Faculty Initiated Communities of Practice in a University: A Case Study

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Applying a case study approach this research explores faculty members' experiences in three faculty-initiated and organized communities of practice (CoP) in a corporate university. These informal groups, defined by the convenors of the groups as 'communities of practice' (CoPs), had formed with horizontal membership to connect and convene faculty across disciplinary and organisational boundaries.

Data collection included three focus group interviews and nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis indicated that faculty appreciated the opportunity to convene in a CoP and that learning was associated with the freedom to choose whether to join and how to contribute; an engaging purpose for attending; mutual support; a collaborative and open approach to learning and sharing; and, an opportunity to slow down and take time for reflection. Several context-related barriers and risks related to group functioning and individual participation are identified. Factors that enable or impede the informal CoPs are also explored. The implications of this analysis are discussed and the research concludes with a contribution to a typology of communities of practice in higher education.

Keywords: higher education, social learning, communities of practice, faculty professional development, organisational learning

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAS	Contracted Academic Staff
CoP	Community of Practice
CoPiA	Community of Practice in Academe
CTET	Centre for Teaching and Educational Technology
CU	Canadian University
FLC	Faculty Learning Community
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LTM	Learning and Teaching Model
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The subject of this study is social learning in faculty communities and the topic is the exploration of faculty experience in informal, faculty-initiated, communities of practice. The purpose of this qualitative single site case study is to describe and explore, with a sample of faculty CoP members, their experiences in communities of practice in their University. The further application of three embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2009) represented by three different CoPs in the University allows for both a description and a comparison of faculty experiences. The study participants included a purposefully selected group of full-time tenured, or full-time non-tenured, faculty members who had participated in one or more of the three CoPs analysed in this qualitative case study.

This chapter starts with an introduction to the context and background of the study and includes a short introduction to the Canadian higher education (HE) system and a deeper introduction to the Canadian University that is the case study site. Next, the statement of purpose, research questions and anticipated significance of study are set out. An exploration of the experiences that motivated me to start this study situate me in the study and is entitled 'My Story'. The chapter closes with a short summary of the research approach and an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background and Context

Higher education institutions are diverse, each one a reflection of different mandates, resources, socio political influences, governance structures, constraints and local conditions (Brown & Duguid, 1991). How a higher education institution operates and responds to change is influenced by the institution's place within the higher education system as a whole, and the institution as a functioning micro system of that whole (Barnett, 2004; Keller, 2007). To explore the University as a site for this case study and the phenomenon of faculty CoPs within this context, I will first briefly introduce Canadian University governance. Next, I will discuss four

significant characteristics that have contributed to the local conditions in the Canadian University where this study is situated.

Canada is a federation and in Canada's Constitution the responsibility for education is delegated to Canada's provinces and territories (Shanahan & Jones, 2007). Canada does not have a Federal central government department or agency for education, and there is no national education policy (Shanahan & Jones, 2007). In this decentralized system, most higher education institutions (HEI) operate under a specific legislative act as a not for profit, autonomous corporation and receive varying degrees of public funding support from their provincial government (Metcalfe et al., 2011).

The site for this research is a Canadian public university in the province of British Columbia, Canada (henceforth the University) created in 1995. There are several contextual characteristics that distinguish this University from other universities in British Columbia. These distinguishing contextual characteristics are elaborated upon in this section as they affect faculty work and practice. For example, the contextual characteristics directly impact expectations from the University regarding the content of faculty work, the content and delivery of professional development, and also, possibly, the trajectory of individual professional careers. The contextual characteristics are: University act, governance and corporate operating conditions, interdisciplinary structure, and the University's learning and teaching model (LTM).

The University operates under the authority of a University Act to offer a non-traditional public university with a specific mandate to respond to current and emerging labour market needs by offering applied and professional programming in leadership, business, environmental science, tourism and hospitality, education, communications and humanitarian studies (University Act, 1996). The University receives half the public funding of other provincial public universities and was conceived to be a market-responsive alternative to the traditional university. With the exception of public funding (approximately 27%), the University is financially self-sustaining. Hauptman (2007) refers to this funding approach as policy-driven funding or funding for relevance.

The University retains fiscal flexibility and the flexibility to shift programming priorities by employing a small core of tenured or tenure track faculty members. These faculty members are referred to as the core faculty group (full time employees, tenure or non-tenure). The core faculty, to varying degrees, reflects the University's mandate in that members typically possess a combination of academic and also professional and applied experience in their respective disciplines. Sessional associate faculty, referred to as associate faculty, are typically practitioners in their own careers outside the University. Associate faculty teach approximately 80% of the university courses both online and also face-to-face on-campus. Furthermore, with a minimal number of full-time tenure or non-tenure core faculty employed by the University, the school's core faculty members are few in number with a minimum of five and a maximum of eighteen core faculty members in any one school.

As with many other HE institutions that must demonstrate financial sustainability, the University has a form of corporate governance structure (McCaffery, 2010). The University president is also the chief executive officer, and administers the University's operations, with vice-presidents and associate vice presidents who each hold line management responsibilities. Most universities in Canada have a bicameral governance structure (Jones, 2014); they are typically governed by both academic and administrative structures that delineate lines of authority and decision-making (Bess & Dee, 2008). At this University the governance model is unusual, with a uni-camera Board of Governors and no separate Senate. This structure limits the scope of the involvement of faculty in decision making. The operation of the University is heavily influenced by a private sector style business management structure, and thorough financial forecasting, monitoring and planning, reflecting a corporate university model (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). In an environment of constrained financial resources, the delivery of the university mandate requires faculty who are willing to engage in non-traditional work, for example, entrepreneurial activities, international programming, online learning, and in particular, administrative leadership (Sporn, 2007).

With respect to an interdisciplinary structure, the University was established with solely applied interdisciplinary programming. There are no discipline-based departments such as Geography or Biology, and the University specializes in applied and professional graduate programming. The majority of the programmes are offered through a 'blended' format defined as a blend of intensive, 1-3 week on-campus residencies later supported by online learning off campus. The schools are primarily social science based, offering credentials such as an MA in Global Management, an MA in Human Security and Peace Building, an MA or MSc in Environmental Management, and later a Doctor of Social Sciences. Further to interdisciplinary approach, a College of Interdisciplinary Studies was established in 2017.

In addition to the corporate structure, governance model and interdisciplinary structure, another characteristic that makes the University distinctive in the Canadian HE landscape, is a Learning and Teaching Model (LTM, 2013). The LTM is a model for teaching and learning that was designed around a social constructivist and constructionist orientation and states "…we understand learning as a socially constructed activity and we conceptualize life-long learning as a process of social and personal discovery beyond the acquisition of knowledge" (p. 10). Developed internally by faculty and sponsored by the academic vice-provost, the model has been widely accepted at the University. It includes eleven components: outcomes based, technology enhanced, experiential and authentic, learning community, team-based, integrative, applied, engaged, action research, supportive and flexible. (p. 15). As noted through the LTM, the University states support for social constructivist approaches to teaching and learning and learning communities. The LTM is currently undergoing a review and an update is expected in 2020.

Faculty professional development in HE in Canada is typically influenced by the mandate and practices of the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC). TLCs may offer specific services such as workshops, short courses online and face to face, instructional design support for course development, and technical support related to the learning management system and integration of educational technologies.

Staff in TLCs tend to focus primarily on individual development and formal professional learning through online and face to face courses and workshops (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). Some TLCs support social learning as part of a planned approach to faculty professional development.

Despite its focus on social constructivist learning, beyond the LTM, the University has not articulated a direction for supporting this approach through faculty development or organisational learning. Here lies a conundrum and an opportunity. The TLC, at this University, is called the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies (CTET). As noted in the name, formal opportunities for faculty professional development at the University through CTET focus primarily on supporting CAS faculty and full-time faculty to improve teaching and learning, particularly in relation to online learning and the integration of new educational technologies. There appears to be an opportunity at the University to develop a strategic approach to professional development for faculty for future capacity building or career development in areas outside teaching.

To thrive, our higher education institutions must respond to immense learning challenges. For many faculty and staff, the pace of change and adjustment can feel like a sprint. Camblin & Steger (2000) noted that faculty and institutional response require the development of "strategies which promote opportunities for life-long learning and self-renewal activities" (Camblin & Steger, 2000, p.4). As noted previously, CTET has a focused mandate on teaching and educational technologies. However, I have noticed an absence of dialogue with faculty members about how they maintain and advance their knowledge and expertise relative to teaching, specifically in terms of discipline, school priorities, administrative and leadership capabilities, and so on.

Wenger (2010) suggested that communities of practice (CoPs) are one opportunity to nurture social learning in our HE institutions. In exploring social dimensions of learning, social learning theory has a focus on individuals as social participants. As such, it recognises a broad appreciation of multiple aspects of human experience beyond the cognitive. For example, Wenger (2010) proposed that human experience includes relationships, feelings, emotions, skills, knowledge,

practices and understandings. This appreciation of the "whole person" (Wenger, 2010) and the concepts of identity, community, practice and meaning are mutual components of a social theory of learning introduced by Wenger (1998). These components are discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Over the past several years, informal groups, convened by faculty members as 'communities of practice', have formed in the University. Typically, one or more convenors for a group have invited faculty from across the University to come together around a shared interest in a specific topic. Although one can speculate on the experience faculty have in these groups, and although CoPs have a rich theoretical base, there seems to be little agreement in the University and in the literature, on why faculty join a CoP and their perception of learning in a CoP. Furthermore, there seems to be little agreement on what supports a CoP to function in HE, and in particular what CoPs need to function in this specific University.

1.3 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative single site case study is to describe and explain with a sample of faculty CoP members, experiences in faculty communities of practice in their University. It is anticipated that through a better exploration of the purpose and function of communities of practice and the learning that occurs in these groups, a deeper understanding can be generated about how the CoPs may contribute to faculty professional development and to learning in the University.

The further application of a case study design with three embedded units of analysis allows for both a description and a comparison of faculty experience in three different CoPs. This case study specifically explores how faculty members describe their learning experience in three different communities of practice within one university. This approach offers an opportunity to explore a faculty perspective on communities of practice – through the voices of the faculty members

To explore the issue, the following research questions guided the research design for this inquiry:

1. What are faculty members looking for from a community of practice?
2. How do faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice?

3. How do faculty members perceive the related impacts, and potential risks and benefits of participating in these informal learning groups?
4. What are the common aspects that enable or impede the groups to continue to function as a community of practice?

1.4 Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study was developed out of my practice-based experience convening and participating in faculty communities of practice. This experience lead to a curiosity to explore the phenomenon of communities of practice in my University. Tight's (2015) comprehensive review of CoP related research in higher education concluded that the application and development of communities of practice theory is developing. This study seeks to contribute to this scholarship and practice, offering insight into informal faculty communities of practice in a university that are convened and lead by faculty for faculty. We need to know more about the role and impact of informal CoPs in universities because they seem to provide a social learning opportunity that are outside organisational norms that typically characterise faculty professional development. Boud and Middleton (2003) discuss the necessity of making learning "…visible, so that it can be consciously deployed in enhancing work and the quality of work life" (p. 195). Building on this perspective, this inquiry provides a contribution to making learning visible in faculty communities of practice. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this study may provide further guidance on how CoPs are situated within faculty professional development policy and practice, and the role they may have in faculty professional development. In summary, the study informs what we know about the context and practice of faculty development in HE, social learning in organisations, and, in particular, the role and functioning of communities of practice.

To further establish the context for why I chose to explore this issue, I share with you *My Story*, which describes the impetus behind my decision to start a new faculty community of practice.

1.5 My Story

What follows is an account of experiences to develop my professional capabilities as a faculty member in the first five years of my employment with the

University. I present this story here in Chapter 1, in order to help establish the context and significance of the study and the background that informed the development of the research problem.

My opportunity to join a university as an Assistant Professor, and a member of the small core faculty at the University was unusual. When I joined the institution in January 2012, I considered it highly unlikely that any of the other Canadian public universities would have hired me for a core faculty position. I did not have a PhD and I had completed my MSc back in 1996. I was hired because I had 15 years of public sector and corporate experience in tourism and hospitality management and a wide professional network. In addition, I had developed a reputation for administrative leadership and teaching excellence, working as a program lead for six years in the local college business school. I supported and reflected the university's commitment to applied, real world learning. I also possessed administrative skills and the willingness to be an administrative lead for a degree program.

In the beginning I poured my energy and focus into program administration, student advising and teaching. I began to formulate a research agenda and decided to start my scholarship by writing and publishing teaching cases. Four years on, with an administrative workload that was increasing and a growing program (49% increase in students) I started to feel isolated and frustrated. I experienced a sense of lack, or absence of agency in connection with issues and interests that mattered to me and to my professional development. The professional development available at the University tended to support our educational learning management system (LMS) and the use of educational technologies. There was very little guidance for developing researchers and few opportunities to build working relationships with faculty members outside my school. I questioned my academic capabilities. I was struggling to innovate and advance in my landscape of professional practice; teaching, research, service and administration. I was learning independently and alone.

In 2016, I decided I needed to do two things: 1) develop my expertise in case research, writing and teaching, and 2) find a faculty community – people I could get to know and learn with. I submitted a request for professional development funds

to develop a case research and writing workshop, and my proposal was accepted. In February 2016, I arranged a three-day workshop on how to research and write a teaching case facilitated by a case method scholar. The workshop was delivered on campus, and 14 faculty attended. On day three, the group spontaneously suggested we should continue to meet and support one another to publish our cases. Thus, my first involvement in a faculty community of practice started. We decided to meet again and to focus on case writing and publication and I agreed to be the convenor. In the same year, I received an invitation to join a group of women convening to explore issues and opportunities related to women in leadership in the University. This particular group was not initially referred to as a community of practice, however this shifted late in 2017 and the nomenclature stuck.

Noticing some success with the progress of the interdisciplinary case research and writing community of practice I had a meeting with the person responsible for faculty professional development at our university. In conversation she mentioned that there was some discussion regarding training for faculty members who were program heads in their respective schools. The University has a small number of core faculty members (72) and 37 of these core faculty members take responsibility for administrative program related tasks. These responsibilities include recruiting and selecting associate faculty to teach on their programs, student academic advising, curriculum and pedagogy oversight for the program, student recruitment support, and a range of academic issues that arise. My immediate response to the suggestion for training was that program heads had many best practices, and a diverse range of responsibilities. What they did not have was an opportunity to engage with a community and to share practice.

Shortly following this conversation in February 2017, I agreed to work with the University's faculty professional development advisor who worked in the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies (CTET). We convened the first community of practice for programme heads who are faculty members with administrative leadership responsibilities for academic programmes. This was the third community of practice that I was associated with at the University and the third community of practice in this study.

The focus for this study is the experience of faculty members in these informal faculty led communities of practice. In discussion with the other convenors of these groups, the impetus for convening has been expressed as a desire to build agency from within the academic group around practice and experiences that matter to faculty members. While the groups continued to convene and appeared to be worthwhile due to their continuation and attendance, there was a gap in our understanding about how faculty members experienced the CoPs and how the groups were functioning. There seemed to be a groundswell of interest in CoP membership in the faculty group, suggesting that CoPs were addressing unmet needs. At present, despite the emergence of these informal groups it is unclear how the CoPs contribute to faculty members' experience in the university and their professional development. The groups currently receive limited recognition or institutional support, suggesting their potential value is not understood or articulated and thus may be overlooked.

In this study I have taken a social constructivist approach to knowing with a particular focus on understanding how faculty account for their personal and social experiences in communities of practice. I am firmly an insider researcher to the University and to the groups I am researching. The implications related to this positionality and the choices I made to address it are acknowledged here and discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.6 Research Approach

On approval from the University's Research Ethics Board, I explored the perceptions of 15 faculty members who participated in a faculty community of practice at the University. These participants had recently participated in a CoP or were currently participating in one.

Pursing a qualitative case study approach, this study followed what Yin (2018) defined as a single site case study, with three units of analysis reflected in an analysis of three different faculty CoPs. This aspect of the study is significant, as it offers the opportunity to gather multiple sources of experience in CoPs, which is a facet of Yin's (2018) case study definition.

Data collection for each of the CoPs was completed by applying two methods; in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Interviews were used to deliberately explore an individual perception of experience and focus group interviews were completed to explore understanding and meaning through a social constructivist approach to data gathering – whereby participants articulated their own perspectives through the process of listening and responding to, the experience of others. The data collected formed the basis for the empirical findings in the study. The data was collected at the University between October 2018 and January 2019. I completed a thematic analysis and coding categories and themes and sub-themes were developed and refined as the analysis progressed.

1.7 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study, background and context, a statement of the problem, a statement of purpose and research questions, the rationale and significance of the study, and an introduction to the research approach. I share a personal narrative to situate the study, and in particular, to intentionally share the impetus for this study. 'My Story' is one example of what Mills and Birks (2014) refer to as the commitment to purposefully develop insight into my approach as a researcher.

Chapter 2 explores social learning and communities of practice theory and includes a review of some empirical studies of communities of practice in higher education. Additional topics that connect to these central themes include change in higher education, faculty professional development and organisational learning.

Chapter 3 introduces the case study research design and the philosophical and epistemological assumptions that underpin the study. Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of the research methods, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter also provides an overview of Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning and communities of practice concept that form the theoretical framework for understanding faculty communities of practice and faculty perceptions of these groups.

Chapters 4 presents an analysis and description of the data collected and recorded in transcripts for the semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group

interviews. This chapter shares further detail on the thematic analysis process, including coding and theming, and theme and sub-theme descriptions.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion and synthesis of the findings and the associated implications of these findings.

Chapter 6 draws conclusions from the study. Recommendations related to University practice and further research are also presented and discussed.
The chapter concludes with and a discussion of both the limitations and strengths associated with the study and the researcher's final reflection on this research journey.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe and explain with a sample of faculty CoP members their experiences in faculty communities of practice in their University. This critical review of current and/or significant literature was completed in advance of the data collection, and then was ongoing throughout the data collection and data analysis. This critical review explores the interrelatedness of faculty CoPs and the University context. Four major areas of literature were reviewed: a) the changing nature of faculty work; b) the practice of faculty professional development in HE and the University; c) communities of practice theory and application in HE; and d) organisational learning in universities.

This review of the literature starts with an assessment of the changing nature of faculty work. This section discusses macro forces and structural context factors that affect the content and experience of faculty work. I explore several specific examples to establish the linkages between macro forces and structural context factors and the professional development opportunities faculty may need to learn, adjust and adapt in their roles. The second major area, the practice of faculty professional development in HE provides an understanding of the context, structure, and approaches that relate to how faculty engage in professional development. Third, communities of practice theory is discussed to offer context for the kind of learning the CoPs in this study were seeking to establish and to determine the associated characteristics of CoPs compared to other forms of group learning such as faculty learning communities. Organisational learning in universities is a fourth major area in this review as it presents an inter-related perspective on the connections between professional development, communities of practice and organisational learning in universities.

2.2 The Changing Nature of Faculty Work

This review of the literature starts with a critical discussion regarding different perspectives and complexities associated with the changing nature of faculty work. This study is situated in a changing environment that requires the academic

profession to adjust to both external factors and the internal structural context factors present in their home university (Metcalfe et al., 2011). This section of the literature review explores some specific examples in universities to highlight both external factors and internal structural context factors that are directly or indirectly affecting faculty work. After discussing three macro external factors, with a particular focus on Canada, this section also reviews examples of internal structural context factors in Canadian universities. In setting the scene for the changing nature of faculty work the intention of the researcher is to situate the CoPs in this study more holistically.

2.2.1 External Factors and the Changing Nature of Faculty Work

To explore the relationship between external factors and the changing content and nature of faculty work I include a review of research related to three external macro factors that many people working in a faculty role in the HE sector recognise. The first external factor is globalisation, the second is the changing labour market and the third is external governance. I have selected these external factors as each one has affected the University in this case study, featuring in the institution's strategic plan (Royal Roads University, 2017). Most significantly, there are implications for faculty work that researchers and practitioners have associated with these external macro factors. The proposition here is that as faculty work is affected by the external environment, there are implications for faculty on the nature of their work and also the content of their professional development as both an individual and a social endeavour.

