Practice (Hardcover). Harvard Business Press; 1 edition. ISBN 978-1-57851-330-7.