

Peering over the parapet; using Communities of Practice to break down silos of working practice

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Abstract

Organisational structures are a key element to aid in the management and leadership of teams and employees, helping to provide ownership, and identify and leading the organisation to its strategic goals. However, whilst there are positives to this approach, there is also an issue of teams/departments building the walls of their 'kingdoms', creating silos of working practice in which the team controls their knowledge and experience, stopping it from flowing outside of their own silo. This is discussed by Mintzberg in which he models the divisional structure of organisations.

This chapter discusses the development and impact of silos of working practice and how the experience of engaging with the Service Improvement Community of Practice has led to key developments in collegiality and improvements in practice and process. The chapter considers aspects such as transdisciplinarity, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging as key when considering breaking down silos and disrupting the status quo to enable social justice in through CoP in Higher Education Institutions.

Introduction

Within the higher education working environment, it has been reported by many that due to its specialised and competitive nature, there is often a sense of isolation due to the multiple disciplines, departments, and the organisational hierarchy (Trust et al, 2017; Doherty and Stephens 2020; Roper 2021). Barnett (2000) uses the term 'multiversity' when discussing the complicated structure and culture that exists within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) furthering the notion of separation, and isolation, between staff. This isolation can prevent staff from developing collaborative relationships outside of the discipline or department in which they are based, thereby potentially stunting their ability to grow academically (Trust et al. 2017). In this chapter we will examine how organisational structures and higher education practices can lead to a sense of isolation with academic staff working within silos based on parameters such as discipline, department, or hierarchy. This chapter will then discuss the benefits of developing and engaging in communities of practice, and how this transdisciplinary practice can support staff in breaking down the barriers behind which they may find themselves.

Organisational Structures

Mintzberg (1979) states that an organisation is composed of five main parts:

- the operating core,
- the strategic apex,
- the middle-line managers,
- the technostructure
- the support staff.

Using these five parts, organisations can develop and grow into a number of different structures dependent on their environment, internal and external influences and challenges. The majority

of HEIs fall into the category of a divisional form structure, which incorporates smaller sub-structures, such as faculties, schools, departments etc. that are connected through the overarching organisations strategic apex (Mintzberg 1979).

For an HEI, this divisional structure is beneficial in that it separates faculties/schools into their own separate sub-structures, allowing them to focus on their own particular areas of specialism. For example, within Bournemouth University we have The Business School, The Faculty of Media and Communication, The Faculty of Science and Technology, and The Faculty of Health and Social Sciences. All four faculties/schools are managed within isolation of one another whilst sharing the overarching structure of the university as a whole.

Whilst it is true that this divisional structure can improve engagement and a sense of belonging within a faculty/school, a divisional structure also has its challenges. The compartmentalisation of the faculties can make strategic planning more complicated due to the potentially conflicting priorities and demands of the different stakeholders involved, as universities support a wide range of activities and subject matters which cannot be easily compared with one another (Temple 2014). This is because whilst most organisations are purposive; they have one main area of focus on which their success and growth is focused. In contrast, a university has a variety of different areas of focus which makes interdisciplinarity and working across boundaries a more complicated process (Temple 2014).

Mintzberg (1979) stated that an organic organisational structure (i.e., a structure that is loosely controlled and non-hierarchical) was the optimal approach for a dynamic organisational environment, and that a mechanistic structure (one that was tightly controlled and hierarchical) would be the optimal approach for a stable environment. This was further supported by the work of Ali and Varoğlu (2021) who stated that these organic and dynamic environments were most often linked to innovative and creative activities, and the stable and mechanistic environments were more conservative and risk averse. From this we can assume that Higher Education Institutions are considered as having a mechanistic structure due to the controls in place and the hierarchical nature of an institution as discussed above.

However, this approach has the potential to overlook some of the key components of an HEI. Whilst it is agreed that UK HEIs follow a traditional hierarchical model, this oversimplifies their structure. The very nature of Higher Education is based in innovation; in expanding the body of knowledge. In following a conservative, mechanistic approach to organisational structure, an HEI runs the risk of weakening the ability of its staff to innovate and be creative, activities on which it is reliant (Ali and Varoğlu 2021).

Consequently, whilst it is recognised that different disciplines are fundamental for the success of a HEI, there is limited interaction due to the divisional nature of HEIs. In order to overcome this, Siemens et al. (2014) developed an approach which compares the level of disciplinary difference and the level of academic control for each individual within an HEI, in order to understand the key factors that enable interdisciplinarity and enhance the desire for these collaborative practices.