Returning to globalisation, Altbach & Knight (2007) are recognised for their scholarship on the differential impacts of globalisation in higher education. Clearly, globalisation is a macro force for change in higher education (HE) and pervasive in society in general. In Canada, to foster international partnerships, generate revenue and support immigration policy, the Canadian federal and provincial governments have encouraged international education and in particular the growth of in-bound international students to study on Canadian campuses. Kell & Vogl (2012) identified how other countries have also pursued ambitious in-bound internationalisation agendas; in particular, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA)

Australia, Germany and France. Some significant shifts that broadly relate to globalisation that affect universities and faculty work in Canada include: the internationalisation of HE (Knight, 2013), online learning and education technology integration (Barnett, 2004), the shift to link education to economic relevancy (Jones, 2014) and an increasing diversity of student needs and expectations. Clearly, faculty work is affected by globalisation in different ways in different jurisdictions. In Canada, how faculty adapt to globalisation and learn in this context is significant to their own careers and to the financial stability of their institution.

Turning to the second example, and the changing labour market, a report on 'The Future of Work and Learning' released by D2L and the Colleges and Institutes of Canada (2018), recommended that HE become more responsive to the labour market. While the nature of work in the future is uncertain, suggestions in the report included the further development of work integrated learning to prepare learners for the changing nature of work and jobs, applied curriculum, flexible learning models and employability related learning outcomes.

These two examples - globalisation and the changing labour market - also require innovations and professional development to address changing educational technologies, including online learning systems, web-conferencing, and multi-media communications. Furthermore, new options for course development including flipped classrooms, flexible learning and other educational innovations (Ward, 2013) are all opportunities for further innovation and change in teaching and learning. Of course, each HEI is affected differently; as Knight (2013) has emphasised, each HEI's response is shaped by a complex and dynamic relationship between global, national, regional and institutional approaches and priorities.

A third external factor that has a profound impact on faculty work is external governance. D'Andrea & Gosling (2005) found that in a complex macro environment, public institutions are also increasingly accountable to the governments that fund them, and to their government's economic policy priorities. For example, Shanahan & Jones (2007) argued that in Canada, national and provincial priorities emphasise accountability, efficiency, quality and accessibility in HE. These sizeable changes are generally also associated with uncertainties. Keller

(2007) argued that one of the most pressing challenges for administrators, faculty and staff is to determine "the extent to which colleges and universities should yield or adapt" to shifting macro conditions (p. 230). The significance of this statement for this case study is that there are no easy steps or answers on how to learn to adapt to these changes, as an individual, faculty group, or as an institution. Keller (2007) further proposed that within HE institutions there are often competing interests and institutional priorities. Strategy can be grey, accompanied by "rumbles from the inside" related to different sociocultural and political values about the purpose and content of a higher education (Keller, 2007, p. 232). Government policy and reporting requirements, financial expectations and accountability measures shift more authority to senior administration and a more centralised approach to decision making. Metcalfe et. al, (2011) also noted that in Canada, changes in areas such as institutional structures, research funding, hiring practices and workload expectations all impact faculty work.

In summary, the continuous pursuit of productive and innovative education and research is a broad necessity for HE. In developed economies policies are typically driven by the search for efficiencies, cost-effective programming and targeted funding (Metcalfe et al., 2011). The academic profession and forms of engagement in academic work are changing in universities around the world (Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2017; Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Locke, Cummings & Fisher, 2011). As noted, the academic profession is further affected by macro socio-cultural trends (Knight, 2007) and specifically the related responses to these trends at global, national, regional and institutional levels (Knight, 2013). As the content of faculty work changes, faculty may need the time and opportunity to discuss the meaning of this change, and also the evolution of their practice, with other colleagues. Faculty initiated communities of practice are a potential environment to nurture this form of learning.

2.2.2 Internal Structural Context Factors and the Changing Nature of Faculty Work

At the institutional level, inside HEI's, faculty work is also shaped by structural context factors (Nagy & Burch, 2009; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Structural context factors vary significantly from one institution to another. In a

discussion on the drivers affecting higher education management, Metcalfe et al. (2011) concluded that in the Canadian HE system there is a wide variation in approaches to administrative structures and decision-making processes. These approaches indirectly affected the nature of faculty work as some administrative structures are decentralized, leaving more decision making to faculties and departments, and some are more centralized leaving more decision making with senior administration (Metcalfe et al., 2011).

The change in faculty work is a contemporary phenomenon. To understand the real-life context of change in faculty work within the University, the structural contextual conditions related to the site of the case are significant. For example, British Columbia has eleven public universities. The University of British Columbia (UBC), founded in 1908, is the largest with approximately 45,000 students. In 2015, at UBC, contracted academic staff (CAS), often referred to as sessionals accounted for approximately 13% of faculty (Wood, 2017). In contrast, the University, founded in 1995, is the smallest provincial public university, with approximately 5,000 students. In 2018, the University's CAS instructors accounted for approximately 80% of faculty. This difference is an example of an indicator that demonstrated contrasting structural contexts of the diverse public universities in Canada. It is reasonable to assume that faculty work in these two institutions is markedly different. Indeed, competition for targeted funding for FTE's, research, new program development and capital projects has created a HE sector in Canada that Metcalfe et al. described as "increasingly stratified" (Metcalfe et al.,2011). In the University in this case study, the low core faculty to associate faculty (CAS) ratio, 72 to 350 (1-4) has also contributed to a particularly heavy reliance on core faculty for service and academic managerial/administrative work. This internal structural context has implications for the focus of professional development in the University. The University's Centre for Teaching and Educational Technology (CTET) continuously provides technical training and professional development related to pedagogy, teaching and technology particularly directed to CAS faculty, and the quality monitoring and support for online courses. The focus is in the purview of teaching and learning. The research services office provides some research related

professional development from time to time. I have not noticed professional development that has addressed administrative or service-related aspects of faculty work.

It is anticipated that structural context factors may affect social learning and professional development in communities of practice in the University. In the first research question, the case study explores what faculty members are looking for when they join a community of practice. The research questions in this inquiry reflect the perspective that structural context factors may affect faculty perceptions. For this reason, in this review of the literature I have also included a review of some of the structural context factors that are currently embedded in the University that affect faculty work.

In the University, accountability requirements, a high proportion of managers and administrators, and a high number of CAS associate faculty are all factors that potentially affect faculty work. A study by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) indicated that CAS faced a range of issues that affect their working conditions and livelihood (CAUT, 2018). Canadian studies have examined the experience of CAS finding CAS to experience concerns regarding job security, low pay, lack of benefits and workload (Foster & Birdsell Bauer, 2018). Associated with these issues are the pressures that this operating model places on a limited group of core faculty (tenured and non-tenured) and the effect these expectations have on the professional work and lives of faculty. Aligned with this trend to operate universities by employing a high ratio of CAS is a trend towards rising workloads for full-time faculty (O'Meara, Terosky & Neuman, 2008). The high proportion of non-standard employment for sessional, casual and part-time academic staff continues to advance. A study by Foster & Birdsell Bauer (2018) completed for The Canadian Association for University Teachers (CAUT) noted that according to the Canadian Census, between 2005 and 2015, full time, full year faculty positions declined by 10%. In the same period, university professors in part-year, part-time work increased by 79%. Significantly, contracted academic staff (CAS), typically referred to as sessional (and in the University as associate faculty) are paid to teach. They are not paid to research or to undertake service or administrative work. At the

University in this study, the operating model with a high reliance on CAS has also required 38% of the core faculty members (27 faculty out of a total of 72 faculty) to undertake extensive academic leadership and administrative oversight for their program areas. Because of this internal structural context, specifically, the high proportion of CAS associate faculty, along with and the operating model, many core faculty are required to include program administration in their faculty role. The responsibilities of a program head have a significant impact on faculty work, in some cases representing a substantial proportion of a faculty member's work plan. I provide this example as it directly relates to one of the CoPs in this study that was convened for faculty who had the additional responsibilities of program head. The professional development needs of program heads were not supported by the University and the impetus to start a program head community of practice came from faculty members in these roles.

There are implications for faculty as they negotiate external shifts that affect HE, and also the internal social context of their particular situated experience as faculty members located within their discipline, interdisciplinary context, school and institution. MacGillivray (2017) proposed that the tensions between the time and focus required for research, teaching and academic administrative responsibilities, the changing practices in these areas and the ongoing professional development required to support each of these parts of a faculty member's scope of practice may create pressure and stress. Indeed, Austin, Connolly & Colbeck (2008) argued that it is increasingly difficult to be an 'integrated scholar'. At the University, despite the pressure to undertake academic administrative work, all core faculty roles are integrated, incorporating a work planning process that includes service, teaching and research and associated performance expectations. O'Meara, Terosky & Neuman (2008) drew a similar conclusion. In a study of faculty work in the USA, the authors identified trends in faculty work that included the gradual broadening of scholarship to recognise teaching and community engagement, and a general movement towards interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and research. Authors such as Churchman & Stehlik (2007) and Nagy & Burch (2009) suggested that faculty may be given little formalised support to navigate shifting expectations and opportunities in

their professional lives. In my experience, I also felt that the formal support for faculty with program head responsibilities did not meet my needs, which was why I set up the first CoP. I was interested to explore whether others, who joined or facilitated similar CoPs, had been motivated by a perceived lack of formal support.

To summarise, the institutional norms that have developed in relation to the operating context described at the University have created expectations, perceptions and understandings that shape a core faculty member's work and learning. Within an institutional context, Jawitz (2009) argued that professional experience and histories may have significant implications for how faculty members perceive and negotiate their identities and their role as academics. This study will provide an opportunity to explore possible tensions or incongruities that are experienced by faculty members as they work to meet their commitments to their students, colleagues and other stakeholders. If we extend this argument to faculty learning and development, the opportunity and capacity for faculty to examine new ways of learning and working with other faculty colleagues is potentially significant. The research questions in this study provide an opportunity for faculty to discuss their perceived interests and needs as these relate to joining a CoP, participating in learning in a CoP, and the related impacts, benefits and risks associated with participation. Furthermore, the study explores aspects that may enable or impede the CoPs to function in the University.

2.3 The Practice of Faculty Professional Development in HE

This second major area of this literature is concerned with faculty professional development. How to support faculty growth through professional development is also integrated into factors associated with the changing nature of faculty work and both external factors and internal structural conditions as discussed in 2.1. For example, if a university has a significant number of CAS faculty, the institutional approach to faculty development will have a content and character that reflects this operational structure with a particular focus on orienting and supporting CAS faculty in their teaching and course administration.

In the data collection for this case study, the faculty research participants in the University all affirmed that they perceived their involvement in their community

of practice as a form of professional development. For this reason, this review of the literature includes an interpretation of faculty professional development, and the situating of communities of practice as a form of professional development in HE.

In the previous section, the literature suggested that faculty work is changing and that this change is affected significantly by external factors and internal structural conditions. In addition to this perspective, faculty professional development is also a personal journey. The content of this personal journey is captured by O'Meara et al. (2008) in the articulation of an approach to professional development that fits reasonably well with the understandings applied to professional growth that are foundational to this study. O'Meara et al. (2008) assert that a faculty members' professional growth is a "change that occurs in a person through the course of her or his academic career or personal life and that allows her or him to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientations to her or his work" (p 24). O'Meara et al. (2008) expanded on this definition through the expression of the following ideas.

- Learning is the centre of faculty work and their contributions.
- Faculty have and can develop a sense of agency to navigate the barriers and put effort, will, intent, and talent into their work.
- Faculty learn, grow, and make contributions through professional relationships embedded in communities.
- Who a faculty member is – her history, identity, and experiences, shape what and how she learns, the types and quality of contributions she makes to academe, and the ways in which she makes them.
- Faculty are professions with capacities for deep commitment and vocation. (p. 166)

Of note in this definition is that it is inclusive of both formal and informal learning in faculty development with a particular emphasis on the ongoing nature of faculty growth and the significance of learning in multiple environments. This definition also frames faculty development as learning that is both an individual process and also a social activity in communities (O'Meara et al., 2008).

This broad, yet useful definition of faculty growth places agency with the faculty member and the ability of the faculty member to assume personal and professional learning in a workplace context as an individual and also as a community member. However, in further discussion on learning in communities the authors noted that "the process of developing collaborative relationships and webs of support and learning are rarely the primary focus for studies of faculty, the field of higher education knows little about how to facilitate this aspect of faculty growth" (O'Meara et al. 2008, p. 171). This estimation suggests that there is less known about faculty professional development through learning in communities. Nagy and Burch (2009) argued that academic autonomy, self-direction and specialised interests are impediments to forms of faculty professional development that are embedded in community or collegial work. Furthermore, the authors noted that there is more evidence of HEI's supporting communities that are associated with operational or strategic priorities in an institution. It appears that communities established for the purposes of collegiality and learning and without an institutionally framed agenda are less common in faculty professional development in HE. Faculty communities have more of a peripheral place in the literature on faculty professional development. However, faculty communities are studied in some niche research areas and in particular, in areas such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In the next section I discuss faculty communities in SoTL and also introduce the phenomenon that is the focus of this study, the formation of faculty communities defined as communities of practice (CoPs).

2.3.1 Forms of Faculty Communities in Higher Education - SoTL

At this point, it is useful to pause and define the term "learning community". Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones (2003) completed a study to explore how learning communities are defined in different countries and disciplines. In this study, Kilpatrick et al. (2003) identified the following themes that linked the definition and uses; "a common or shared purpose, interests or geography; collaboration, partnership and learning; respecting diversity; and enhanced potential outcomes" (p. 6). In particular, the learning communities were found to have a human element described as the synergies associated with learning with other people and sharing

and developing knowledge through collaboration (Kilpatrick, Jones and Barrett, 2003). What this definition does not discuss is the organisation of these communities; in particular, who decides on the shared purpose or associated outcomes.

Two community-based approaches generally associated with faculty professional development are; faculty learning communities (FLC) and communities of practice (CoP). These two community-based approaches share similarities and some significant differences. FLCs tend to focus on teaching and learning; for example, shifting the focus from teaching to learning, and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) (Richlin & Cox, 2004). These communities support faculty to integrate teaching and learning theories and practices such as assessment, educational technologies, instructional design and problem-based learning. Research in SoTL suggests that faculty are more responsive to support offered through a FLC if this support is offered as a way to build capacity at the local level, for example, through departments, schools or faculties (Shulman, Cox, & Richlin, 2004). This finding is another example of the appeal for faculty for community learning that is not necessarily directly aligned with managerial and operating priorities at the institutional level. Empirical studies on faculty learning communities related to SoTL have demonstrated that these groups supported and enabled faculty members to develop their capabilities to become better teaching practitioners and scholars of teaching (Richlin & Cox, 2004). Furthermore, FLCs have also had impact on research projects, community building, and the visibility of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Richlin & Essington, 2004). Significantly, FLCs are typically part of a formal faculty development strategy and are affiliated with universities or associations (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007) with a set timeframe, curriculum and task or outcome- based focus (Cox, 2004) with a cohort orientation or a topic orientation (Hatcher, Shaker & Freeman, 2013).

In their study to explore the similarities and differences between FLCs and CoPs in two different institutions (Miami University and The University of Southern Queensland), Cox and McDonald (2017) found that FLCs and CoPs as community-based approaches to learning shared hybrid features. However, differences were

noted in several areas. One key difference related to the learning partnership. CoPs were informed by CoP theory and had three elements that form a learning partnership: domain of interest, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). whereas FLCs were not. CoPs were also classified as decentralised, and FLCs were aligned with a teaching centre or educational development unit, deans or the provost. FLCs also had a defined timeframe for members, typically one year, whereas, CoPs did not have a time limit. Membership was also slightly different. FLCs had an application process for membership and CoPs were by invitation, voluntary, with a looser membership structure guided by interest. Finally, leadership was practiced differently. In the FLCs there were three leadership roles: investigator, implementer and program director. In the CoPs, leadership was described as a coaching and facilitation role (Cox & McDonald, 2017). Cox and McDonald define an FLC as "a yearlong, structured, small group learning community with a process that enables its participants to investigate and provide solutions about any problem or opportunity in higher education" (2017, p.49).

These distinctions between FLCs and CoPs are significant for this study as the groups in this study are considered CoPs and not FLCs. The distinguishing characteristics of the two kinds of communities discussed, indicate that the groups in this study did indeed display characteristics more closely associated with CoPs. For example, the CoPs were not managed through a teaching and learning centre. Rather, they are faculty groups that self-organized without, or with minimal institutional oversight or support. Furthermore, the domain or topic of interest that motivated each group to meet was not sponsored or mandated by the institution. The spontaneous and informal development of communities of practice within the social institutional landscape at the University is under-researched, and this study seeks to understand this phenomenon in different ways as noted in the research questions. This informality in a CoP is further explored in the next major topic; communities of practice application and theory in HE.

To summarise, the participants in this study associate communities of practice with professional development. The contribution of these groups is broadly related to supporting faculty learning, growth and professional relationships

embedded in communities. Dissimilar from FLCs, CoPs are typically associated with informality and form without an institutionalised mandate or sponsor. The next segment of this literature review turns to the theory and application of communities of practice with a particular emphasis on theory and application in HE. This discussion is included in the literature review to clarify the theoretical basis for CoPs and also the different critiques, understandings and applications that have emerged as this theory has been applied in universities.

2.4 Communities of Practice Theory and Application in HE

The concepts of situated learning and peripheral participation first developed in early empirical studies by Lave and Wenger (1991) were drawn from the observation of apprenticeships in different cultures. These studies included midwives, tailors, alcoholics, quartermasters and butchers (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Empirical studies of claims processers informed Wenger's later work (1998), most notably Wenger's social theory of learning and the further developed concept of communities of practice. In their early work, Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the term "legitimate peripheral participation" as a way to make connections between learning that is situated in practice and learning that is situated in social practice. Hanks (1991) noted in his introduction to their book: 'Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation' that "learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind… learning is… distributed among coparticipants" (p. 15). This work recognised and empirically accounted for learning in social practice through various forms of community membership. This is a "viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 40) that has broadly informed social constructivism. As previously noted, the study of apprenticeships in workplaces (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and insurance claims processors (Wenger, 1998) later formed the empirical basis for Wenger's (1998) conceptual development of a social theory of learning (Table 1). Wenger's observation of insurance claims processors (1998) profiled tacit knowledge, informal learning, and learning through lived experience with others. For example, claims processors navigated their workload by sharing practices with one another, creating a practice that was different to the institutionalized expectations reflected in, for

example, procedures, rules and policies. Indeed, the claims processors developed a distinct practice that made the role possible (Wenger, 1998). It is worth pointing out further that Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning and concept of communities of practice were empirically informed by both the work contexts and the specific practices associated with apprenticeship and apprentices and also insurance claims processors.

Together, Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning (1991) and Wenger's social theory of learning (1998) created the theoretical foundation for the related concept of communities of practice. Wenger attributed his approach to understanding learning from a social perspective to the previous work of anthropologists and social theorists, with specific acknowledgement to Lave (1988); Bourdieu (1977); Giddens (1984); Foucault (1980) and Vygotsky (1978) (cited by Wenger, 2010). Situated learning, peripheral participation and social learning are interconnected approaches to conceptualising and understanding informal learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) elaborated on situated learning as learning from our immediate social experience in communities of knowledge and practice. Situated learning is connected to participation with others and discussed simultaneously as social learning. Lea (2019), helpfully explores communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation as heuristics to be understood "as ways of helping us understand a social model of learning as participation in practice" (Lea, 2019).

In Wenger's influential book *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (1998) he proposed a social theory of learning that had four components. Wenger theorised that these four components were mutually defining with learning as the central phenomenon, understood as "a social process of learning and of knowing" (p. 4). These theoretical components are shown in Table 1. The social learning theory foundation is significant for our understanding of communities of practice. Wenger noted that to understand the "analytical power of the concept" (1998, p. 6) of communities of practice, it was necessary to understand the four components in the social theory of learning model (Wenger, 1998). Wenger further stated that the purpose of the theory was to "give an account of learning as a

socially constituted experience of meaning making" (Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I., & Wenger-Trayner, E., 2016).

Table 1: Components of a Social Theory of Learning

(Adapted from Wenger, 1998, p. 5)

It is important to note the distinction between Wenger's social theory of learning and social learning theories. Social learning theories are typically understood to emphasise imitation and modeling through observational learning and behavioural reproduction (Bandura, 1977). In this study reference to social learning refers to Wenger's social theory of learning (1998).

Wenger (1998) proposed that a social theory of learning as a framework to explore the connection between participation and competence, the development of identity through community and practice, and the meaning that coalesces through individual and collective exchange. He further proposed that through social practice and participation, we create opportunities to examine and develop our understanding of four components of social learning. Wenger created an inventory that established a connectivity between learning as social participation and four components: 1) Meaning: learning as experience; 2) Practice: learning as doing; 3) Community: learning as belonging; and, 4) Identity: learning as becoming (Table 1). Wenger argued that each component is an integral part of the phenomenon of social learning and the catalyst for these components to work together was created when group members engaged with one another in social practice and participation (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger (1998) described his social theory of learning model as an "initial inventory". Initial inventory emphasised Wenger's intention to create a theory that

could be applied and understood in relation to other theories, disciplines and ways of knowing. Indeed, Wenger has proceeded to develop this social theory of learning in several ways, including the concept of communities of practice (Wenger 1998), modes of belonging (Wenger, 2000), communities of practice within social learning systems (2010) and social learning across landscapes of practice (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). I will now shift this exploratory theoretical lens to review literature on CoPs in higher education. The next section provides an introduction to the concept of communities of practice.

2.4.1 Community of Practice: Domain, Community and Practice

Described as a "a point of entry" into a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998) it is the inclusion and the fusion of each of the components in Table 1 that provide the theoretical basis for communities of practice. In practical terms, this suggests that this theoretical foundation is a significant consideration – or the communities of practice concept may risk losing theoretical meaning and relevancy. This is not to say that new interpretations and directions may not emerge that advance our understanding of this theory. Rather, that the theoretical underpinnings do indeed matter in the practical application of CoPs. This is the assumption the researcher has taken in this study.

The first delineation of the concept for CoP developed by Wenger (1998) introduced three dimensions of practice in a CoP as mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. In 2010, Wenger further defined the CoP concept and described four disciplines that constituted the learning partnership that formed a community of practice. The learning partnership included 1) the discipline of *domain* 2) the discipline of *community* 3) the discipline of *practice* and 4) the discipline of *convening*. Later, Etienne and Beverley Wenger-Trayner defined a community of practice to include the *domain*, the *community* and the *practice* (2015).

The *domain of interest* is significant as it represented the area of competence that brings a certain group of people together. As such, communities of practice develop around the things that matter to people (Wenger, 1998). For example, in this inquiry, the domain of interest for one CoP was interdisciplinary case research

and writing, for another, the practice of academic leadership (program heads) and for another, women in leadership. These domains are not necessarily recognized as areas of expertise by all faculty members in the university; they are examples of specific areas of interest, and the CoP members shared an interest in the domain (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The second characteristic of the learning partnership is *community.* Wenger proposed that learning is associated with our evolving social relationships with others in the group through multiple relational processes. In Wenger's earlier work he referred to this connection as mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) where contributions reflected the participants' interests and practice. For example, mutual engagement could be complementary where members have different roles in a particular practice, or overlapping when the role is similar, yet the practices are nuanced (Wenger, 1998). In this study, the CoP members in the groups are faculty, so I argue that mutual engagement is fostered through social relationships that developed with other faculty colleagues who shared a faculty role with overlapping role characteristics. These overlapping role characteristics represent the broad scope of practice for faculty work within a specific University. However, it should be noted that inside the faculty group some of the CoPs were social learning spaces that were open only to certain faculty members. For example, women in leadership is open to women members only. The program head CoP is for faculty who have the title and responsibilities of a program head. The case research CoP has the broadest accessibility, open to all faculty members who have an interest in developing their case research capabilities. Some examples of community practices include how the group coordinates to learn together, the functioning within the group (discussing, problem solving, sharing, coordinating, creating, identifying gaps), and the commitment and support that group members extend to one another (Wenger, 1998). Mercieca (2018) posits that community is what sustains the CoP and nurtures continued participation. This study will provide some insight into this assertion.

The third characteristic, *practice* connects the CoP concept to the practitioner. In a CoP, the group, through their community relationships share aspects of the activities and understandings that they engage in within their practice.

Returning to a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998 and Table 1); in defining this third characteristic of a CoP, Blackmore (2001) noted that Wenger did not distinguish strongly between practice and learning. To explain the discipline of practice, Wenger noted "how can the practice become the curriculum" (Wenger, 2010, p. 194), and established a connectedness between the two. Furthermore, Wenger does not separate the practical from the theoretical. Practice is both "ideals and reality" and "talking and doing" reflecting CoPs as active spaces for sharing how we do things, what we know and what we are trying to understand (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) noted that communities of practice develop into a variety of forms and they practice multiple different activities. Some additional features of CoPs are that they are voluntary (Mercieca, 2018, Nagy and Burch, 2009), emphasise open accessibility to new members and offer opportunities to explore competence in domains that invite participation from across boundary organisational structures. In particular, it is necessary to note that Wenger (1998) has emphasised that the communities of practice concept is embedded in social learning theory; furthermore, the theory reflects a process and not a form or structure to be overtly directed or managed.

2.4.2 Communities of Practice in Higher Education

The disciplinary contexts for academic inquiry on communities of practice in higher education are broad (Tight, 2014). Tight (2019) further noted that articles related to business and management and articles related to, and within, education are the most prevalent. In higher education as previously discussed, research related to communities of practice has tended to coalesce in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Given that social, participatory learning is the theoretical basis for communities of practice, this academic interest in CoP development in SoTL is understandable. Examples of further areas of research related to communities of practice in HE include teaching practice (Lieberman, 2000), online communities (Sherer, Shea, & Kristensen, 2003), research support (Kent, Berry, Budds, Skipper, & Williams, 2017), and support groups for new academics (Mercieca, 2017, Richlin & Essington, 2004).

The application and theorising of the communities of practice concept in higher education institutions is not without criticism. There are a range of critiques of communities of practice (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007) and communities of practice in higher education (Nagy and Burch, 2009, Tight, 2004). These critiques broadly relate to situated learning theory, the CoP concept, the nature of knowledge work under-taken in universities, and the organizational context of faculty work. To consider the application of the communities of practice concept in HE more comprehensively it is necessary to explore these criticisms.

Turning first to theory, Hughes (2007) has drawn attention to the characteristics of situated learning observed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and has questioned the transferability of these situated characteristics to other organizations. As previously discussed the concept of situated learning and peripheral participation first developed in early empirical studies by Lave and Wenger (1991) were drawn from the observation of apprenticeships in different cultures. Nagy and Burch (2009) posited that the situated socio-cultural practices in apprenticeships and the development of knowledge and skills observed by Lave and Wenger (1991) were significantly different in universities. For example, the interest areas for each of the CoPs in this study are relatively specialized and reflect knowledge work in HE. The faculty members in the CoPs come from different schools, disciplines and locations within the University and share diverse knowledge and understandings. Furthermore, James (2007) argued that Lave and Wenger's research (1991) suggested that CoPs were places of coherence, agreement and harmonization. It is hard to reconcile these characteristics with universities where situated and social practice is affected by external factors and internal structural context factors discussed in 2.2. The stratified and changing nature of faculty work (Metcalfe et al., 2011) is unstable, fractured and dynamic. In her study of academic identities and communities of practice in higher education, James (2007) proposed that in HE, Lave and Wenger's CoP concept "neglects the impact of external pressures in the wider organization where they are located and the dynamic process of their formation and reproduction" (p. 136).

There are also tensions between situated learning and social learning in how these understandings relate to the CoP concept. Hughes, Jewson and Irwin (2007) identified the absence of acknowledgement of wider social memberships that CoP members bring to learning. They argued that these wider social memberships "shape the ways of acting, thinking and feeling – of members of communities of practice" (p. 172). Some social memberships identified by Hughes, Jewson and Irwin (2007) are "age, sex, gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity and class" (p. 173). An academic's trajectory into, and inside, academia is also highly individualized. For example, James' (2007) biographical research that related the stories of two academics noted that a female academic's account of her experience in a CoP included related experiences in other domains located in CoPs outside the workplace. The issue of wider-social memberships and the inter-play of these on identity and participation in CoPs and situated learning continue to be explored in empirical studies.

In addition to this diversity in knowledge and skills in academic work, faculty work in a dispersed work environment. White and Weathersby (2005) also described faculty knowledge work in universities to incorporate a significant amount of discretion and self-direction. As previously noted globalisation and neo-liberal public management practices are two examples that have been identified as contributors to more autonomous work and less collegial engagement (Nagy & Burch, 2009). Clearly, knowledge work has different characteristics to the work of apprentices or insurance processors.

Arthur (2016) contrasted several characteristics attributed to the CoPs studied by Lave and Wenger (1991) with CoPs in universities. In the former, the characteristics were as follows: a singular community, a stable operating environment, a close-knit community, and a low level of initial knowledge for newcomers. In contrast, the CoP characteristics in universities were identified as follows: several diverse communities dispersed, a turbulent operating environment, a loosely formed community and qualified newcomers(high level of pre-existing knowledge). Newcomers in universities have pre-existing knowledge, a stark contrast to the trade and craft groups that through legitimate peripheral

participation created communities of knowledge and practice between newcomers and old-timers (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 29). This brings to question the significance, contexts and character of peripheral participation and learning between faculty peers in university settings; this study aims to contribute to these understandings. For example, it is unclear how a faculty member of a CoP might describe their experience learning in a community of practice in the terms associated with being novice or a newcomer; or, in contrast, terms associated with being an expert or old-timer. Clearly the historical, cultural and contextual aspects of the empirical research by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) are observations very much removed from a university context.

Picking up on diverse and dispersed communities, Engeström has criticized Lave and Wenger (1991) for not recognizing the dispersed and new patterns of social relationships associated with work. Building on this point, and earlier discussion, work in universities is not stable. Faculty work in dispersed and peer groups and relationships and these groups change frequently; they are not bound tightly, stable or centrally directed (Engeström, 2007).

Very few studies focus on the relationship between communities of practice and the context of the university and the experiences faculty members have in these voluntary and informal learning groups. There are also opportunities to consider for professional development for faculty through communities of practice, and learning situated in a social sphere.

As noted in the Background and Context (1.1) the University in this case study has managerial and corporate characteristics. Nagy & Burch (2009) studied faculty work practices in a corporate university model and the impact of these elements on communities of practice in corporate style universities in Australia. The authors argued that academics in corporate universities faced increased pressures related to accreditation, quality, performance criteria, grant applications and service expectations leaving little time available to engage in informal, voluntary learning groups. This contextual analysis highlighted the potential challenges related to participating in communities of practice in academe and in particular, in the corporate university. Nagy and Burch (2009) defined the corporate university to

reflect a transition from "collegial autonomous institutions with government funding, to managerial business style operations with flexible delivery and a need to earn revenue in a competitive environment" (p. 229). Furthermore, the authors posited that we have more to learn about both the conceptualization of communities of practice in academe (CoPiA), and also the developing practice of these groups. Their concluding argument is that CoP theory shifts in academic settings necessitating further understanding of the contextual differences between CoPiA and CoPs.

Although Nagy and Burch (2009) make a compelling argument, the transferability of CoP theory to a corporate academic setting is not currently supported by empirical research. This study will contribute to this evidence base by developing our empirical understanding about CoPs in corporate universities. I decided it was important in my study to also explore impacts and risks associated with participation in informal CoPs and also CoP participants' perceptions of common aspects that enable or impede the groups to function. With respect to the potential risks associated with CoPs and how they function, McDonald & Star (2008) have published broadly on CoPs in HE in Australia where the concept is broadly understood (McDonald & Star, 2008). Based on a practice-based reflection on convening communities of practice McDonald and Star (2008) identified the continuity of the community as an essential risk. Continuity was associated with membership engagement with the CoP. An online polling system to identify agenda priorities, liaison with CoP members, and an online catalogue of resources for the CoP were actions that were undertaken to support continuity. McDonald and Star also chose to follow a consistent framework for meetings. The CoPs were part of an intentional program that was formalised through bids for funding, and additional administrative support and research personnel, funds and meeting resources. This study will offer insight into the benefits and risks associated with informal CoPs.

Significantly, a recent contribution to social learning in universities, "*Communities of Practice: Facilitating Social Learning in Higher Education,"* encouraged practitioners and researchers to enhance social learning in HE and identified an "urgent need for more relevant forms of professional learning in HE"

(Mercieca, 2017, p. 5). This further supports the limited spread of the practice of CoPs in HE and the significant contribution empirical research offers to understand the contribution of participatory, social forms of learning for faculty members.

2.4.3 Communities of Practice in Higher Education – Informal or Formal?

There are different interpretations of community of practice theory when applied as a formalised knowledge development strategy in organisations. As part of the formative feedback the researcher received during the study design phrase was the question: *"Could communities of practice be communities of practice if they were organized?*" (Kahn, 2018). I understand the conceptual and theoretical basis for this question. One potential criticism of the approach taken in this study is that the researcher has explored an 'convened' approach to social learning and communities of practice. In 2016, Wenger cautioned on the association of a community of practice with a group, preferring to emphasise that communities of practice referred not to a 'group' but to a "social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time" (Farnsworth, Kleanthous & Wenger-Trayner 2016, p. 5). Here the question may indeed also reside in the argument that communities of practice have to be informal, and that once they become visible within an organisation, they somehow lose their informal orientation and essential nature. This distinction is worth consideration as it suggests that task forces and working groups that are often associated with organization-wide change are not learning partnerships as theorised for a CoP because they are oriented to a task or mandate. For example, Tight (2014) posits that once communities of practice are "…seen as a managerial tool, its usage in other contexts appears compromised in some ways" (p. 120). The researcher agrees with Tight's perspective. Some more managed and formal interpretations of CoP risk losing a connection to the theory of social learning that can inform them. To address this contradiction McDonald, Star & Margetts (2012) developed a typology that included W-CoPs, and M-CoPs. A W-CoP (with a nod to Etienne Wenger) is a CoP that is an unplanned and unstructured social learning community reflecting a process rather than a form or thing (McDonald et al., 2012). McDonald et al. (2012), described a W-CoP that "*cannot* be led, managed, facilitated or even influenced" (p. 18). CoPs that have structure or form in any way including a convener are defined as

M-CoPs or modified CoPs (McDonald et al., 2012). While this terminology may seem clumsy, it does create the language that is necessary to make this distinction between an W-CoP that is informal and may not be visible to the organisation or to the members, and, an M-CoP that is predominantly an informal process; yet does include form expressed in different ways (organized times to meet, a convenor, facilitation and so on). The CoPs in this study are modified CoPs or M-CoPs.

Boud and Brew (2012) have further argued that informal learning and workplace learning have much in common, despite the fact that as a discipline they have been studied and advanced in their own right. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) made the distinction between formal and informal learning on the basis of whether the learning is intentional/planned or unintentional/unplanned. While distinctions are helpful in enabling us to form clear ideas about 'what is' and 'what is not' they can also unnecessarily draw a boundary where a nesting or over-lap would be a more useful conceptualisation, emphasising connection and hybrid possibilities rather than difference. In a Malcolm, Hodkinson & Colley (2003) study of the meanings and uses of informal and formal learning, the authors concluded it is more helpful to examine the dimensions of, and interrelationships between, formality and informality as the two are "inextricably inter-related" (p. 313). This is the perspective that I have taken in this study.

In summary, there is a role for social learning and communities of practice in faculty learning and growth. Communities of practice is an influential concept with a rich theoretical basis. The concept has been shaped and adapted by applying the concept in difference contexts, and HE is a context that has specific characteristics that may affect how CoPs develop and function. The three CoPs in this study are not managerialist forms (Tight, 2014) and based on the McDonald et al. (2012) typology are modified or M-CoPs. They are faculty-initiated and organized with a minimal level of support from the University. The domain and community membership are voluntary, and the timing, agenda and outcomes are organic. These distinctions are viewed as important as they clarify the level of informality of the CoPs.

2.5 Organisational Learning in Universities

Organisational learning in universities is a fourth major area in this review of literature as it presents an inter-related perspective on both professional development, communities of practice and organisational learning.

As discussed in 2.4 communities of practice theory and application in HE, socially constructed learning theorises how we learn in social situations through active participation with one another and relationships with one another (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The implications for institutions are that through the appreciation of socially constructed learning arise new approaches that encourage informal participation and relationships between people. When people come together, they form different kinds of communities. Wenger (2000) argued that the success of organizations depends, in large part, on their ability to create and build social learning systems. Communities of practice are one opportunity to nurture social learning systems in our institutions. The communities of practice in this study may reflect a response to organisational limitations. For example, these limitations could relate to the practice associated with the University's Learning and Teaching Model (LTM) discussed in Chapter 1 and the understandings and applications of this model. Another limitation may be organisational culture or strategy. For example, in a viewpoint paper on the institutional obstacles to creating learning organisations in HE, White & Weathersby (2005) commented "rather than operating as a community of scholars, most universities operate as bureaucracies where social learning is an espoused ideal rather than actual practice" (p. 293). The CoPs could also be in response to other organisational limitations including a deficit in horizontal communication between schools and faculties. The CoPs may indeed offer an opportunity within the University for learning that would not otherwise be possible.

Drawing from the field of organisational development, Brown and Duguid (1991) argued that organizational learning could be more productively understood by assessing learning that occurred in practice-based communities in organizations. Drawing on the ethnographic studies of Orr (1990a and 1990b) and Lave and Wenger (1990), Brown and Duguid (1991) argued that "learning is working" (p 41) with an emphasis on the connection between knowledge and practice that presented possibilities to bridge work and innovation. In particular, they argued that

communities of practice as emergent and evolving groups presented particularly valuable sites for innovating in organisations and declared a "knowledge-practice separation is unsound, both in theory and in practice" (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p. 41). This research explores the possibility that CoPs are a response to organisational limitations.

The CoPs in this study were initiated around the interests and practices of faculty practitioners. As discussed in 2.3.1, the initiation of the CoPs reflected an interest to bring people together to examine their practice across organizational boundaries and reporting structures within the University (university, school, discipline). This motivation to start a CoP was perhaps similar to the impetus shared by Raeburn and McDonald (2017) in their reflection on starting CoPs in a corporate university in Australia. The factors associated with starting CoPs as noted in *My Story* included my heightened sense of isolation, a search for collegiality, increasing demands on my time to complete administrative tasks, and a desire to learn with and from others. As MacGillivray noted, there is much to learn about innovations in higher education that encourage social learning across institutional boundaries (2017).

2.6 Communities of Practice in this Study

In this study the communities of practice are convened groups. In this University context, the gathering of the communities of practice was a necessary step to facilitate bringing faculty together. In this case study, this was primarily in person, however, this can also be facilitated through asynchronous digital communities. Without these convened spaces, the community would not exist, or would exist differently. The initiation of a CoP by a faculty member speaks to an identification of an aspect of practice that was considered important to the convenor and this interest also resonated with others. Research question one explores this aspect of communities of practice by seeking to understand what faculty members were looking for when they joined a convened CoP. Table 2 provides some background information on the three CoPs in this study including the name of the group, the broad purpose of the group and the date the CoP was convened, and the number of times the CoP meets each year.