The model identified the main inhibitors to collaboration across silos were:

1. Differences in vocabulary
2. Differences in methods and approaches
3. Varying role expectations and levels of perceived power
4. Different reward and acknowledgement policies, leading to resentment
5. The potential for damage to reputation through failed co-creation activities

Through using this model, it is hoped that colleagues across departments within an HEI could identify an appropriate balance of control and acceptancy of the degree of differences required within a co-creation team in order to be successful in their endeavours. The idea being that a higher level of difference provides access to new ideas, perspectives and knowledge and therefore develops creativity and innovation.

It is important to note however, that these differences, as identified in Siemens et al.'s (2014) model, also have the potential to cause conflict and misunderstandings. Siemens et al (2014) use the example of physical versus social scientists. A physical scientist does not often use a first-person, and their research is carried out at a distance from the object that they are researching. In comparison, a social scientist will generally use a first-person pronoun and involve themselves within the area of the research. These two separate approaches can therefore cause a conflict in interdisciplinary co-creation due to misunderstandings related to vocabulary and methodology.

This exemplifies why individuals will often be more comfortable in working with others within their own team/department due to a shared understanding, which means minimal conflict. However, as discussed, this also means a lack of creativity and innovation which can stunt an individual's ability to develop further. In addition to the inhibitors identified by Siemens et al, the structure and hierarchy of a HEI can often further restrict innovation and creativity due to the lack of flow of information between departments, subject areas and levels. Whilst there is evidence that some HEIs have started to adopt approaches to reduce this silo effect with the introduction of academic and professional staff who work across faculties and the creation of new interdisciplinary research centres, such as the ones set up at Exeter University. The compartmentalisation of disciplines and departments can make co-creation complicated due to the conflicting priorities and demands of the different stakeholders involved (Lewin et al. 2016).

Lastly, it is important to note that traditionally, changes in working practices within an HEI have been viewed as led by 'command' from the top. Change is therefore seen as something which is imposed on teams and individuals, rather than something which is organically developed by those who seek it. Furthermore, new initiatives or ideas introduced by those who seem to be closely connected with those on the top are seen as suspicious, even if there is no connection to the overarching practices of the senior leaders. Lewin et al, (2016) discusses how evidence is now showing that change must be developed from the bottom up. Those closest to the change are better positioned to be able to understand what is required, and how the change can be achieved, "people, in relationship with each other, create organization; and that without people working together organizations would not exist". (Lewis et al, 2016 p. 23). A move from hierarchy-based silos to open networks, which engage all staff, allow for greater transparency and a more democratic engagement from stakeholders at all levels (Lewin et al, 2016).

The impact of silos

Simply put, a silo in higher education can be viewed as a number of sub-communities all of whom exist under the overarching umbrella of the HEI. Within the UK higher education system silos have been both defined and strengthened by discipline focused funding, increase in specialist journals, team and departmental metrics (such as unit delivery student surveys, the NSS, PTES etc). Whilst evidence suggests that this competitiveness has benefited many staff,

this has also further increased the divide between teams, and potential co-creation opportunities (Macfarlane 2006). Evidence suggests that there is still little exchange of knowledge and collaboration across borders, and that this insular approach further strengthens the barriers of the silos in which many institutions operate (Macfarlane 2006). It has been reported that some staff within disciplines actively encourage barriers to working across disciplines, strengthening the silos that often exist, in order to ensure that rewards and the sharing of knowledge is kept to a select few within a shared discipline (Roper 2021). Weeden (2002, p. 58) notes how staff “try to monopolize advantages and maximize rewards by closing off opportunities to outsiders they define as inferior or ineligible.”

We know that within HE there is a need to develop as a specialist within your particular area of research focus, or within a particular role. However, by not looking above the parapet of your discipline, silos can lead to a lack of awareness regarding knowledge, and activities taking place elsewhere, both internally and externally to your HEI, that may overlap or assist in developing work that you are undertaking. They can also result on doubling up work thus wasting time and resources.

The mechanistic structure of UK HEIs, as discussed above, inhibit collaborative approaches to learning, teaching and research. Bui and Baruch (2010, p. 23) state that the way that colleges and universities are broken down into subject disciplines “creates a false impression that the real world is divided into fragmented parts.” This leads to discipline-based academic departments and business operations which work in parallel to one another with limited awareness of, or interaction with one other. These rigid structures narrow staff members’ views of their role within the HEI and act as barriers to collaboration, and partnership (Kezar, 2005a, 2005b; Leimer, 2009).