Table 2: Three Communities of Practice

Community	Purpose	Timeline
Community of Practice for *Program Heads* Between 6 and 24 participants	Examine the role of program head, share experience, support one another.	Convened February 2017 to present date Meets 8 times per year
Community of Practice for *Interdisciplinary Case Research* Between 5 and 9 participants	Write business style cases for teaching and publication.	Convened February 2016 to present date Meets 6 times per year
Community of Practice for *Women in Leadership* Between 8 and 16 participants	Share experiences, support women leaders.	Convened June 2016 to present date Meets 5 times per year

The domains for the three CoPs are situated in professional academic practice (teaching, research and academic administration) and the development of practice through sharing and discovering the perceptions of others in the group (Boud & Brew, 2013). As noted, CoPs can be informal and invisible, or, be convened and scheduled (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). In this study the CoPs were convened by faculty practitioners in service to those practitioners, and not through any institutional directive. The CoPs have characteristics associated with McDonald et al. (2012) typology for modified or M-CoPs.

2.7 Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe and explore with a sample of faculty CoP members, their experiences in faculty communities of practice in their University. This chapter has explored literature in the areas of the changing nature of faculty work; the practice of faculty professional development in HE; communities of practice theory; and the potential connections between professional development, communities of practice and organisational learning. This material

provided understandings and potential gaps that framed the broader context for this study of faculty learning in communities of practice. For example, the experience of learning in a horizontal, faculty-initiated and convened group. Twenty years after Wenger (1998) published *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* there is merit in returning to his theory to conduct an empirical case study of how faculty members experience social learning in communities of practice in a specific University context.

This literature review informed the research questions that were developed and refined before, during and after the literature review process. The review of the literature suggested that a study of CoPs that are modified M Cops – not formalised, or informal, rather somewhere in between these two dichotomies is an area that is under-researched. Faculty members are joining faculty-initiated communities of practice and they make their own choice regarding their decision to participate. This study provides an opportunity to make some broad connections between the reasons for joining a community, learning in a community and faculty development and in particular, the role of informal learning and social learning in a University. As the nature of academic work shifts or fragments (Barnett, 2014), communities of practice may support faculty learning. There are also potential impacts, risks and benefits that faculty CoP members associate with participating in a CoP. If we understand these aspects of CoP membership more fully and also what aspects may enable or impede the CoP's from functioning, there may be opportunities to better support the groups in appropriate ways.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Study Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe with a sample of faculty CoP members their experiences in faculty communities of practice in their University. In the University informal groups have formed across organizational and disciplinary boundaries. There are gaps in our understanding of how faculty members who participate in one of these groups experience a community of practice in this University, and what purposes these groups may serve.

Four research questions guided the research design for this inquiry:

1. What are faculty members looking for from a community of practice?
2. How do faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice?
3. How do faculty members perceive the related impacts, and potential risks and benefits of participating in these informal learning groups?
4. What are the common aspects that enable or impede the groups to continue to function as a community of practice?

3.2 A Qualitative Case Study Methodology

In this case study I explored the phenomenon of informal faculty communities of practice, as perceived by faculty members, in three different communities of practice in a Canadian University. Yin (2018) defined a case study as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.15). I chose a case study approach to recognise and explore the context of the case. To develop an account of the context for this study, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 included a description of external factors that are significant in Canadian Universities, and to the University in this case study. For the case study context, I also chose to include characteristics that I and the research participants associated with the internal structural conditions within the University. Furthermore, the case study context also recognised the local conditions developed within the three CoPs in this case study, and the associated knowledge and practice that related to these CoP conditions. For example, each

CoP had different community participants, history, and purpose for convening. Brown & Duguid (1991) emphasised the significance of contextual knowledge and proposed that communities of practice provided the space for learning that drew on contextual knowledge and practice "…like a magpie with a nest, learning is built out of the materials to hand and in relation to the structuring of resources of local conditions" (p. 47). The case study approach acknowledges these possible contextual connections.

According to Yin (2018) and Merriam (1998) a case should be bounded, to give it a sufficiently focused or narrow scope of inquiry. This case also has boundaries between the phenomenon which is communities of practice and the context that is the University. The bounded aspects of this case study are the three different faculty communities of practice that were introduced in Chapter 2, 2.6 Table 2. To summarise, while this case study took place on one site, the phenomenon of communities of practice is explored in three different faculty groups. Yin (2018) described this approach as a single site case study with more than one unit of analysis, defined as an embedded single-case design. This study is thus characterised as a qualitative single site case study with three embedded units of analysis represented by three different communities of practice. This offers the opportunity to gather multiple sources of experience which is a facet of Yin's case study definition (2018).

Simons (2009) has written about theory and practice in case study research in education with a particular focus on qualitative case studies. There are several aspects of Simons qualitative case study approach that align with this study. According to Simons (2009) a qualitative case study recognises and values participants' perspectives on their experiences and how they interpret them. This case study approach describes faculty experience with a goal to deepen understanding of communities of practice so that others may learn from this data to inform and improve their contributions to communities of practice. Furthermore, Simons (2009) emphasised that case research is about 1) learning and inquiry into the case and 2) learning about yourself as the researcher. Chapter 1 included the researcher's self-introduction in 1.5-My Story and provided a somewhat raw and

unrefined insight into the personal struggle that formed the impetus for this case-study. I have purposefully not changed My Story since it was written at the inception of this study, as it captured my perspectives and experiences in the University and the gaps that I felt motivated me to seek out other communities and to pursue this study. This is an example of the reflexive practice I have taken to consider my values, motivations and decisions and their impact on the study and on myself. The incorporation of researcher reflexivity in this study is discussed in further detail in 3.11 - Reflexive Approach and Practice.

In summary, I completed a qualitative single site case study with three embedded units of analysis represented by three different communities of practice. Within this approach I chose to monitor my impact on the case research process and analysis through reflexivity. A starting point for reflexivity included the development of a 'My Story' statement. This statement represented a particular moment in time at the start of this case study inquiry.

3.3 Research Paradigm & Epistemological Basis for the Study

A social constructivist research paradigm guided this qualitative study. With this perspective I believe that knowledge is constructed personally and also socially (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Mabry, 2012) as this knowledge relates to individuals and communities (Cupchik, 2001). With this claim to knowledge I seek to understand the varied, multiple and subjective meanings that each of the participants construct to make sense of, or describe, their experiences. I also recognize that this sense of reality is not fixed and will shift and change over time (Etherington, 2004). Different people perceive and inhabit different worlds, or ways of knowing, experiencing, or making meaning (Crotty, 1998). This study also pays attention to the individual, for example, their discipline, their experience, their interests and perspectives. Meaning is understood as relative reflecting an individual interpretation that is also influenced by our social, cultural and historical contexts (Lave, 1991).

My assumptions about how I come to know as a researcher within this social constructivist paradigm are supported by the following epistemological understandings:

- As Crotty (1998) noted "we are all born into a world of meaning" (p. 54). The socio-cultural context of an organization, in this case, a University, where the participants worked, formed the structural conditions associated with faculty work and professional growth. There are other socio-cultural factors, most significantly, the participant's school and discipline. These conditions also affected the meanings individuals and groups created. I seek to describe and interpret the meaning of these conditions.
- Wenger (1998) argued that through our connection, dialogue and contribution with others, regarding our practices, we come to learn. Learning in this study is understood as an individual and also a social activity. The research methods: individual interviews and focus group interviews, reflected these two aspects of social learning.
- Recognizing that my background and experience will contribute to how I interpret the study, I sought to be as open and as transparent as I could about my part in the construction of this research (Etherington, 2004). I have sought self-knowledge during this research process with a specific interest in developing my capability to consistently bring a social constructivist worldview to this study.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

Yin (2018) suggested that in case study research it is beneficial to have a theoretical position to guide the data collection and analysis. I chose to embed a loose alignment with Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning and let the theory inform the interview questions I posed (Yin, 2018). Related to this choice, I was familiar with Wenger's work as I had used his social learning theory in the past to help inform my work as a community of practice leader and participant. It was problematic to separate this understanding I had from the study, and so I chose to acknowledge the influence of Wenger's thinking as a background aspect, while also pursuing an inductive approach to the data collection and analysis. As Crotty noted (1998) "…a concept is never able to exhaust the richness of a phenomenon" (p.81). I assumed that this specific University environment would offer representations of the experience that were highly contextualized (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). The data

collection and analysis were thus loosely informed by a social theory of learning articulated by Wenger (1998) with a particular focus to what Simons (2009) phrased as "what the theory of the case may be in practice" (p. 22). I use the term loose alignment purposefully to reflect an approach that was theory informed (Simons, 2009), yet was also adaptive. Yin (2016) has described this approach as one that "let the field reveal reality first" (p. 132). By following each participant's interpretation of any question I asked, I refrained from restricting or re-directing the conversation. Similarly, in the analysis I purposefully approached coding openly, taking care to code to the data before me and not to any pre-conceived sense of what patterns might be present. Further details regarding coding and the research methods are explained in 3.9 – Data Analysis Method.

3.5 Participant Selection & Recruitment

The research population for this study consisted of up to 72 core faculty members at the University. Core faculty were members who had either a continuing position or a fixed term (5 year) contract with the University. The three CoPs in this study were made up of core faculty members with the exception of the ICR CoP that had one associate faculty member. For this reason, only core faculty were included in the research population. The final sample of 15 faculty that represented the core faculty population met the following selection criteria. The participant had to be a member of one or more of the following three communities of practice: 1) program heads with administrative program oversight; 2) interdisciplinary case researchers; and 3) women in leadership (Table 2). CoP membership was relatively loosely defined as each CoP had shifting participation throughout the year. For this reason, any core faculty member (none CAS) who had attended a CoP and who was listed on one or more of the three CoP distribution lists was invited to participate.

Participant recruitment was completed with two approaches. First, between April and September 2018, I introduced the purpose of the study verbally in each CoP during a regular meeting. Second, an invitation to participate in the study was distributed through a blind copied email to the members of each of the three CoPs. The email invitation and participant information sheet were tailored to each CoP and so distribution was completed separately for each group. The email invitation

included the participation information sheet for the study in an attachment (Appendix A).

The participant information sheet (see Appendix A), attached to the email invitation, outlined two options for participation in the study. For option one, the faculty member could choose to participate in: 1) individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and 2) a focus group interview. For option two the faculty member could participate in: 1) individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, or 2) a focus group interview. The rationale for the two participation options in the study and the sequencing of the options are discussed further in 3.6. Three participants chose to participate in both options, the in-depth semi -structured interview and also the focus group interview. The participant selection protocol for the interview was to accept the first three interview participants based on the date of the acceptances received. The participants for the focus groups included all focus group acceptances received.

3.6 Research Methods

I selected semi structured, in-depth interviews and focus group interviews for the two data collection methods for this study and the complete data set comprised of nine interviews and three focus groups completed in two parts. The two research methods were completed consecutively with the semi-structured, in-depth interviews first (Part 1), and the focus group interviews second (Part 2). For Part 1, the semi-structured interview method was chosen for research questions one and two to encourage the participants to describe their individual perspectives. This approach was taken to recognise individual identity and the significance of the individual as a participant in the social and participatory experience in a CoP (Wenger, 2010). In Part 2, the focus group interview method was chosen to explore instrumental aspects of the study. I considered a moderated group discussion would encourage open elaboration and exploration of questions the participants may not have previously considered or talked about openly.

For each CoP, data collection consisted of three semi-structured in-depth interviews and one focus group interview. A semi-structured approach was used for both methods, however the approach was organised differently with a separate

guide for each method. The interview prompts are provided in Table 3. Further details regarding each research method and the rationale for these choices are provided in this section.

Table 3: Prompts for In-Depth Semi-structured Interviews

Developed from components of a Social Theory of Learning (Wenger, 1998)

1. What are faculty members looking for when they choose to join a community of practice?
2. How do faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice?

General questions to open up a broad conversation	1. Can you share your perspective on why you chose to join this community of practice? 2. What were you expecting from it? 3. How would you describe your involvement and experience in the community of practice? 4. How does this account of your experience in a CoP compare with your experience in other groups you have been involved in at this university?
Meaning	
In-depth Semi Structured Interviews	Prompts in interview guide: 1. Can you share any particular experience in this CoP that has affected you in some particularly meaningful way? 2. Can you recall any particular experience in this CoP where your sense of understanding yourself or of understanding others shifted? 3. How would you describe interactions in the CoP – what have you noticed? 4. What is participation like in this CoP? 5. How would you describe the contribution of this CoP to the university?
Practice	

In-depth Semi Structured Interviews	Prompts in interview guide: 1. Do you share resources, perspectives, or particular frameworks, processes or approaches in your CoP? 2. What have you learned from others or with others? 3. How would you describe the contribution of this CoP to your practice and knowledge as a case researcher?
Community	
In-depth Semi Structured Interviews	Prompts in interview guide: 1. To what extent does the group feel like a case- writing (customize in interview) and research community? 2. What characteristics do you associate with this community? 3. What kinds of interactions do you have in the CoP? ▪ What do you do together? ▪ Can you explore trust with me? ▪ Can you comment on the conversations that happen in this group?
Identity	
In-depth Semi Structured Interviews	Prompts in interview guide: 1. Has your participation in the CoP had any impact on your sense of purpose in your role/work as a (program head, woman in leadership or case researcher)?
Last Question	Is there a question I should have asked you but didn't?

3.7 Part 1: In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Drawing from the work on qualitative interviews Lichtman (2013) King, Horrocks & Brooks (2018) and Savin-Baden & Howell Major (2013), I explored nine CoP participants' experiences through the completion of individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The focus for this data collection was to encourage the research participant to individually consider their reasons for joining a CoP and to elaborate on their learning experiences as a CoP member. The in-depth structured interviews were conducted to gather data that related to exploring research

questions one and two. The qualitative interview method was appropriate as a data collection method as it enabled the exploration of individual recollections, expectations, experiences, thoughts, feelings, reflections and aspirations. Simply stated, the intention was to get an understanding of a full range of faculty experience in CoPs.

According to Savin-Baden & Howell Major (2013), interviews are also appropriate when the information to be shared is sensitive. This case-study was potentially sensitive as some of the CoPs in the study convened around politically sensitive issues (women in leadership and program head administration), the groups were also not formally institutionalised within the University organisation and culture. I decided the interview method would provide participants with the most suitable opportunity to explore and share their experiences openly.

I used a semi-structured approach for the interview design, and I invited participants to explore their experience and perceptions within a loosely guided format. Yin (2009) argued that case study interviews should be "guided conversations rather than structured inquiries" (p. 106). Lichtman (2013) referred to qualitative interviewing as a "conversation with a purpose" (p. 116). I purposefully sought to develop an interview approach that had the tone and pace one would expect of an individual conversation.

For preparation, I considered Litchman's (2013) five components for interviews: advanced planning, the opening, getting started, the body of the interview, and the end of the interview (p. 120). Advanced planning included a reflection on the theory informed and practice-based knowledge I had developed as a CoP participant and convenor. I drew on this knowledge to develop interview questions (Table 3). The semi-structured interview prompts related loosely to the four components of social learning summarised by Wenger (1998) as noted in Table 3. Some examples are: *Can you share your perspective on why you chose to join this community of practice? What were you expecting from the CoP? How would you describe your involvement and experience in the community of practice?*

In practicing a semi-structured approach to data collection, I sought to create a balance between asking questions informed by Wenger's social learning theory,

and also leaving space to capture a broader discussion with the participants on the aspects of experience that mattered to them. In practice the questions worked as prompts and the conversations I had with participants quickly moved into spaces that the participants wanted to discuss. In some interviews the initial general questions generated in-depth responses and I was able to I drop some of the later questions. For the opening, before the interview started, I re-introduced the purpose of the study, reviewed the participant information sheet and invited the research participant to complete the informed consent form. In some cases, the participants completed these preliminaries in advance as these documents were sent to each participant before the interview. Several participants did not review the paperwork in advance, making this opening work necessary for consistency, full disclosure of the study, informed consent and acknowledgement of consent.

As previously noted, a conversational approach for this study was necessary as I had a collegial working relationship with all of the participants in the study. Therefore, to acknowledge these pre-existing relationships I approached the interviews in a conversational way. While this pre-existing relationship enabled quick rapport building it also gave me a heightened my sense of responsibility to the participants that I may not have felt so acutely if I had not known them prior to the interview. I had a strong sense of accountability to the research participants to provide them with the opportunity to articulate their experience. King, Horrocks & Brooks (2018) in their discussion on qualitative interviews stated "we are all situated actors and as such we bring to each interview our own histories, political affiliations and a myriad of other aspects that constitute who we are" (p. 183). In the interviews I was humbled to hear the range of experiences in CoPs that the research participants shared with me, and through this I noted that my own understandings became much more variegated. For example, I realised that in one or two cases after an interaction in a CoP, a participant had felt un-heard. I had not considered this perception as I had typically felt most comfortable and most heard in discussions and conversations in CoPs. I realised that this participant's history, role and responsibilities affected his/her relationships in the group.

An issue I faced early on was balancing the conversational approach that I believed to be necessary with appropriate interview reciprocity (Mercer, 2007). However, early in the data collection I noticed during transcription of the first interview, that when asked a question by a participant, I had shared a perspective that may have perhaps shifted that particular conversation a little more than I had anticipated. It is unusual to be asked a question by a research participant, and I had been surprised and had responded. I adjusted my approach and purposefully aimed to only contribute for the purpose of rapport building and probing.

I had concerns initially that the semi-structured approach might be too leading or confining. In practice, the questions were starting points. For example, participants were amenable to the questions, yet assertive in their ability and interest in sharing what they wanted to share. I intentionally focused on careful listening, rapport building and appropriate probing to seek to understand the perspective of each participant (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). Interviews were audio-recorded to ensure that interviewee's responses were accurately captured. In-depth interviews were conducted on the- university campus in a meeting room in the library. I chose this location as it offered a neutral, central and private space. Each interview took approximately 50-60 minutes with the shortest interview lasting 53 minutes and the longest 73 minutes. I completed transcription and participants were each given the option to read their transcript and share any further observations with me.

3.8 Part 2: Focus Group Interviews

Part 1 of data collection encouraged the research participants to individually consider their reasons for joining a CoP and to elaborate on their learning experiences as a CoP member. In Part 2, rather than probing experience, I focussed on encouraging participants to share and generate ideas. I considered focus group interviews a compatible research method in this study as this method was most suitable for providing group participants with the opportunity to reflect on the group functioning by interacting with each other and sharing experiences, impressions and ideas. Savin-Baden & Howell Major (2013) defined focus group interviews as a qualitative data collection method that generated a moderated interview to elicit a

range of perspectives and ideas from participants in a group. By encouraging a collective consideration of the focus group interview questions, the participants explored possible impacts, risks and benefits associated with participation in CoPs and also the common aspects that enabled or impeded the groups to continue to function. The focus group interviews were completed to collect data to explore research questions three and four. Breen (2006) suggested that research questions that require participants to share and compare experiences, develop and generate ideas, and explore issues of shared importance, are particularly suitable for a focus group interview method. Furthermore, King, Horrocks & Brooks (2018) noted that focus group interviews bring people together to interact with one another. I decided it was appropriate to use a research method that offered the participants in the study an opportunity to explore their experience socially in a format that related reasonably well to the social constructivist nature of social learning experience in communities of practice.

I conducted one focus group interview for each of the CoPs in the study; the participants were not mixed. The CoPs functioned differently, and I decided that separating the focus group interviews by CoP was an important decision to ensure I could explore experience within each different community of practice separately, thus ensuring participants had shared interest backgrounds, experiences and discussion focus (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The prompts were instrumental (practice based) in focus, seeking to explore different aspects the participants associated with group functioning. The participants shared their personal experience and reflected critically on different aspects related to how the CoP functioned, and, considered impacts and potential benefits with others. In addition to this, the groups also discussed their experiences together. I followed a semi-structured approach, and the focus group was characterised and conducted as a focus group interview (Lichtman 2013). I prepared a guide with focus group interview prompts (Table 4).