It is clear that within HEI there is a need to break away from silos. In moving away from silos, we can establish a wider focus on research, grow our academic communities and enrich our knowledge base and understanding with approaches and methodologies that we may not have otherwise been aware of (Macfarlane 2006).

Leimer (2009) suggests that silos insulate faculty and staff from the awareness that others may be struggling to resolve the same organizational challenges, which results in a duplication of effort. As Kezar (2013, p. 763) notes “Because people discover their own invented reality, it will be difficult for them to engage in a change process unless it is made meaningful to them, and they can connect to the change.” As such, in order to lead change and promote co-creation across multiple silos, there needs to be a clear understanding of the values and priorities of the different stakeholders.

This idea is discussed further by Leimer (2009), who states that information does not filter through an organisation, if the information does not clearly demonstrate how it will add value to the individual’s daily work. It is therefore necessary to assess the different ways in which the same information may need to be shared, dependent on the audience. Whilst some staff may be more open to face-to-face communication, others may respond better through email. Again, whilst some staff are satisfied with a simple overview, others may require a deeper understanding of how the information impacts their work and feel the need to be involved in the development of any new processes (Lloyd 2016).

It is important to note here though that we must remember that the process of removing barriers and breaking down silos is not simply about gaining buy-in or consensus. It is about

encouraging staff members to engage in processes and discussions, and to allow them to develop a new, or improved, shared vision and identity as well as encouraging them to work together to achieve shared goals. (Bess and Dee, 2012). Removing barriers by breaking down silos will also benefit the HEI by encouraging transparent ways of working and a learning from each other's type of culture. This will in turn benefit staff as they are able to get out of their comfort zone by exploring different ways of working within a safe environment. Collaboration, co-creation and peer support foster wellbeing and a positive organisational culture (Devis-Rozental and Clarke 2020), and this in turn will benefit the institution as people feel more creative and energised.

Why are silos negative for a HEI?

Silos in any organisation can be detrimental. Considering specifically HEI, we have identified a series of reasons why silos can be negative, and these are presented below.

Negative impact of Silos in HE	Example
Breakdown in Communication	Silos can have a negative impact on effective communication, and this can be detrimental to the student experience. For example, if a student needs support and information is not passed on effectively to the right team due to a lack of knowledge of what the team does. This can lead to missed opportunities to support students and lead to misunderstandings and frustration.
Inefficiency	When two different teams in different parts of the university work in isolation to solve a problem and end up looking at the same issue as another team there can be duplication, waste of time and demotivation.
Silo Mentality	Universities are complex institutions with many different departments, faculties and services. When a team in a university is only looking to meet their own goal without accounting for the overall strategy and organisational objectives it can create resistance to change and a toxic or fragmented culture.
Not sharing knowledge	Knowledge exchange is key in a HEI. Take for example a group of researchers in the psychology department looking at emotions in teachers and another team in the health department looking at wellbeing in education. These two groups could be working together for a common goal but if they don't know the other one exists there will be missed opportunities for cross collaboration, innovation and sharing of best practice.
Lack of agility in a HEI	Having rigid structures that aren't flexible and able to change and adapt can hinder HEIs, especially in today's ever-changing landscape. An example of this is the use of technology in different areas of the university and how some teams manage to thrive whilst others struggle to keep the pace.

Table 5.1 The negative impact of silos within a HEI.

All of the examples above can be tackled to improve practice. Lewin et al. (2016) suggests that it is beneficial to consider an organisation, such as an HEI, as a living system. Indeed HEI's are organic in nature changing and evolving constantly. This lets us look at how different perspective within an organisation encourage different beliefs about how people work, the role of management, and how to best affect changes in practices that are innovative and creative. To talk about an organization as organically developing as a 'living system' suggests that potential exists for both growth and renewal. It also suggests that the organisation will have a need for sustenance, something that gives it life. Viewing the organisation as alive reminds us that living systems are located within, and are responsive to, their environment. Viewing the organisation this way, we can experience the constant adaptation and change and the lack of a finite state within organisations as to be expected, maybe even as an important resource for growth and renewal, rather than as problematic (Lewis et al. 2016).