Table 4: Prompts for Focus Group Interviews

	Prompts in interview guide:
General questions to open up a broad conversation	1. What is the history of this group? 2. What is its purpose? How do you describe it to others? 3. What does leadership look like? What are some possible future directions? 4. What role do you think you take in your CoP? 5. What factors facilitate your experience in the CoP? 6. What factors hinder your experience in the CoP? 7. How would you say the group operates? 8. What enables the group to function as a CoP? Are you in a CoP?

The focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Accuracy regarding who was speaking was not an issue as in the transcription process, I could recognize each voice (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The focus group interviews were completed in a neutral, central and private space. The largest group had five participants and the smallest group had three participants. Each focus group interview took approximately 50-60 minutes with the shortest focus group lasting 55 minutes and the longest 58 minutes.

3.9 Data Analysis Method

As discussed in 3.6 Research Methods, this study design had four primary research questions and two parts. In part one, data collection for questions one and two, was completed with nine in-depth semi-structured interviews. In Part two, data collection for questions three and four was completed with three focus group interviews. Data analysis using a thematic analysis method was subsequently completed in the same sequential order, with analysis of the interview data first, and analysis of the focus group data second. I did not analyse part one data before collecting data for part two as the study was set up to be in two distinct parts. I did notice that the focus group participants made some references to their experience learning in the CoP with one another. This data was not explicitly mapped to research questions one and two. In a review of the focus group data I noted that this data did not include new themes or sub-themes that were not captured in Part 1. For this reason I was confident in the overall research design and made no further adjustments.

Braun and Clarke (2012) described a thematic analysis as a "method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p. 57). I chose this method as it offers an analytical process to identify patterns of data that were most relevant to the research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2012) thematic analysis offers the researcher an analytical method that identifies patterns of meaning that are significant to the research questions and research topic. In exploring and describing different aspects of experience in these groups the intention was to develop insight into experiences that were meaningful and significant in understanding faculty communities of practice and the context in which they emerged and convened. In this sense, this analysis method honed in on the most meaningful patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This is important as the research questions were written to guide an inquiry into different considerations associated with understanding faculty communities of practice – for example, how faculty learn in CoPs and how CoPs function.

3.10 Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2012) referred to thematic analysis as a data analysis method, not an approach for conducting qualitative research. This method offers a flexible yet systematic approach to data analysis. The analytical approach I have taken with thematic analysis is a descriptive analysis to describe the most significant patterns of data that relate to the phenomenon of communities of practice within the real-life context of the University and faculty work. In summary, I chose and applied a thematic analysis method and followed Braun and Clarke's 6-phase guide to complete it (2006).

Braun and Clarke developed a 6 phase guide to thematic analysis: Phase 1: familiarize yourself with the data, Phase 2: generate initial codes, Phase 3: search for themes, Phase 4: review themes and Phase 5: define and name themes and Phase 6: produce the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 87 – 93). I completed a thematic analysis that followed Braun and Clarke's 6 phase guide (2006, pp. 77-101). This section starts with an overview of my actions and decisions in phase 1 and phase 2 of

this thematic analysis method. On completion of the data collection, I applied a thematic analysis process, and coded each data set separately. The following section provides further detail on the thematic analysis process and the decisions and actions taken.

3.10.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that in phase 1 of a thematic analysis it is necessary to start to get to know your data through active immersion. Phase 1 also included the data transcription. Within a day of each of the interviews and subsequently, the focus group interviews, I made notes regarding my impressions. As discussed in Chapter 3, in consideration of my positionality I purposefully aimed to maintain openness and active inquiry in areas in which I had some pre-understanding. As a CoP convener and leader for the case research community of practice it was particularly important to question my own assumptions, check in to my thoughts and experiences and identify knowledge gaps (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Some of these impressions were later considered when I started the coding process. These notes also included memos regarding my impressions in the data collection process; for example, which interview questions seemed to resonate with a participant and what responses I found unexpected.

I transcribed each audio recording within seven days. I completed all transcription of each audio recording using a subtitle service on a private YouTube channel account. As I listened to each audio recording, I corrected the subtitles for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This system allowed for a careful and accurate transcription. I added pauses, emphasis and occasionally punctuation if the punctuation supported the meaning, pause or flow of the conversation. The goal was to represent the meaning of the audio recording in words as accurately as possible.

3.10.2 Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Moving to Braun and Clarke's (2006) Phase 2: generating initial codes – I found this process took lengthy periods of intense concentration and focus. To complete this qualitative analysis, I considered NVivo, however, coding was required in advance of working with NVivo. After completing coding, I decided to continue to

develop Phase 3: theming without NVivo. Returning to the coding, to complete this process I created a two-column table, one for each of the nine interview transcriptions, and one for each of the focus group transcriptions. As noted previously, on completion of the data collection, the data analysis was completed consecutively. In the left-hand column of each table, I copied in each full transcript. I re-read and analysed the transcripts multiple times. As I read and analysed a transcript in the left-hand column, I broke down the text data into smaller units, and developed codes for these smaller units of data. I categorized the data into codes and recorded these codes in the right-hand column. The codes were descriptive of the text; in some cases, the codes were derived directly from the words used by a participant. In others, the codes summarised, for example, a perception, experience, feeling or idea. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) suggested that this process enables a researcher to progress systematically through the transcripts while clearly indicating the connection between text extracts and the codes. In the thematic analysis for the interview data and later, the focus group interview data, I coded a transcript and then re-read the transcript and the codes one day later. As an iterative process, I found the 24-hour review provided space for an intentional reflection and review of the previous day's coding. There were typically one or two corrections, additions or adjustments to be made to codes in the second review. In the next sections, a list of the codes generated for the interviews is provided in Table 6 and a list for the codes for the focus group interviews is provided in Table 8. This careful coding step supported the accuracy and rigour of the analysis. A total of 31 codes were generated for the in-depth interviews and a total of 15 codes were generated for the focus group interviews.

3.10.3 Phase 3: Search for Themes & Phase 4: Review Themes

In the thematic analysis for the in-depth, semi structured interview data I considered the codes and the patterns the codes represented. The completed codes, sub-themes and themes are provided in Table 6. The first iteration referred to 40 codes and 18 sub-themes connected to six themes. In the fifth iteration I consolidated to 31 codes and 8 sub-themes connected to three themes. For the three focus group interviews I completed 3 rounds of iteration to develop the

themes. The codes, sub-themes and themes are provided in Table 8. In the first iteration I referred to 20 codes to generate 10 sub-themes connected to five themes. In the third iteration I consolidated to 15 codes and five sub-themes connected to two themes.

3.10.4 Phase 5: Define and Name the Themes

For the in-depth, semi structured interview data I defined and named 8 sub-themes connected to three themes and refined the theme statements and the descriptions of each theme. For the focus group interview data, I defined and named five sub-themes connected to two themes and refined the theme statements and the descriptions of each theme. Braun and Clarke include phase 6: producing the report in their guide to thematic analysis. In this phase I experienced the process of writing as formative, interpretive, and a deeply reflexive process. The report is provided in Chapter 4.

3.11 Reflexive Approach & Practice

In this inquiry I practiced a reflexive approach guided by the definition from Corlett & Marvin (2018) that stated "reflexivity is always a self-monitoring of, and then self- responding to, our thoughts, feelings and actions as we engage in research projects" (p.337). More specifically, Simons (2009) emphasised that reflexivity in qualitative case research is about 1) learning and inquiry into the case and 2) learning about yourself as the researcher. This focus guided the practice of self-reflexivity in the different stages of this study. I have incorporated reflexive comments and insights into the content of this thesis inquiry. For example, the thesis account includes the motivation to engage in research in this topic, the epistemological assumptions underlying the study, self-monitoring during data collection, data analysis approach and process, and knowledge development. In summary, rather than write a specific exploration of reflexivity in Chapter 3, I have articulated and discussed reflexive considerations within each chapter. I made this choice as I prefer to emphasise the proximity of these thoughts, ideas and decisions to the different stages of the inquiry embodied within each chapter. This section focuses on the researcher's practices for developing reflexivity.

The practices and opportunities that supported reflexivity included: a research leave; the writing process, note taking and mind mapping. As a developing researcher I found each of these practices contributed to my growing capability to be reflexive. This section provides an overview of each of these practices and, in particular, a discussion on how they contributed to a reflexive approach.

Developing researcher reflexivity was supported by the opportunity to take a six-month research leave from the University during this study. During this period, I stepped away from full immersion in day-to-day faculty work. This temporary separation while undertaking a qualitative case study in my own university was particularly valuable. It was a time to settle, reflect on my past experiences and involvement with communities of practice and focus on hearing in-depth accounts of experience from a range of research participants who were also my faculty colleagues. I was able to take more time to consider the experiences and ideas so generously shared, and to also examine and re-examine my own responses to this data. For example, I was able to identify that research participants experienced both a discipline-related, and epistemic informed understanding of their experiences. These and other reflections are integrated into the analysis in Chapter 4.

Writing note taking and mind mapping were helpful practices that captured and preserved insights, perceptions and thoughts and generated a record that could be reviewed and reconsidered at a later date. According to Greenback (2003) reflexivity in writing is necessary in an emergent, qualitative research design. I noticed that reflexivity through writing supported the development of the literature review, and also the completion of a synthesis of positions and arguments to frame the case study appropriately. Note taking was completed throughout the study. This practice particularly supported the data collection phase. Mabry (2012) noted that a qualitative case researcher has to make a determined effort to be open, maintain curiosity and "notice opportunities and to follow data wherever they lead" (p.218). Note taking and mind mapping pre and post-interview and pre and post-focus group interview were both engaging processes that offered a form of self-coaching. For example, through note taking I corrected any missteps I noticed, and I learned how to ensure the data collection questions were invitations to encourage

participants to explore their own perceptions and meanings with me. Mind mapping was particularly valuable in the data analysis phase and this practice became part of the thematic analysis process.

One example of a reflexive insight early in the data collection phase occurred during my first in-depth interview. In this interview I was humbled to notice how willing the research participant was to be open and vulnerable in her conversation with me. I determined to honour the vulnerabilities shared by my colleagues through their dialogue with me, by being open and potentially vulnerable in dialogue with myself. This statement by Kirsh links reflexivity with also ethical research considerations "…living participants and communities deserve careful, thoughtful and ethical representations." (2012, p. xiv). In a case study at my own University I also practiced reflexivity to ensure I captured the institutional history and culture thoughtfully, honestly and accurately without assigning any representation to administrators or policy makers or staff. One particular consideration in this study that relates to reflexivity is positionality. Positionality is discussed further in the next section.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

At the outset of this study I considered ethical issues related to the research design and protocol. I completed a full ethical review at my home institution, the Canadian University. The ethical review process was completed by the Research Ethics Board in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018). In addition, an expedited ethical review was completed through the University of Liverpool (see Appendix B). A participant information sheet outlined the nature and purpose of the study, the research methods and participant time commitment, data collection procedures, benefits for participants, confidentiality, ownership of data, and an explanation of consent to participate. The participant information sheet is provided in Appendix A.

To address confidentiality, I chose to anonymize the University and the participants. As noted, this approach was explained in the participant information

sheet. This research was completed in a small university with only 72 tenured or non-tenured full-time faculty members. Any extracts from the transcripts that could potentially be directly linked to a person were not included in the study.

Simons (2009) suggested that engagement in qualitative case study research in education may also "…contribute to participants' self-knowledge and to their political knowledge of what it means to work in and between groups" (p. 5). As a researcher completing a study in my own institution, CoP convener and CoP participant, completing research in three different communities of practice, I worked in and between groups for over nine months. These different positionalities enabled me to broaden my appreciation of different contexts associated with the study; for example, the schools, the University and the participants. I approached this study open and curious to learn, and I endeavoured to bring this approach to all aspects of my conduct. As this study progressed, I became more aware of the ethical issues related to positionality. My personal position in relation to the subject of this research – the phenomenon, is introduced in Chapter 1, 1.5 My Story. I am a faculty member at the site for this study and I have also been a CoP participant (WiL, PH) and a CoP convenor (ICR).

For example, as previously noted, I convened one of the communities of practice included in this study. Based on this association, I had some initial concerns that research participants might feel reticent about disclosing experience that could present as negative. To encourage a fully open disclosure of experiences I noted on the participant information sheet that a full description of experience was encouraged (Appendix A). At the beginning of each individual interview or focus group interview I re-stated that my purpose was to explore a full range of experience, including all perceptions that might in any way relate to my personal involvement in the CoP or my association with the CoP. While I made this statement, I cannot know if my role in the CoP, or my relationship with each participant has had any influence on the experiences shared in this study. I am reasonably confident that my rank (Assistant Professor) limited any power related influence on this study as most of the research participants were Associate Professors or Professors. The research participants presented verbally and non-

verbally to be comfortable to disclose their full range of experiences and perceptions. This suggests that one advantage of my insider researcher position was a pre-existing relationship that was sufficiently trusting that it supported participants to openly disclose their experiences fully (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). I acknowledge that as the researcher I am a significant instrument in this study, in the data gathering, interpreting and reporting (Simons, 2009). Related to this, it was necessary to be conscious regarding my own practices, values, experiences, past interpretations and world view (Etherington, 2014) and to self-monitor the potential impact these views could have on the research process and interpretations.

3.13 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the qualitative case study methodology, the epistemological basis for the study and the theoretical framework. I explored and discussed the inter-relationship between these three decision areas and the purpose of the study. Further discussion was also developed to explain the choices made regarding participant selection, research methods and analytical approach. As noted, I am an insider researcher, completing a study in my own university with participants who are also faculty colleagues. For this reason, I detailed decisions related to ethics, positionality and my ongoing work to practice reflexive inquiry through all stages of this study. The analysis of the research findings is discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single site case study was to describe and interpret with a sample of faculty CoP members their experiences in communities of practice in their University. The further application of three embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2009) represented by three different CoPs in the University allowed for an in-depth exploration of faculty experiences in CoPs.

As noted in Chapter 3, the data collection in this study was completed consecutively, with data collection for semi-structured, in-depth interviews first, and the focus group interviews second. On completion of the data collection, this sequencing was applied for the data analysis. I applied two separate thematic analysis processes. First, I analysed the semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Second, I analysed the focus group interviews. This chapter is organized into two main parts. Part 1 provides a thematic analysis of the data collected from nine in-depth structured interviews. The data collection, and analysis was completed to explore the following research questions:

1. What are faculty members looking for from a community of practice?
2. How do faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice?

Part 2 provides a thematic analysis of the data collected from three focus group interviews. This data collection and analysis was completed to explore the following research questions:

3. How do faculty members perceive the related impacts, and potential risks and benefits of participating in these informal learning groups?
4. What are the common aspects that enable or impede the groups to continue to function as a community of practice?

4.2 Part 1: In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

In summary, on completion of a systematic and iterative thematic analysis across this data set I identified three main themes:

A. This space is freeing.
B. This is a supportive community with strong bonds and shared interests.

C. This is a faculty learning space.

Table 5 presents an overview of the themes and theme descriptions, examples of data extracts that reflect each theme, the sub-themes and codes. Note that identifiers for the data are provided in Table 6.

Table 5: Themes, Descriptions, Examples, Sub-themes and Codes

Theme	Description	Example	Sub-themes	Codes
A. This space is freeing	Individuals in the group had autonomy and choice. They did not feel they had to have answers; they could 'not know' and seek contributions from others. The CoP offered freedom from prevailing norms.	"You are in a free setting you're hearing different opinions and you're allowing your thinking to evolve at a pace that is comfortable to you" (ICR 2)	A1. There is autonomy and choice A2. There is goodwill	Space to talk; Membership changes; I have choice in whether to attend; Loose structure; Free from cultural norms
Theme	Description	Example	Sub-themes	Codes
B. This is a supportive community.	Participants noticed that group members were supportive of one another. Through a range of activities such as sharing ideas, information, experiences and practices the group bonded, and relationships were strong.	"there was a good amount of openness and collegiality about a shared bond" (WiL2) "I think that's one of the strengths of the community of practice in general is being able to have that group of random collection of somehow like-minded people	B.1 There are supportive relationships and strong bonds in the CoP B.2 Sharing with others	Sit with like-minded people; Not in this alone; Peer support; Multiple perspectives; Collaborative; Open conversation; Connection with faculty; Social

		because they all have similar tasks to accomplish" (PH2)		
Theme	Description	Example	Sub-themes	Codes
C. This is a faculty learning space.	Participants described collaborating in a range of different ways. Participants in the same group shared different impressions of group purpose and focus. Participants noticed they self-reflected in these groups. There was a common thread of shared experience and interests within the group.	"I feel like it's the collaborative piece that makes us, helps us frame it correctly, but also generate really collaborative solutions we can't do on our own." (WiL1) "And again, working with colleagues from different disciplines it helped me to reflect on my understanding, and learn from them actually, yeah" (ICR2) "so, it gave me a chance to pause and say, OK, what do I want the program to look like" (PH1)	C.1 A learning impetus and purpose C.2 Some members had different expectations of the group C.3 There is learning through collaboration with the group C.4 CoP members notice they self-reflect and discuss gaps in their professional understandings and experiences.	Things we needed to address collectively; How do I do this? Active not passive; Democratic principles; Integrative not consensus; Open discussion; problem solving; comfortable, Learn from the experience of others; Supports reflecting; New to role; Interest in research with other CoP members; Share ways to do the job better; Lonely/isolated; Desire to work together; Feel unsupported; Discuss inequality; learn to write and publish cases; LTM

		"you always hear of interesting things that people are doing in other programs, but you don't…there's no formal way that people are talking holding that conversation" (CR1)		

Table 6 provides the interview identifiers for each interview participant and each CoP.

Table 6: Interview Identifiers

Group Name	Interview Participant Identifiers
Interdisciplinary Case Research Group (ICR)	ICR1; ICR2; ICR3
Program Head Group (PH)	PH1; PH2; PH3
Women in Leadership Group (WiL)	WiL1; WiL2; WiL3

The thematic analysis completed in phases 1 through 5, formed the basis of the following discussion. This thematic analysis summarised in Table 5 is presented and discussed by theme and sub-theme.

4.3 Theme A: This Space is Freeing

Individuals shared a range of perspectives that reflected a sense of freedom associated with participation in their CoP. In the following quote ICR2 described the CoP as a free place and s/he associated the free setting with hearing and thinking about multiple points of view. There was freedom over the speed and pace of their thinking within the group. In addition, ICR2 also referred to thinking as an evolving experience.

"You're in a free setting you're hearing different opinions and you're allowing your thinking to evolve at the pace that is comfortable to you" (ICR2)

Freedom was also associated with the opportunity to openly share a range of thoughts, impressions and practices inside the group. Reflecting on the Program Head CoP, PH1 said:

> *"I think people felt free to share what was going on for them which was good and to get what they needed out of it, so it was a little bit of a safe space"* (PH1)

PH1 perceived that others could *"get what they needed out of it"*. This suggested the perception that individuals were looking for different things from the CoP. Furthermore, feeling free to share *"what is going on for them"* suggested there was a degree of candidness within the CoP about individual needs, practices and contributions. This may be associated with being able to engage in deeper, more considered dialogue related to the program head role and faculty responsibilities. There was also the opportunity to get reassurance from the experience of others. PH1 said:

> *"In the discussion of how we can support a colleague, I thought that was really useful to think, well where is everybody else with that?"* (PH1)

Related to this freedom and openness, some interview participants also shared that in their CoP they were also able to 'not know'. For example, interview participants talked about being able to ask questions of others, seek feedback, not have the answers and to feel removed from the pressure of others' expectations. PH1 described this not knowing as:

> *"more therapeutic, of hey this is really hard this week what are your suggestions so it's a multitude of different ways of communicating and I think there's it's a nice space for that."* (PH1)

This statement also suggested that through a "multitude of different ways of communicating" PH1 was able to relay 'in the moment' aspects of her/his knowledge and practice with others and openly 'not know'. Within the CoPs interview participants referred to communication patterns that evolved and included reflective and participatory qualities such as empathic listening and circle sharing. These contributions are an integral foundation to this theme, facilitating the opportunities

inside a CoP to learn together in a broad and inclusive way. These patterns and processes in CoPs are returned to in more detail in Theme C.

4.3.1 There is Autonomy and Choice

Freedom was also associated with autonomy. In the individual interviews CoP members talked about their attendance and participation in a CoP in terms that emphasised their autonomy to make their own decisions and choices. This started with their choice of whether or not they wanted to attend a meeting and their choice about their contributions. For example, the content of what they chose to contribute and the shape of what they shared.

The participants appreciated the flexibility to contribute, think and participate at a speed that was appropriate to the individual. This implies that CoP members were at different stages in their learning and required different time frames to, for example, review their first case, shift their perspective on a program head task, or, affirm another female colleague's contributions in a business meeting.

Another dimension that participants discussed was their experience of freedom and a sense of spaciousness inside the CoP discussions. The interview participants made multiple connections between autonomy and freedom and their experience in their CoP. For example, ICR2 associated her/his experience with the CoP convening outside the traditional hierarchy and structure associated with the University:

> *"There's an old politics and a dynamic that is created by an institution. So, it's not part of the group, so the group created a completely different dynamic from the existing dynamic created by the structure and roles and this stuff"* (ICR2)

The CoP created their own freer structure and space that represented new ways of relating with their colleagues. PH3 associated an experience of *'freeing up'* with the absence of an executive presence in the group:

> *"And so, I feel I see people freeing up a lot more in those because there isn't any sort of executive presence there, there isn't a feeling that you know, if I say the wrong thing there's gonna have implications"* (PH3)

PH3's impressions suggested that when communicating in formal institutional structures there is a constraint or self-edit that occurs out of fear of possible repercussions. This step outside the institutional structure and dynamic into a group of faculty colleagues that would not otherwise get together and is not associated with the formal institutional governance structure, generated opportunities to think and learn that were a shift from regular communication patterns. PH1 expressed the experience as:

> *"But even having room or space to think through okay, yeah that's a different way and if we're not there but what's a different way?"* (PH1)

In this expression, the spaciousness or freedom is associated with taking the opportunity to reflect on different approaches or ways of understanding and practicing a role with others. Freedom was further articulated by the same participant as an opportunity to explore and express fully what perhaps cannot be expressed otherwise. In this particular example, faculty members with program head responsibilities had not previously had an opportunity to connect with each other and to explore the role. PH1 associated this opportunity with the idea of space:

> *"Program head is an incredibly important role and there isn't a lot of space to discuss that, discuss what it entails, what kind of workload is involved in it, what some good practices are, what some traps are."* (PH1)

In other formal meetings, faculty may hesitate or avoid discussing gaps, uncertainties, struggles or difficult issues related to their program head role.

In the Women in Leadership CoP the language associated with freedom tended to coalesce with sharing and mutual support. WiL1 said:

> *"People were just pouring forth…just being very free in that space, I think it felt very safe which is thrilling because it is so free and rare."* (WiL1)

WiL1 identified freedom as a feeling in this CoP that was a response to *"the same-old, same-old you know, glass ceiling, barriers etc..."* Elaborating further WiL1 said:

> *"But also because of our writing in our research we had surfaced this idea that the real issue was more around cultural norms and values and assumptions."* (WiL1)

WiL2 reflected back to when the WiL CoP started and said: *"At the time (inception of the WiL CoP) we felt the University actually hadn't been very friendly or progressive towards us at all."*

Returning to WiL1's comment that the CoP space was *"very safe which is thrilling because it is so free and rare"* – the rarity is an interesting aspect of experience in the WiL CoP. The association of the CoP experience with something rare suggested that the content and form of expression associated with 'pouring forth' ran counter to prevailing norms. Interview participants also noted that learning with others enhanced their capability to think about what they had heard and to evolve this thinking on their own terms. ICR2 said:

"What I like about the format is with the way it was set up is that everyone is equal."

Again, there is evidence that the horizontal structure of CoPs contrasts with a hierarchical structure that appears to be associated with other institutional meetings and groups.

4.3.2 There is Goodwill

A subtheme of *Theme A: This space is freeing* that became apparent is the consideration of goodwill. WIL3 made a connection between freedom, autonomy and choice and also the decision to support the group and bring goodwill. There was some recognition that autonomy and freedom that were characteristics of informal structures within the CoPs could also lead to a weakening of a CoP if participation was not also supported by goodwill and some degree of commitment. WiL3 said:

> *"I'm going to participate to turn this into something of value, or, is it that this should be fun and valuable this should be more valuable, I should see value, and then I'll participate?"* (WiL3)

If faculty have autonomy and choice around their attendance at a CoP meeting, goodwill becomes more significant as the CoP relies on multiple commitments from the group and the goodwill of each member to continuously show up and contribute. This is particularly meaningful in a faculty schedule where there are no shared 'open' times. There are inevitable over-lapping commitments

and each individual has to make a decision regarding these commitments and priorities regularly.

ICR1 and ICR2 discussed goodwill in terms of sharing experience and expertise with other group members. ICR1 said:

> *"But for me the group has been more… so maybe as a more experienced case writer it's been more about trying to give feedback to others."* (ICR1)

For these CoP members, goodwill was associated with sharing expertise to support other group members with the writing and publication of their cases. In this example, choice, goodwill and freedom were all linked together in ICR1's decision to attend, participate, and be a learning partner in case research – being willing to give more than s/he receives.

In summary, Wenger (2000) suggested that communities of practice do not align with how organisations function because they are a self-governing, horizontal community groups where participation is voluntary. In this study the freedom and autonomy in these CoPs with voluntary participation created the conditions for members to share a range of opinions and experiences with one another in a specific interest area situated inside experience and practice. The CoP members were autonomous and free in terms of their choice to attend and in terms of their contributions within the group process. Interview participants talked about the value of goodwill to a CoP.

4.4 Theme B: This is a supportive community

There were several over-lapping dimensions reflected in Theme B: This is a supportive community. There was a general agreement indicated in interviews that most of the time the three CoPs provided emotionally safe and supportive spaces where strong bonds and collegiality with others developed over time. Emotional safety was frequently shared as a significant aspect of experience in the CoP. However, there were two incidents where emotional safety was not met, and these incidents are explored in 4.4.1.

4.4.1 There are Supportive Relationships and Strong Bonds

The theme supportive community was tightly bound with the sub-theme: there are supportive relationships and strong bonds. This sub-theme was particularly evident in the WiL CoP.

The interviews indicated that CoP members appreciated their CoP as an emotionally safe space where feelings, thoughts and impressions could be shared in a range of ways. Relating her experience in the WiL CoP, WiL3 described the CoP as a *"self-help support group – of benefit to those who show up and talk."* For example, *love, talk, care, warm, hug* and *cry* were words spoken by WiL1, WiL2 and WiL3 when referring to words and expressions of experience that were shared in the group. There was a consistent agreement that the women in leadership was an inherently emotional topic that women in the group experienced and shared together. For example, WiL2 said that the focus for the CoP included women's inequality and the *"emotional impact"* of what this means throughout a career. WiL3 spoke about the group as loving: *"it is really sort of supportive and loving and open and warm, that's very warm."*

WiL1 shared that the CoP was interactive and friendly, and she associated decision making with these qualities.

"Yep, even a little more free and comfortable and friends, like, yeah, which is good. Social and I think out of some of those interactions came decisions."

As noted in Theme A, the WiL CoP appreciated the opportunity for freedom to not self-edit or hold back. The CoP offered a secure environment where the members could 'be themselves', including being expressive. The WiL CoP participants each discussed care as an aspect of feminine leadership and this led to open discussions about self and outward appearances in professional life. WiL1 articulated this focus on self and group emotional health as follows:

> *"Let's stop watering down our issues and because of our nature which is to be so inclusive and integrative we end up kind of shooting ourselves in the feet and it becomes about everyone instead of being about actual gender and women's issues" (*WiL1)

In this quote WiL1 suggested that the CoP offered an opportunity for women to centre themselves in the discussion – it was about the CoP members' experiences first.

There were two separate incidents that presented exceptions to this general sense of emotional safety and comfort. In each of two CoPs there was one example of a situation where emotional safety was not met. One situation reflected uncertainty about both the purpose of a CoP and a perceived level of disregard expressed in a group meeting, for example WiL2 said: *"I'm not being…it's not respected…but it's that my perspective is not landing at all."* The second situation reflected one CoP participant's experience with a new member bringing an unsupportive approach to the group discussion. ICR2 said: *"…there is a risk always having people who bring their professional culture to the team. They may sometimes go out of the collegial boundary. That happened once."* In this case the CoP participant's colleague brought a level of criticality that did not align with the CoP's collaborative and supportive practices. The participant experienced this approach and behaviour as inappropriate to the supportive and participatory norms that s/he had come to expect.

4.4.2 Sharing with Others

The research participants spoke about a range of activities that related to openly sharing with others in their CoP. Some CoP members who identified as bringing more expertise to the group related sharing with others as giving their feedback to other members. ICR1 said:

> *"But for me the group has been more… so maybe as a more experienced case writer it's been more about trying to give feedback to others"* (ICR1)

In addition to reporting sharing as giving feedback ICR1 also identified sharing with learning about how others think about and use cases in different disciplines.

> *"To me, the piece that's most interesting about that – the sharing… what are the ways that people are teaching or thinking about teaching within their programs. Different."* (ICR1)

When ICR2 talked about sharing s/he also made a connection between sharing and the individual development of ideas and mental frameworks:

"…we share ideas, everyone will develop his own framework, in a different direction" (ICR2)

Some CoP members spoke about sharing in more relational terms than giving and receiving feedback. For example, ICR3 spoke about a desire to give more to the CoP. Sharing and giving was a foundational reason and intrinsic motivation for participation. ICR3 said:

"I want to give gifts to this I mean that's how I get my sense of purpose and feeling good is by giving to this thing not what can I just, what's the least I have to give but what's the most I can give." (ICR3)

Sharing was also expressed in terms of sharing an experience or bond that was deeply connected to the purpose or interest area of the group. In both the PH and WiL CoP, some individuals talked about sharing as a bond that was germane to the program head role or to the experience of female leadership in an academic setting. The purpose of these two CoPs held particular meaning for each member's professional practice, and therefore sharing as a bond reflected the range of practices and experiences this CoP could recognise and articulate together. In the PH and WiL CoPs the reason for convening was centred around a role (program head) or a pattern of experience (women in leadership). With the ICR CoP, the case research and writing formed around a research interest that represented a narrower focus, that did not connect as noticeably with institutional structure, culture or values. However, it should be noted that ICR2 had chosen to participate in the case research group and not the program head group because s/he preferred to connect with others around a research interest, and not an interest that was also integrated into what s/he termed as structural issues. ICR2 talked about:

"It (the program head group) seems to be aligned with university rules and regulations. It does not try to tackle a specific structural problem in the university, it's more about, not like the program issues, it's more about faculty growth and development." (ICR2)

The significance of this perspective articulated by ICR2 is that it indicated that in the interdisciplinary case research group, the strong bonds and shared interests were associated with supporting one another to be a published case researcher and

writer. In the PH and the WiL CoPs, the bonds extended to a shared professional experience that connected to roles in the university, including program head (PH CoP) and leadership and gender in society (WiL CoP). PH and WiL experiences included the aspiration for institutional and societal change or shift. For example, considering the PH CoP, PH2 said:

> *"One of the things we talked about was kind of coming up with a role profile task description. Sort of yeah, how the profile is lived so to speak within the specific school or every program culture, and then definitely differences in the three faculties and I saw a lot of value in that."* (PH2)

The exploration of the program role through sharing practices and ideas presented as a primary motivation shared in interviews with individuals from the PH CoP. PH3 said:

> *"I find it quite interesting, that's probably the main thing is just it's just hearing that different perspective of what's appropriate for the role."* (PH3)

PH3 noted that sharing and listening to other program heads was valuable as it offered opportunities to reconsider the tasks and responsibilities associated with the role, and in particular, the prioritisation of these tasks. There was a sense of empowerment, and an interest in working together to do something tangible to support each other as program heads in ways that current processes may not allow. PH2 shared a more cautious perspective on what was possible and said:

> *"So, in many ways the actual ability to influence, to create, or sustain a program is somewhat limited by a lot of administrative processes that you don't really have the freedom of deciding."* (PH2)

This suggested that there are opportunities through sharing to improve practice and also that there are structural limitations. Improvements in a role can be achieved informally through practice change. However, there are some aspects of the role that are restricted or shaped by institutional policies, assumptions and practices that a program head may not be able to change. The participants in the PH CoP could work to improve their role within the current institutional structures.

In summary, *Theme B: This is a supportive community* reflected a pattern of experience in the interview data that indicated that the CoP members bonded and

connected with one another through sharing in an emotionally safe space. Sharing with others was described as giving feedback, sharing expertise, and learning with others to explore different perspectives and understandings. Through sharing, individual CoP members noted that they felt more empowered and less alone. Sharing was also described as a deep connection with others characterised in different ways including care, warmth, openness and love. For many of the CoP members in this study, the emotional self was present in each person's description of their learning experience. The data suggests that for most CoP members, learning in the groups included affective, embodied learning (Merriam, Caffarella and Baurmgartner, 2007). In this supportive space, CoP members could share more aspects of themselves and their identities.

4.5 Theme C: This is a faculty learning space

In each CoP the individual participants referred to a catalyst that created the interest and support to meet. There was also a learning purpose and participants characterised learning as an individual and social experience. Further exploration of the content of the experiences in the faculty learning space are explored in the following sub-themes.

4.5.1 A Learning Impetus and Purpose

In the WiL CoP, the participants reflected on the group coming together to meet a need within the women faculty group. One aspect of this articulation of identifying a need is the spontaneity of the decision. A need was recognised, and a gathering was quickly organised. This social response to engage with others in a social learning group reflected a genuine aspiration to learn together and make sense of this need. WiL1 reflected:

> *"So, it really naturally formed as a community of practice centering around this domain you know of leadership and the idea that we want to inform our practice and do things differently within our organisation which is very real and applied."* (WiL1)

Within this broad domain, the WiL CoP members consistently noted the need to share and explore with one another the challenges that women were confronting. Through sharing their histories and experiences with others and asking each other

questions the CoP was described as an opportunity to explore a range of experiences with others. Learning was related to appreciating and understanding the authentic experiences that other women were willing to share. WiL3 described her experience:

> *"for the most part I think from what I can recollect just a very supportive, safe comfortable environment to talk freely about what was going on and a willingness to do so, an actual let's go for it here"* (WiL3)

Participants referred to a lack of support for women scholars and leaders in the institution and society at large, and the experience of being talked over or dismissed. WiL2 described this experience as:

> *"…that experience of feeling silenced at times or overlooked. So that was the beginning of the discussion and how we could you know, again, what strategies we could use to support each other when we saw that kind of behaviour"* (WiL2)

In a discussion on the negotiation of meaning in communities of practice, Wenger (1998) defined meaning as an ongoing process of exploring how we experience meaning through practice. For example, in the WiL group, the group members identified that the University norms in many formal meetings sometimes impeded the contributions of women around the table. The individual experiences women were having had more meaning when they were expressed and shared with other women in the group. The process of sharing, listening, relating and reinterpreting created something new – a new or deeper understanding. This is an example of the process that Wenger refers to as 'negotiation of meaning' in communities of practice (2008).

A learning related impetus was also present in the program head and interdisciplinary case research groups. For the program head CoP, the impetus was also linked to a need that surfaced and was recognized by many. PH2 said:

> *"When the call or the invite came up for the program head, I think it's something that I at least had asked for or in different conversations with others we had always agreed that that would be a good thing to do. Just because*

there are a lot a challenges that we all share and a lot of things that are also unique." (PH2)

On reflecting on the purpose of the program head group, PH1, PH2 and PH3 each shared a similar general purpose that was described as the opportunity to talk about their experiences of practice at the program head level with other program heads who shared similar roles. The learning was embedded in examining the role and related practices together. PH3 said:

"So, I think probably the main reason for it was that there wasn't really another forum at the University to discuss specifically program head issues with other program heads." (PH3)

PH2 talked about seeking out learning with others:

"Learning from others both good and bad sort of what works for others could that work for me too?" (PH2)

The focus on trying to understand and make sense of their respective program head practice with each other was a significant part of the learning partnership that this CoP developed. As with the WiL CoP, the participants talked about negotiating meaning as it related to the practice of being a program head. PH1 associated the learning purpose of the CoP with defining the program head role, and practice related improvements and talked about this:

"And a lot of discussion was hey what is the role and it was it was very definitional what is within scope and what is without…how can we find a way to do the job better." (PH1)

In the interdisciplinary case research CoP, the impetus for those members who joined at the outset of the CoP was an interdisciplinary case research methods workshop that was hosted at the University. There was a spark generated by the workshop that also connected to the interdisciplinary conversations in the workshop and the anticipation of interdisciplinary case research collaborations. ICR1 who was part of the core group that initiated the ICR group talked about this impetus in these terms:

"So, it was that introduction of getting people familiar with kind of the formal structure and world subculture really that exists out there, at least around

business cases and case studies. So, I think that's kind of one intent. Can we formalize and publish in a way, more of what people may be using. Then the other piece of this really relates across different disciplines or for us across different schools." (ICR1)

In this quote, ICR1 referred to the CoP learning about case research methodology, generating knowledge with others, disseminating this knowledge; and, exploring different interdisciplinary approaches to cases.

To summarise, the interview participants talked about their CoPs starting because of a particular impetus. This impetus resonated with a number of faculty members creating an initial recognition of a reason or purpose to meet.

4.5.2 Some Members had a Different Expectation of the Group

In the WiL CoP the interview participants expressed different opinions regarding some aspects of the purpose and focus of the CoP overall. This is significant because through understanding the purpose and interest area of a CoP, a CoP member can decide what the group offers and why participation may be worthwhile (Wenger, 1998). The interview participants in the WiL CoP described a purpose that was broader than the other CoPs in this study. Beyond their faculty position, the WiL CoP members did not share a specific role or research goal. Rather, they shared a wide range of experiences as women faculty members holding a range of formal or informal leadership roles and responsibilities. Perhaps associated with this broad interest area that situated individual experiences in this CoP, the common thread of experience in the CoP was reciprocal and warm support. In the interviews, WiL1 referred to the group as a community of practice, and WiL3 was unsure and WiL2 noted that she believed the CoP was a support group and not a community of practice. WiL2 said:

"Some of the things I noticed was that the membership changed. And it changed from people who were really wanting to do something different to people who were more, who need the support group and so it was a support group and it wasn't really a community of practice." (WiL2)

The shifting membership in the CoPs is explored further in Part 2. As noted in the previous sub-theme, in the interviews the WiL CoP members referred to a lack of

support for women scholars and leaders in the institution and society at large, societal inequities and the experience of being talked over or dismissed in meetings. In response to these experiences, the WiL CoP came together and provided mutual support inside an informal group. WiL3 reflected:

> *"…so in some ways it began more as a support group then potentially a community of practice… you know really it was more about feeling overwhelmed and not perhaps not supported in a way that worked for us… and I'm using that term and it could be a community of practice because you know I'm not sure I'm not sure."* (WiL3)

The word 'support' is shared frequently by participants from the WiL CoP, particularly in relation to emotional, caring support that the participants noted that they did not have elsewhere and that they noticed characterised the interactions within the CoP.