It is in this organic space that CoP can exist and become an important tool for developing those collegiate and open forms of communication. As such, a community of practice is a meaningful and genuine development, rather than one established simply to encourage staff to "toe the line".

Breaking silos from disciplinarity to transdisciplinarity

Within the context of academia, a discipline is a branch of knowledge that a group of academics have in common, and from which they research, teach and practice. It is a clearly defined way to identify a particular group and what they research and teach. According to Post (2009), disciplines are seen in different institutions in different ways depending on how their structures are formed. These ways of grouping in itself create silos, especially if there are no opportunities to share knowledge beyond the subject area. Language is similar, the audiences they reach may also be quite homogeneous and there are signature ways of teaching and learning which will be distinct to that discipline. Then there are multidisciplinary groups, where different silos work together and although they may be tackling the same issue the results may be reported from each discipline without really integrating the information. This happens for example, when a group of business studies academics work on a project with health studies academics to develop a solution for improving wellbeing in small businesses. Although they will be working together, the outputs each group delivers may be disciplined based in order to meet their REF requirements.

An interdisciplinary approach goes further as the disciplines combine their knowledge but there are still clear boundaries between the disciplines. If we take the example above, these academics would be working together for a common goal and also creating outputs together, whilst still each group focusing mostly on their subject. Transdisciplinary happens when the lines between the disciplines are blurred to the point of becoming almost not relevant to create a holistic approach to sharing knowledge. According to Rigolot (2020), transdisciplinarity brings together all types of stakeholders to create new knowledge. We argue that CoP present the opportunity to do exactly that. By bringing together people from all parts of an HEI or beyond to work together on the same interest, we are gaining a wealth of knowledge that will enrich everyone's experience by working in a transdisciplinary space.

Communities of Practice: developing collegiality and improvements in practice and process

A successful HEI is built through a culture of collective actions, knowledge, values, and ideas. The goal should therefore be to remove the barriers that hinder employees from taking appropriate action (Finch et al. 2010). In order to encourage and enable the removal of these barriers, HEIs must develop the means to allow for social and formal interactions to take place, which cultivate and encourage collaboration (Lloyd 2016). To develop these means, leaders should start by bringing colleagues together to work on identifying organisational practices and policies that block collaboration and develop practice and processes to remove them (Eisenberg, et al. 2015). In previous chapters the notion of what a CoP is has been identified. But to recap, to us a CoP is a group of people who share a common interest or type of knowledge in a particular domain and actively engage in learning and collaborating with one another. By removing hierarchies, job roles and seniority, CoP enable these beneficial interactions within a third space, neither professional nor social to create new learning opportunities.

Leimer (2009, p. 86) states that “institutional research professionals can contribute to institutional goals, even transformation, by helping to foster a broader organizational view, operating as a connector and facilitator of collaboration, and stimulating organizational learning.” This is something that would fit well within a CoP. A place to create connections and collaborate for the benefit of all.

A collegiate HEI focused on bringing its staff together, needs to focus on developing horizontal processes that bring people and skills together from across silos (Leimer, 2009). However, as Kezar and Eckel (2002) note, it is difficult for staff members to engage in a change process unless it is made meaningful to them. HEIs therefore need to build a compelling narrative or case for why this collaborative work is important and provide meaningful examples of impact from previous CoP activities in other institutions (Kezar 2005c).

Research funding agencies are now actively encouraging interdisciplinary co-creation of research in order to provide the innovations required to solve a variety of complex issues. This increased call for interdisciplinary co-creation is likely to lead to changes in the structure of HEIs in order to effectively meet these demands. (Millar 2013). We have heard from academics who feel that interdisciplinary research can have a negative impact on career progression, especially for Early Career Researchers (ECRs). For example, that those undertaking interdisciplinary co-creation have an increased workload in order to meet requirements. In addition, ECRs may feel that interdisciplinary co-creation is frowned upon by senior staff and the professoriate which can affect their potential for promotion (Millar 2013). In contrast, a study undertaken by Millar (2012) showed that ECRs seeking promotion were more likely to succeed in academic employment if they had focused on interdisciplinary activities. However, the data collected for this study is limited in that it is not able to identify why or how interdisciplinary co-creation has assisted with promotion. This could be due to a number of reasons and would require further study (Millar 2013). Nevertheless, it is still a point worth considering.

Daring to break the silos with CoP

CoP can play an important role in breaking down silos and there are many ways in which this can be done. We have identified some of these in table 5.2.