Related to a support focus, WiL3 noted that she was feeling lonely and that she recognised this loneliness in other women in the group. WiL3 said:

> *"…the very first meeting I realised how and I'm gonna use the word lonely…how lonely many of the other women across the institution were."* (WiL3)

In the WiL CoP, discussion was facilitated through a round table format that offered each CoP member the opportunity to share her experience with others. With one exception, participants described as a pattern of support and this was present across the data set in all interviews in this study. Interview participants talked about the gatherings as loosely structured and recognized as opportunities to be in community together. As noted in the previous quote, WiL3 was not sure if the WIL group was a community of practice and said:

> *"I think it was more of a support community with the potential for practice"* (WiL3)

WiL2 held a similar view and also noted that another characteristic was a level of criticality and frustration that she noticed in the group. WiL2 suggested that the group did not move into problem solving and practice as much as she had expected. WiL2 said:

"So I think that kind of meaning making is really what I was looking for and maybe I was maybe it was unreasonable to think I was going to get it in a community of practice that seemed to be more about people's experience and fighting that experience, or fighting for equity and equality" (WiL2)

This statement suggested that WiL2 sought a different learning orientation to the support focus and believed that the CoP's potential had not yet been realised. WiL2 sought to be situated more in a problem solving and practice related learning process, with a focus on recommendations that fed back to the University and said:

"So and I think that would have made it a powerful group to say yeah we're the women in leadership community practice we've been discussing these things, and here are our recommendations for meetings or you know when you're looking at hiring people for positions you know those sorts of things. That would have been powerful, but it never got there" (WiL2)

In the PH CoP PH2 expressed a similar interest in building stronger connections between the learning in the group and possible institutional change. PH2 suggested the PH CoP could feedback to the faculty union and said:

"There is an element where the community can come together and channel some of the conversations and being able to put forward maybe even proposals or ideas that can support the Union." (PH2)

This desire to feed into more formal structures is discussed in further detail in Part 2 and *Theme A: Group process was variable and changeable.* ICR1 talked about a gap s/he perceived within the ICR CoP that related to focus and expectations. ICR1 had the impression that not everyone in the CoP brought the same focus to publishing as s/he expected. ICR1 said:

"Not that many people are really trying to publish a case…it's not necessarily driven in terms of both you bringing something and you offering other people something." (ICR1)

ICR1 associated the round table reviews that were a part of the ICR group process *"you bringing something and you offering other people something"* as an indication of a CoP member's commitment to publishing. For ICR1, membership in

the CoP was tied closely to a CoP member's ability and commitment to the round table review process.

This sub-theme indicated that CoP members each brought a wide range of expectations to the informal CoPs. Some expectations aligned with a more inclusive and open approach to membership and some, as explained by ICR1 in the quote above, aligned with an expectation regarding a certain level of expertise and participation. Some CoP members sought support, community and connection. Others wanted to see the CoP as a conduit to formal institutional change.

4.5.3 There is Learning through Collaboration in the Group

Interview participants from across the different CoPs identified a range of activities and practices related to social learning with one another in their CoP. The character of collaboration fell into three categories. The first was advancing something collectively as a full CoP; the second, was working with one or two others in a sub-group; and the third, was related to CoP collaborations that supported the individual to learn. All these forms of collaborative practice and learning threaded back to CoP membership in some way.

For the WiL CoP, collaboration was described to rest consistently around the decision the CoP made to support each other with some tangible practices in formal meetings in different University committees. This was an example of learning connecting to the new practice of 'amplifying' other women's contributions in meetings. This was a rallying focus for all WiL CoP members. WiL3 said:

> *"…initially it really was about coming together to support each other and potentially figure out how we might amplify each other's voices in meetings"* (WiL3)

PH1 talked about practice-based learning primarily localised to the CoP:

> *"…it's just really useful to have my group of people where you can ask questions. How do you do this and what's coming up for you? And I learned so much from other people about how they manage their programs"* (PH1)

The reference to *"my group of people"* indicated that PH1 identified with other program heads in this CoP and that the CoP could explore practice related questions with one another.

WiL1 was also motivated to collaborate to explore different models of leadership:

> *"Across all the research I was doing I was seeing the same pattern same themes emerging. Which had more to do with this idea of how do we function more collaboratively and inclusively…it just became this like realization that there are so many opportunities to be differently in our organizations and shape a different path*." (WiL1)

WiL1 is motivated to learn through collaboration with others and is purposeful about this. WiL1 noted that there were a range of collaborations in progress before the CoP gathered, and these collaborations continued:

> *"All these women were just naturally collaborating on a number of subjects…so it all started to converge and bubble up."* (WiL1)

WiL3 was unsure how the CoP's work was connecting or integrating into practice, while she assumed it was, she said there had not been a recent opportunity to reflect and share activities and practices. WiL3 referred to all the actions and practices of individuals in the CoP as the CoP's constellations. There was the impression that the CoP was inspiring change and action, yet the constellations had not reconnected with one another for some time. WiL3 mused:

> *"There's a group coming together that has some kind of, you know it's connected... I was inspired to focus a little bit more, that's all those intangible things kind of constellations if you like."* (WiL3)

There is a recognition in these words that the CoP is perceived to facilitate connections and further collaborations either by bringing people together inside or connecting CoP members to other possibilities outside the CoP. The constellation or web metaphor generates a fuller appreciation of the learning systems that small informal CoPs can energize.

The research participants in the Program Head CoP identified a range of collaborations with one another that connected with practices associated with program head work. PH3 talked about:

"So, I mean, yes, I mean I see that as one of the main things you know sharing practice and I think that's pretty much what my contributions have been." (PH3)

Some specific examples included reviewing decisions with others, formal and informal practices and other related issues. Here practices are associated with knowledge and practice:

"One of the things I found most valuable is just hearing really simple things about what's your communication like with students, or, how do you handle grade appeals or what's your school policy on plagiarism…just sharing stories, it's useful for me because you hear about different ways of approaching something." (PH1)

In this statement PH1's individual practice and the practice of others is the source of knowledge, the two together are the catalyst for a shift to something else, a new way of knowing and practicing her/his work. Wenger (2009) stated that our practice related knowledge generation involves "a discipline of inquiry that takes practice as the place of knowledge and the person as the vehicle for knowledgeability" (p.3). What I infer from this statement is that Wenger suggested that an analysis of practice or knowing in practice in whatever form that may take: critique, reflection, adjustment, shift and renewal – can be enough. Knowledge can be documented, or not; it does not have to be accounted for outside of the person or people who produced it. The data suggested that this is a point of tension. PH1 noted that when the CoP started to focus on documenting the work there was a shift in the CoP:

"I think there was a move to really want to focus more do something specific and tangible and some of the energy actually left when we started to have more tangible outputs. Which is interesting right that's yeah, everybody's like okay this is great we want to discuss things but now let's do something and then, then people start to disappear." (PH1)

PH1 also shared some reasons for this perception, and noted that the CoP energy was around solidarity, appreciating others for their empathy and support and *"I just need to meet someone to listen to me"*. The paradox in this situation is that

the tangible output was the development of a document that would capture the full expression of the program head role. Despite the potential value of this document *"to express what the work was, … what was feasible and what wasn't"* it was *"another thing added to the workload"* (PH1). This statement suggested that time pressures and workload contributed to this participants' perception of what s/he could commit to support in tangible terms. The documenting and related work necessary was perceived as an add-on and also a pressure. To support social learning in a collaborative space a discussion on the interpretation of knowledge as practice within the CoP may be necessary. PH2 also noted *"so I think that's where it comes back to … how the community of practice self-defines".* I return to this point and the concept of 'knowledgeability' in Chapter 5.

In the interviews, different CoP members discussed collaborations in terms related to writing and publishing cases, teaching with cases and learning the case research and writing method. There was also an appreciation for interdisciplinary perspectives. Two CoP members who had more experience with case research connected collaboration closely with the specific output of case writing and publishing. When ICR2 talked about writing and publishing cases s/he separated learning from the work of producing/writing cases:

> *"Later on, I was more interested in finding colleagues to produce rather than to learn because we already spent some time learning different techniques. I was more interested in finding colleagues I could work with and also share my work with and get some feedback in a collegial way."* (ICR2)

ICR2 separated the learning related to case research methodology provided in two case research workshops with the ongoing activities s/he associated with the ICR CoP meetings. The ICR CoP meetings were associated with receiving peer feedback, which is perceived as complementary to the goal to produce and publish cases.

Bray, Lee, Smith and Yorks (2000) in their work on collaborative inquiry described the developing processes associated with collaboration as a circling and meandering dynamic. Different CoP members described these participatory processes in their CoPs in terms of circling and gathering. The CoP members

referred to the social relationships *as "circle together" "coming together", "round table review"* and *"showing up and talking"*. Further identifying the collaborative processes in each CoP, there was evidence that each CoP had developed different processes and patterns to create collaborative spaces.

This sub-theme was a significant aspect of the broader *Theme C: This is a faculty learning space.* Learning through different forms of collaboration supported individual, small group and full CoP learning inside and outside the CoP meetings. Some CoP members connected collaboration in a CoP with curiosity and interest in the practices and approaches of colleagues in other disciplines or schools. In interviews CoP members also talked about learning through collaboration as a way to extend and develop practice and develop new projects. The CoP members associated collaboration in CoP meetings with the support of different internal facilitation approaches.

4.5.4 CoP Members Notice They Self-Reflect in the CoPs

There were specific instances in the interviews when CoP members remarked on, and, discussed the self-reflection they noticed while they were participating in the CoP.

ICR3 described the content of a self-reflection in an interdisciplinary CoP:

> *"And when I'm in a room with other people who are working from other disciplines, especially on that shared case I could see that we really need the communication perspective."* (ICR3)

PH2 associated the activity of self-reflection with hearing the ideas of other CoP members:

> *"…hearing how others are handling sort of the workload or yeah how they integrate it into their daily work life was quite useful. Including like, oh look this might be something that could work for me as well as that this might be definitely something I wouldn't do. So yeah in that sense again getting ideas and being able to reflect on my own as well."* (PH2)

PH1 talked about a self-reflection and shared that it included reflecting on the role of program head and her/his choices with respect to her/his authority within the role.

"So, some space for self-reflection of what space do I have control, and which don't." (PH1)

PH3 also noted that the CoPs promoted different ways of thinking about the program head role. For example, PH3 said:

"…it does certainly provide more kind of opportunities to you know inform what you are thinking." (PH3)

In these descriptions of self-reflection there were connections made between reflection and practice, and specifically the decisions and scope of responsibilities associated with the program head work. In interviews with program head CoP members, there was evidence that collaboration with others leads to social support, discourse, critique and exploration that fostered reflectiveness.

In the interviews with WiL CoP members self-reflection was shared through the language of support, coming together and listening to one another. As noted, the CoP members in the study referred to the CoP as a *"community of support"* and a *"community of interest".* The focus on sharing and listening to the experiences of others and giving and receiving support was in the forefront of members' description of their experiences in the WiL CoP. It was a place to make sense of experience though discussion with others.

In their work on adult education and reflective practice, Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) noted that reflective practice is supported by slowing down, considering multiple perspectives, and maintaining an open approach, so that new perspectives and understandings can develop. Furthermore, reflection leads to the development of insights and shifts in practice. The interview data indicated that CoP members self-reflected in their CoPs, frequently noting the workload and constant pressures on their time and attention. The opportunity to reflect was created by the space the informal CoPs provided where it was possible to pause, consider, and express ideas, questions, and experiences. This shaped a form of learning that enabled CoP members to reflect on their disciplinary lens' and/or their professional assumptions, experiences and actions. The data indicated that the CoP members reflected on their professional practice including, for example, their own understandings and practices in the interest and practice area the CoP served.

In summary, for *Theme C: This is a Faculty Learning Space*, there is evidence that the CoP members associated the CoPs with an opportunity to advance their learning in an area of interest that had particular meaning for them. Learning was associated with an impetus - subject matter that was sufficiently pertinent and practice-based that it contributed to holding the CoP together. Not all interviewees had the same expectations of the CoP, and some CoP members sought a more practice and problem-solving orientation. Learning was also affective and had mutual support qualities. The CoPs were collaborative, and learned together by discussing problems, practices, experiences and understandings with one another. Interview participants noted that they had the opportunity to self-reflect when in CoPs with other faculty members.

4.6 Summary

Part 1 describes and discusses three main themes identified within the interview data set. My analysis indicated that when faculty members attended a faculty CoP, they were looking for an opportunity to bring an authentic, autonomous self to converse and learn with a CoP of faculty peers. Learning related to individual expression and commitment through, for example, contributing to the CoP's organisation, attending meetings, self-reflection, and a willingness to share things such as impressions, experiences and needs (Bray et al., 2000, Wenger, 2009). The CoP members appreciated and recognised their groups as a place where they could contribute freely and openly. The data suggested that the CoPs offered faculty a space (time, opportunity, connection) to self-reflect and expand their understanding of self and also practice. Interview participants from the PH CoP sought ways to work with others to understand the content of their role, and to explore different approaches to understanding that role in practice. The WiL CoP supported each other on an emotional level through empathy, warmth and careful, deliberate listening. Both the PH and WiL CoPs also wanted to create change. The intersection between the informality of the CoPs and a change mandate was unclear. This aspect of faculty members' description of their experience is explored further in the next chapter. The interviews with ICR CoP members suggested they wanted to support each other to publish cases. Despite these differences in purpose and character, in

all the CoPs there was an articulated interest in learning and sharing with others in a collaborative and supportive group.

In 4.7, Part 2, the focus moves to explore research questions 3 and 4. In particular, this part of the study seeks to understand some of the more instrumental elements that the group members associated with how the CoPs functioned, and the impacts, risks and benefits associated with participation.

4.7 Part 2: Focus Group Interviews

In summary, on completion of a systematic thematic analysis across this data set I identified two main themes:

D. Group process was variable and emergent.

E. The groups are informal and fragile.

Table 7 presents an overview of the themes and theme descriptions, examples of data extracts that reflect each theme, the sub-themes and codes. Note that identifiers for the data are provided in Table 8.

Table 7: Themes, Descriptions, Examples, Sub-themes and Codes

Theme	Description	Examples	Sub-themes	Codes
D. Group process was variable and emergent.	The group processes were described as emergent, fluid or organic. Membership shifted from meeting to meeting. A task could be discouraging as it was more work.	"In a way get turned off from it because they say, oh you know, yeah, I haven't done the work and I don't want to show up." FG ICR "Output should be organic – if it is important for me and a solution for me – that is good." FG PH	D1.Membership shifted from meeting to meeting. D2. There are questions and apprehensions regarding informal and formal group attributes and what this means for the CoP.	Membership changes; Not visible; Have not communicated why CoPs are worthwhile; Members feel 'bad' about not completing work related to CoP; Risk in getting turned off from CoP because you have not done the work; Human agency

Theme	Description	Examples	Sub-themes	Codes
E. The groups are informal and fragile.	Participants described the groups as informal with different approaches to group leadership and maintenance. The maintenance and continuity of the group was a concern. Different barriers to continuity were identified.	"But I do believe it's seen as peripheral, and I would not have been involved had I not already got continuing status" FG ICR "In my view, what will drive success is that that I found my tribe and there is a community here" FG WiL "It was so organic, it was like we're just coming together and we're gonna talk if there had been more, maybe structure it might not have been easy." FG WiL	E.1 Leadership and maintenance models are varied and can rely on one person. E.2 There are different opinions about group maintenance and support. E3 The CoP offers something different to faculty	Risk the CoP work 'does not count'; Benefits developing researchers; Offers support; Addresses a need; Have real conversations; Helps people who need support; Place to express feelings; Relies on one or two people to convene; Fills a gap for faculty

Table 8: Focus Group Interview Identifiers

Group Name	Focus Group Identifiers
Interdisciplinary Case Research Group (ICR)	ICR FG and numbered to indicate different participants
Program Head Group (PH)	PH FG and numbered to indicate different participants
Women in Leadership Group (WiL)	WiL FG and numbered to indicate different participants

The thematic analysis completed in phases 1 through 5 formed the basis of the following discussion. This analysis is summarised in Table 8 and presented and discussed by theme and sub-theme.

4.8 Theme D: Group Processes were Variable and Emergent

The moderated discussions in the three focus groups, one for each CoP indicated that the group processes in each CoP were both variable and also emergent. In the Interdisciplinary Case Research focus group (ICR FG) the group process was described as a round table case review activity. At each meeting, members were invited to share a case or a teaching note with each other for group feedback. It was agreed that this process was worthwhile. In this excerpt from the ICR FG, the focus group members discussed the round table review. The ICR FG participants wanted to continue using this approach and also offered ways to improve it:

> *"The other thing we could do … just little things like if you don't have a case to review or if you didn't have time, bring a really interesting case that caught your eye so at least you're focusing on a case … you have a case example to talk about."* (ICR FG)

Here we see the ICR FG members expressing a commitment to refine the round table process with each another in an inclusive way. The focus group exchange conveys a willingness to continue to improve the learning opportunities and also provides an illustration of the mutual support the members associated with the group. In the WiL FG the group members also referred to 'workshops' and one FG participant said: *"I mean the workshops this sort of, yeah, seemed to motivate people"* and the other focus group participants nodded in agreement. This suggests that supporting activities such as workshops outside the CoP meetings were also a positive contributor.

In the PH FG the participants described collaborative processes that changed from meeting to meeting and said:

> *"My sense is people felt free to share what was going on for them which was good."* (PH FG1)

"Yeah It was flexible to be able to take in different perspectives. We used some of the liberating structures … to give some space for different voices and different mechanisms which was great for that for building those kinds of relationships." (PH FG2)

The reference to liberating structures referred to micro processes for facilitating dialogue created by Lipmanowicz & McCandless (2014).

The PH FG participants also stated:

"Everyone is trying to create their own or what's best for them, and yeah, generally I think it reaffirmed my… senses that sort of, structure and process not - to me it's a starting point that then allows diversity and different approaches within." (PH FG3)

In this example the PH FG suggested that there was a relationship between internal group process and the opportunity for participants to identify their own needs and also engage with, and appreciate, different perspectives and experiences. The PH FG also discussed democratic principles, sharing, collaborating, trust and active listening. These characteristics can be connected with evolving, group processes and also benefits that CoP members experience. The PH FG said:

"It's almost refreshing to be in a room where it's, hey I'm kind of in a shared space which sort of builds trust and the rules of engagement are around collaboration and democratic principles and, oh, active listening and drawing on the skills that we all teach across the university so I think that's quite nice." (PH FG2)

Barnett's white paper on responsiveness and flexibility in the higher education system in the UK (2014) stated that as institutions move to greater flexibility "maintaining the felt engagement of academics is surely the necessary condition in ensuring the integrity of new arrangements" (Barnett, 2014, p. 51).

One could argue that this is a possible example that illustrates Barnett's (2014) call to find ways to ensure academics maintain "felt engagement" with their institutions and their professional lives.

The focus group members shared different perspectives on the progress of their CoP relative to their perception of the purpose for the CoP and their personal

expectations. While the CoP was primarily described as supportive, it was also a place where there was not always agreement. The WiL FG said:

> *"I would say there's always a need for women to come together yeah whether they like each other or not. Because we also had to discover that we don't all agree with each other and we did take lengthy maybe a year to come up with our language."* (WiL FG)

4.8.1 Membership Shifted from Meeting to Meeting

Several focus group participants talked about the CoP membership changing in different ways from meeting to meeting. This was viewed as both a positive contribution to the group and also a problematic aspect of the group structure.

In the WiL focus group (WiL FG) there was agreement that the CoP functioned for women faculty members. When the membership included women in executive roles the circling and open conversation shifted. This was discussed in the WiL FG and the participants said:

> *"There are a couple of women who came from the executive and they were not as forthcoming. About three or four meetings - that was awkward"* (WiL FG2)
>
> *"Yeah, that's a good idea"* (WiL FG3)
>
> *"I think that what we're doing is a courageous act and if you're a leader it takes real courage to sit and listen even if you are a woman experiencing the same thing. And I remember it felt not nearly as safe when they were there, and I remember even saying something I probably shouldn't have."* (WiL FG2)

In this quote the horizontal norms discussed in Part 1 appear to have been affected by the presence of an executive member. The sense of cutting through hierarchy and everyone feeling equal or on the same level only seems to go so far. The roles and seniority of some staff retained a presence in the group that stifled some of the features that other members valued.