How do CoP break down silos?	Impact
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Peer learning	Sharing knowledge and learning from others can help people improve their practice. This promotes a culture of continuously learning and developing. For those able to share their knowledge, it can be powerful, motivating and have an impact on their confidence.
Cross-collaboration	Bringing together staff from very different teams and departments in a non-hierarchical space can increase innovation, help develop networks and allow others to learn the what's, how's and why's of how things work in a university. This can foster a sense of belonging as people feel included and knowledgeable about where they work.
Building effective relationships	In a CoP everyone regardless of who they are and what they do should have the same opportunities to collaborate and develop working relationships. Being able to sit in the same space with others sharing a common interest fosters engagement and a positive organisational culture. It challenges the them and us culture enhancing everyone's experience
Flattening hierarchies	Much like the point above, ensuring everyone has a sit at the table and the job titles are left at the door, humanises others as you are able to find the commonalities and develop mutual respect.
Empowering staff	Being able to share your knowledge and interests can be empowering and help people build their confidence. By being active participants that feel heard, people may feel a sense of ownership and agency about their organisation.
Influencing an organisation's culture	CoPs foster collaboration, participatory knowledge sharing, opportunities to meet the people in your organisation and to be more inclusive. This can only but have a positive impact on organisational culture.

Table 5.2 Methods for overcoming siloed practices in HEIs.

Whilst CoP can contribute to breaking down silos, these must be embraced as part of an organisational strategy, not as a standalone effort. CoP can influence change and provide opportunities for engaging in activities that foster collaboration, creativity, inclusivity and a more cohesive approach.

How can CoPs work successfully to break down silos?

In order for CoPs to be successful we can draw from the literature that discussed what makes a successful team. Eisler (2002) asserts that collaborative partnerships with other HEIs allow individuals to view each other as respected peers with a common goal. This can have a positive impact on the success of that team. Gibert et al. (2002), adds that co-creation and sharing practice can indeed create more value for institutions. Costa and Kallick (1993) add that working collaboratively with people from different disciplines can be helpful to develop opportunities to become critical friends showing curiosity and engaging in thoughtful

questioning, which in turn will result in a better understanding of the other team members. Mutual respect and trust are important for the success of working together (Peters and Armstrong (1998, (Nameth and Wheeler 2018).

There are a series of attributes of successful teams that could be applied to successful CoP. These are:

- **Professional and personal accountability**

According to Woolley et al. (2015), the process of collaborating between individuals in a team can be enhanced by a feeling of professional and personal accountability.

When people from different teams purposefully collaborate, it shapes the discussions they have and the outputs they are able to deliver. It can also help identify common themes (Pardee et al. 2017).

This process can result in high levels of integration creating new opportunities for for further engagement. According to Pardee et al. (2017), creating this new opportunities can have an impact on the success of a team, especially if the effort of the group, their working towards a common goal and their sense of accountability is inherently within the team. Indeed, successful teams collaborate to set the ground rules for achieving their goals and there is a continuous peer review process to maintain higher standards. This, coupled with building trust, transparent and rigorous within the collective of the team will have a positive impact.

- **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

Spending time with people different from us is a great way to embrace diversity. HEIs are multicultural spaces filled with people from different races, religions, abilities and all with different knowledge and ways of being. This is important because although universities are learning spaces, they are also social spaces where we develop relationships with those around us. Ensuring the space we create in a CoP considers intersectionality issues at its inception and regularly reviewing it to make sure it is welcoming to all and that individuals feel they can be authentic, feel safe to share and importantly feel included are key to the success of a CoP.

- **Collaboration**

HEI's are also spaces where we develop professional relationships with colleagues within our team. In fact, according to (O'Brien and Guiney 2019) the relationships we have with individuals on our team are the most important to develop a strong team. These are followed by the relationships with students and then others within the university who aren't part of our team. And these relationships can have a positive or negative impact on our wellbeing. They argue that the relationships outside of an individual's own team receives the lowest priority and this is one of the ways in which silos form. By paying less attention to those not in our immediate team barriers form and as this silos reinforce there will be a lack of collaboration and co-creation across teams, disciplines and departments. One way to avoid this is to explore the notion of inter-professional education (Buring et al. 2009), in which meaningful interactions between disciplines must take place to discuss and plan how to work together with a common goal. This could include respecting different types of knowledge and expertise (Beltran and Miller 2020).

Collaborating to meet university and strategic initiatives and goals is not a new concept and it has many benefits as mentioned previously such as peer learning and a joined up approach .This joined-up approach can benefit other people, for example, those we are trying to support, as they will not have to go through a range of places in order to get the support they need

(Dishman and Stephan 2019). Collaboration can lead to making better networking connections, broadening the opportunities of the team and having access to wider resources, training and support. Dishman and Stephan (2019) argue that the benefits that collaborating brings outweigh the time and effort it takes to make it happen.

Challenging a them and us culture by putting social justice at the heart of a CoP

When we talk about social justice within the context of a CoP, we refer to enabling a fair and equitable sharing of opportunities and privileges for all. This can be quite complex, especially in HEI's where there already are inequalities and a disproportionate share of privilege. Not only from a knowledge base point of view but also socio-economic, racial and cultural issues. Therefore, it is important to promote equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging the CoP. Indeed, there already exists a known divide between academics and professional members of staff in universities with known examples of people behaving very disrespectfully and unprofessionally against each other (Roper 2021, Devis-Rozental 2020). This can only but reinforce silos and fracture further the way in which people work in HEI's.

Structuring CoP with the aim of creating spaces that inspire, enthuse and enable peer learning and enable social justice can be done considering the following points:

1. A clearly defined shared purpose

Having a clear purpose and well-defined aims that align with the interests of the group is the best place to start. Establishing and enabling people to have this sense of shared purpose will foster engagement and a sense of belonging. Ensuring that everyone is involved in developing this purpose is also important.

2. Active participation by all

Encouraging everyone to participate in the way they feel comfortable is important when developing a CoP. Enabling spaces where people can share their knowledge and insights in a regular basis will ensure individuals feel they are making a contribution to the group. This can also be instigated by creating opportunities to discuss idea, share resources, work together in initiatives and organise themes where participants can share their own expertise. Different cultures have different ways of communicating and of demonstrating enthusiasm for example. Therefore, cultural awareness and sensitivity must be present.

3. A supportive culture

A sense of community and belonging will be the gold standard of a CoP. People should feel able to be themselves, to be authentic and to know that they will not be judged. Therefore, fostering a culture of mutual respect and trust where feedback will be constructive and kind and where all ideas that come from a place of advancing knowledge within the parameters of the CoP will be encouraged. Part of this, is to ensure that people feel psychological safety and are able to share and learn in a comfortable space.

4. Constant reflexivity

A CoP that doesn't reflect on how its going, what is working, what doesn't and why, will probably not last very long. As CoPs are spaces where people can come and go and there is no pressure to speak or do something particular, there will be times where there will be different people at different times. As a constantly evolving organism there must always be opportunities to go back to basics and check on its common purpose. Opportunities for members to give feedback on improvements or different ways of being and doing things should also be

encouraged. Social justice can only happen if we continuously learn and challenge our thinking to improve the CoP and how it delivers for all.

5. A supportive core team/ leader

The core team of the CoP plays a key role in ensuring the purpose and aims of the CoP are at the centre of what the CoP does. They also role model the types of attitudes and behaviours that are expected within the CoP and should provide guidance when needed. Developing new opportunities for participation and collaboration and importantly looking at ways to eradicate barriers to enable full participation are also important aspects of leading a CoP.

6. Celebrating successes

A successful CoP values each member and their contribution. In a transdisciplinary group such as a CoP, there should be opportunities to share achievements and successes. This will motivate and engage participants and it can also inspire others.

7. Addressing power dynamics:

Differences exist and the success of a CoP depends on how everyone feels part of the group. Consequently, it is imperative that there is always an open dialogue of mutual respect and if marginalised voices are not being heard, this is challenged. The CoP should actively promote ways in which everyone can contribute and explicitly challenge stereotypes, inappropriate language or any type of abuse.

Conclusion

Within this chapter we explored how CoP can challenge a them and us culture and break down silos by encouraging a transdisciplinary approach to practice. This will have a positive impact on the HEI as it will foster collaboration, networking opportunities and a promote a positive organisational culture where everyone feels they are contributing to improving practice. For individuals, the benefits can also be great. From sharing and gaining knowledge, opportunities to step out of their comfort zone whilst in a safe environment and to gaining valuable insights onto other teams, disciplines and even cultures, the opportunities are all there.

Ensuring that these CoPs are run with a commitment to social justice, fairness and opportunities for all will go far on the journey to working together to enrich our experiences, our university and beyond.

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