In the program head focus group one of the PH FG participants said:

> *"So, I think the trust part also comes from how well you know the people at the table in relation to then the topic. So, if I don't know them well, I might share less."* (PH FG)

This statement suggested that more consistent membership in a CoP may facilitate the bonding in the group which in turn affects openness and willingness to share with one another. Who is present at a CoP meeting, their role, their history with the group, their expertise and their approach to community engagement - these factors and others, all affect the way the CoP interacts, shares and learns. According to Blackmore (2010), in social learning these aspects are an inevitable characteristic of participation, and in particular the strength of the community.

When the WiL FG discussed group process, it was the talking circle that the group members connected with:

> *"It felt very trusting right off the bat. Maybe (NAME) set the stage for that. It was so organic, it was like we're just coming together and we're gonna talk if there had been more, maybe structure it might not have been easy."* (WiL FG3)
>
> *"So, I think another important that's part of that too was how we came together from so many different units and different levels of leadership. So, the hype, the idea of hierarchy was quickly diluted and quickly sort of ebbed."* (WiL FG2)

The WiL focus group participants agreed that trust, openness and organic process supported the coming together of the CoP because it enabled each person to share openly about their struggles. Open sharing was further supported by the egalitarian, horizontal structure that cut across the hierarchy that was perceived to exist outside of the group. This open sharing created a connection between the women as they recognised aspects of shared experiences.

4.8.2 There are Questions and Apprehensions Regarding Informal and Formal Group Attributes and What this Means for the CoP.

Malcolm, Hodkinson & Colley (2003) proposed that formal and informal dimensions of learning are present in all learning experiences, however small. Most significantly, they argued that this conceptualisation "helps us to step outside the paradigmatic arguments that formal = bad, informal = good or vice versa" (p. 9). Across the CoPs, the focus group members described their faculty CoPs as informal and unrecognised. This was associated with the horizonal, democratic shaping of the

groups, institutional politics, and the limited visibility of the groups within the University community.

The PH FG also talked about the contribution of the informal group to building community and working together to create a faculty forum.

> *"I think the more it comes back to that community idea and the ability to have a forum to meet with colleagues for a particular purpose and at the same time - as a platform for relationship building where there isn't a particular persona in the way of a union meeting or a school meeting others may or may not have that."* (PH FG)

These comments provide further evidence of the breadth of experiences and opinions that the CoP members shared that related broadly to informal and formal group attributes. Starting with informal learning attributes, informality was associated with new kinds of learning, in particular, relational, affective learning. Here is an excerpt from a WiL FG conversation:

> *"In the CoP you are treated with care and I've got your back*." (WiL FG1)
>
> *"Yeah well this is seeing you as a person not a widget not a deliverable."* (WiL FG2)
>
> *"Yeah yeah I'm here for your development yeah no I'm not here to tell you who to be, or what to do."* (WiL FG1)

In this perspective there was a sense that some of the informal attributes of the WiL CoP were also possibilities for a deeper mutual and relational connection. Furthermore, there was a sense of seeking an opportunity for faculty to come together to support one another in areas such as regeneration and reconnection. These are aspects of learning and faculty identity that focus group participants noted to not be typically acknowledged in other institutional processes.

The WiL FG members suggested that the CoP provided an opportunity for members to focus on organisational values and purpose and that this dialogue countered the corporate focus on financials. In the WiL FG there was a discussion about the CoP holding a space that was counter to the enacted culture and closer to the espoused culture expressed in the University's values and purpose. For example:

"So, it's all about bringing it back to the core values which as a community of practice we identified right away was where our biggest points of leverage are in changing equality and inclusiveness in an organization." (WiL FG1)

"It's getting the people to focus on our values our purpose and stop getting interrupted by or distracted by things like money." (Wil FG2)

"Yeah, of course, money is part of it you have to have money, but it shouldn't be your focus which it has become. Which then makes power the focus which then makes power dynamics prevalent." (WiL FG1)

In this focus group discussion, the Wil FG participants associated the focus and learning within the CoP as broadly transformative. There is an interesting connection between a group that is more characteristically informal and the intention to influence the formal by *"getting the people in the organization to focus on our values…".*

There was further discussion in the WiL FG related to linking learning in informal groups with organisational learning. The focus group participants did not see a recognition from the University of a connection between the two.

"I always think about the opportunities that those kinds of things provide in terms of growth and professional development not just for the individuals but for the organisation and the organisation doesn't currently think about those things I don't think." (WiL FG)

Turning to formal attributes that were discussed in the focus groups, there was hesitancy about incorporating formal learning attributes to the CoPs, yet an interest in, or recognition of some of the benefits formal attributes might bring. One hesitancy related to who would be responsible for the additional work associated with more formal approaches to the group. Related to this, there was a perception that new approaches tended to get insufficient support from the University. In the WiL FG there was also a concern that formalising aspects of the group could also lead to quantitative accountability measures.

"But I also worry I'm a little reluctant to ask for that because, I think they'll get it wrong because they're still in that hard-core model and it'll become

something, we then have to be accountable to (laugh) so I don't want that." (WiL FG)

In this quote, the WiL FG participants seems to be concerned about losing the core informal features that the group associates with their CoP. Wanting to protect the informal status of the group there is some resistance to reach out to the institution for support fearing this may lead to a shift to formality that may change or interfere with the group.

The ICR FG had a different impression of formal aspects they might associate with their CoP. The ICR focus group participants discussed establishing the group more visibly in the University and listed a range of ideas. ICR FG talked about difficulties getting support to communicate within the University and said:

> *"Where we have trouble and where this entire university has trouble is with internal communication and with having people who can come and support us with the profiling and the telling of the story, so yeah everybody's always expected to be their own communications person and we just don't have time."* (ICR FG)

The PH FG had a different perspective with the discussion focusing more on minimising formalised or documented output:

> *"Output should be organic and natural solutions we can take into practice- I don't think we have to have a website or a project." (PH FG1)*
>
> *"Yeah, if it is important to me and a solution for me that is good." (PH FG2)*

With respect to a profile for the groups within the University, the focus group members for all three CoPs consistently noted an absence of resources and support. The shift from informal to formal or unrecognised to recognised is described as an uncertain path. Striking a balance between the support and recognition associated with a degree of institutionalised practice for the CoPs is countered by concerns that this may also lead to a loss of independence and freedom.

The main change that some focus group participants sought regarding formalising aspects of the group process was to consider ways to capture the history and output of the groups and to develop a more scheduled approach to meetings. In the WiL FG the participants said:

"That would help us just feel more structured that's all and if we can maybe just get a like an update report out of it every year for ourselves so just, just, I don't want to over institutionalize it. We want to learn from what we're doing and not forget it all." (WiL FG)

In this sub-theme there was a hesitancy to formalise the groups. Hesitancy related to concerns that a formalised approach would change the groups' attributes, and in particular, the deeper mutual and relational connections that some group members associated with the group norms. There was some interest in formal support from the University to communicate the existence of the groups and the contributions the groups have made. Concerns were shared that formal support requirements for the groups would not be resourced, and that this would add extra responsibilities to faculty. There was an interest in capturing in a formal way the learning and history of the groups.

In summary, *Theme D: Group Processes are Varied and Evolving* presented evidence that focus group participants associated their CoP with varied collaborative processes. Collaborative processes were associated with circling, learning, inclusive opportunities to share, active listening and trust. Sub-themes suggested that there is uncertainty and apprehension regarding how the groups should be positioned within the institution. In particular, there was concern that if the groups became more visible and recognised in the University there was an associated risk that power dynamics would take away from the inclusive, relational attributes associated with the groups.

4.9 Theme E: The Groups are Fragile

Focus group participants shared concerns regarding the continuity of the CoP. In the WiL CoP there was uncertainty about the future as the participants noted that the CoP had not met for several months. The fragility is seen in the WiL FG as a risk that might lead to losing an opportunity that is not available otherwise. The WiL FG said:

"There's no other way to really address it. Because those conversations I wouldn't say they've stopped but they kind of stopped. And they've become just disparate and random and ad-hoc instead of it being intentional, focused,

purposeful and connected which is what we were achieving when we would circle together regularly." (WiL FG)

In these words, there is a clear desire to keep the WiL CoP meeting so it can provide an intentional opportunity for women to connect with one another. There is also need expressed in these words for regular meetings, or a routine to the meetings. During the WiL FG, as the focus group participants conversed, there was an interesting moment towards the end of the discussion when the focus group participants declared their desire to see the group reconvene.

"The only thing I would say is even if we weren't thinking about how valuable that community of practice is - to get together a year later and talk about how valuable it was. For me the learning just comes in that was such, and is, such a valuable thing here." (WiL FG)

In the ICR FG there was concern that the group was not large enough to generate enough new cases coming forward:

"It's either the same old cases that people are working … if you had really, had two or three interesting cases every time you know people could get feedback on, I think that really motivates the whole exercise." (ICR FG)

The ICR FG agreed that the size of the group limited the richness of the round table process. There was some discussion regarding how to increase membership and how to build some visibility for the group, particularly in the Faculty of Management as it has a tradition of case-based teaching and learning.

The main impediment and concern expressed in the focus groups regarding the fragility of the group related to uncertainty about each CoP's future. The WiL CoP had not met for over 6 months, the ICR CoP had a stable but small membership and the PH CoP had a changeable membership.

4.9.1 Leadership and Maintenance Models are Varied and can Rely on One Person

In the practice of convening and self-organising the focus groups discussed three different leadership and maintenance models. There appear to be three core threads in focus group participants' descriptions of leadership in their CoP. First, there was a concern that if a CoP relied on one person, then it was vulnerable, and it may not continue. In the ICR FG a participant stated that one of the barriers to a

community of practice was that it *"depends on one person…from what I've seen it's all about one person who is keeping it alive."* " Focus group participants noticed that in WiL and ICR, one person had the responsibility to convene and facilitate the group meetings.

Second, in the WiL and ICR groups, intertwined with a concern for relying exclusively on one person for the continuance of the group, there was an interest in sharing leadership. There was not a consensus on this, some focus group participants appreciated the continuity offered by one person leading and others stated that they would like to see leadership adjust away from being held by one person. Hers is an example from the WiL FG:

> *"I think I would like to be able to see like a quarterly set meeting that doesn't have to be led by one person in holding it's a shared community and we figure it out from a community what we want it to be as opposed to you know, solely on the shoulders of someone leading it."* (WiL FG)

In this statement the WiL focus group participant may be looking for more shared influence in setting the group's focus as well as sharing the tasks associated with leadership. Shared leadership was not sought by everyone. In the ICR FG one participant had concerns about sharing leadership based on her/his past experience and said:

> *"My experience with these things is it doesn't work when you try to share it around you can share tasks but if you're willing to have someone remain as the core person you know."* (ICR FG)

This perspective was further explored in the ICR FG when the group discussed the idea of rotating a group leader:

> *"Until it's (the group) stronger in terms of membership and people coming and maybe more profile then that's my thought like, if we had a rotation, it would be who's now part of the CoP who's leading that and that kind of thing. It would be one more thing - to maybe fragment. How do other people feel about that?"* (ICR FG1)
>
> *"Well we tried to share this is back in the spring, but you have to have people who are really committed to doing it, so you never know right?"* (ICR FG3)

Here the focus group participants articulated their concern that a rotating or shared leadership might lead to fragmentation. The emphasis on *"It would be one more thing – to maybe fragment"* suggested that the CoP needed more continuity. This is discussed in more detail in the next sub-theme *There are different opinions about group maintenance and support.* There was an interest in supporting the group leader and taking on tasks.

Third, in the ICR FG there was some apprehension about the level of competence and readiness to lead. In their discussion the ICR FG talked about a lack of confidence and competency in case research. This was perceived as a barrier to leadership.

> *"I think part of part of the problem, is we don't know how to lead this particular community of practice because we look to (the leader) as the knowledge keeper. Like I don't know anything yet still maybe in a year I might not feel that way but I, you know I would I would be willing to run a meeting I would be willing to lead a review."* (ICR FG)

The reference to the leader as the 'knowledge keeper' suggested that in this informal learning group, the leader was the constant in the group.

From inception, the PH CoP developed a shared leadership model. The constant was the CTET convener (held faculty professional development portfolio). The CTET convener partnered with one or two faculty members for two consecutive meetings (planned the meeting, shared any notes or other artefacts on the Moodle site, debriefed the meeting). This rotation continued for two years. Overall, the PH focus group referred to shared leadership as shared facilitation. The PH focus group did not identify with a group leader in a pattern identified by the ICR and WiL group members. This suggested that shared facilitation developed a different pattern and identification with leadership in the PH CoP. With the exception of the group leader, the focus group participants did not associate themselves with owning a role:

"I don't really see it (role) in any formal way other than you know, participant in sharing at the moment in time…certainly more just a collaborator and learner." (PH FG)

This reflection showed that this focus group participant connected his/her experience in the group with sharing, collaboration and learning – all active verbs that indicated action and engagement. These comments are significant because they reflect the active participation and involvement that was typically a component of the focus group participants' discussion regarding experience in their CoP. While leadership or shared leadership is necessary, the participation of others is also necessary – each sharing a symbiotic relationship.

4.9.2 There are Different Opinions about Group Maintenance and Support

Group maintenance tasks noted by the focus group members included aspects such as: coordinating meetings, communicating with members, sharing resources, maintaining a website, updating a membership list, and collating or summarising the group's learning and other tasks.

Wenger noted that community maintenance can be hidden and "easily undervalued or even totally unrecognized" (1998, p. 75). He further stated, "Even when there is much in common in the respective backgrounds of participants, the specific coordination necessary to do things together requires constant attention" (p. 75). The CoPs all discussed the work of others in keeping the CoPs running suggesting that in these focus groups the participants did recognize the significance of one or two people leading and convening the CoPs.

The convenor/leader for the WiL CoP talked about the pressures she felt regarding group maintenance:

"I'm seen as the convenor – and no-one else has taken it on. Hesitancy about not convening for a while and why." (WiL FG)

Here the WiL convenor expressed reluctance regarding the role of convenor. At the time of this focus group this CoP member had not convened the WiL CoP for over six months and she was trying to identify what was holding her back. As the focus group progressed, she continued to reflect and try to make sense of the barriers to action with the other focus group participants:

> *"We also started to feel the need to capture better what we were doing. And maybe to promote it a little so that we could build support from some circles back to this need, we were feeling. I wouldn't say unsupported, but this need*

for a little more you know, intentional time, intentional support, intentional space. It shouldn't all fall on me. And I started to apply for grants and would get denied. It just seemed like there was no real swell of support from the University for us to continue this good work. No acknowledgement of it, like it's just the same old patterns." (WiL FG)

This reflection suggested there was a transition point for the WiL CoP leader when she decided she wanted to develop *"something a little more structured."* Here the group leader and convenor sought to develop some more formal aspects for the group that included some form of institutional acknowledgement. There was no mention of a path or process towards institutional recognition in the focus group data. WiL mentioned applying for a grant. When this grant was denied, the work of this faculty member was left in a form of limbo, leaving her with the impression that her contributions were not supported outside the group by the University.

The focus group members in WiL, ICR and PH did describe some actions the group could take to generate institutional awareness and acknowledgement. These activities included posting on the University's intranet, presenting on research, presenting at faculty association meetings, presenting in faculty meetings and others. There was a general sense that the University would not seek out and acknowledge or promote the CoPs because they were either 'under the radar' or not sufficiently valued. This may be a significant organisational and cultural issue for the University. With only 72 core faculty members, and many of these individuals current or past members of a faculty group, what the University chooses to say or not say, support or not support, acknowledge or not acknowledge is interpreted in different ways. The groups appear to want to be acknowledged and to some degree, supported. In a conversation about this the ICR focus group participants said:

"I wouldn't say they really value it (the CoP) but they don't not like it either. They don't know about it….so, I think there could be more support for this, and it could be made more formal but first I think we have to figure out how we're going to tell people why this is worthwhile." (ICR FG)

In this quote there was also indication that some participants felt the need to justify their participation in the CoP. This justification was attributed to

demonstrating the value of the CoP in order to get support. Some of the support the focus groups identified as appropriate included promoting the CoPs through University communication channels, assistance with room bookings, and providing a small budget for other associated expenses such as refreshments and annual professional development associated with the group.

There were two different approaches to group maintenance. The first approach was to combine group maintenance (sometimes referred to as convening) with the role of group leader; this approach was taken in the ICR and WiL CoPs. The second approach, taken in the PH CoP, was to separate group maintenance tasks with leadership.

In 2009, in a paper written to report on a social learning and innovation project, Wenger changed his language moving from maintenance to social artistry (p. 10) and noted:

"Among the many factors that account for the success or failure of the process, I have seen again and again that one of the key ingredients is the energy and skills of those who take leadership in making it happen. I call the people who excel at doing this "social artists" (Wenger, 2009, p. 10).

Wenger has commented that leadership of a CoP tends to rely more heavily on one person; it also takes time, skill and mental effort (2009).

As noted in Chapter 2, The University has a Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies (CTET). CTET provides services to the University community to support teaching and learning including the effective integration of educational technologies and oversight for the learning management system. Two of the communities of practice in this study received different kinds of support from CTET. The PH group had the most involvement from CTET. I, and a manager from CTET who had responsibility for faculty professional development started the PH CoP. In the first few meetings the CTET representative was the front person for the group and I acted as a faculty liaison. Between us we modelled a shared leadership approach co-leading the first two meetings. This approach was continued by other faculty members. CTET also supported the PH and ICR group to create a website for the CoP on the learning management system (Moodle).

The focus groups participants had different impressions of CTET's role with the groups. When asked about the role of CTET, the WiL FG said:

> *"It's not a natural fit for me somehow. Just because I don't see them (CTET) as fundamental to the leadership of the university. But maybe, I need to think about that differently. Because I do believe they play a huge communications role in the University and that is central to the cultural shift that's required"* (WiL FG3).
>
> *"They're a little under the radar in that way like I see it, but I don't think anybody else really sees CTET as being that. For a Centre for Teaching and Educational Technology I think that makes obviously it's actually a really good idea. I just don't know if they see themselves that way either."* (WiL FG2)

As noted, the program head CoP was initiated by a faculty member and a representative from CTET with a faculty professional development role. The PH focus group was unsure about the role of CTET and focus group members said:

> *"And at the same time that kind of came with some challenges around so who actually needs this, or you know who schedules the meetings. And with CTET running it at least in the beginning yeah it kind of opened a question around like why her, and is there any meaning or relevance behind it coming from CTET or not? At the same time who else could or should do it."* (PH FG2)

Here the political context of the University and the meaning that focus group participants associated with CTET and CTET's role with faculty and the University, all shaped how the shared leadership was perceived. Taking the perspective of maintaining the group, CTET's involvement is viewed positively.

> *"I love that we do have the support of CTET to help us to keep it on track because I know having (Name) her energy and in the beginning was fabulous because it would probably fall off our plates otherwise. Just having one person to remind us."* (PH FG1)

In the PH FG, the group members spoke positively about CTET's support with maintenance related matters, including setting up the Moodle site. However, as noted, there was some uncertainty about the broader meanings associated with CTET's involvement in the CoP and how this would affect the CoP.

4.10 Summary

Leadership and maintenance in learning groups required an individual or shared commitment that group members recognised and appreciated. Wenger (2009) referred to these skills collectively as an art form, a social artistry (Wenger, 2009, p.10). I will return to this concept of social artistry in Chapter 6. I end this sub-theme with the questions raised in the WiL FG. This question represents some of the uncertainty that was present in the data regarding how to lead informal learning groups:

> *"I always think about well what does it take to be to hold a sustainable community of practice and does it need leadership? Does it need shared leadership?"* (WiL FG)

There was uncertainty expressed in all the groups regarding 'how to do this' well. In addition to some uncertainty regarding appropriate approaches to leadership and group maintenance, the group's pathway forward in terms of institutional recognition and support was unclear and a potential role of CTET was also uncertain. There were some questions about the consistency of group members from meeting to meeting and a related issue of sustaining a large enough number of group members who regularly attended meetings.

In the next chapter I synthesise this thematic analysis into a developed discussion of the findings. This discussion also includes a consideration of the literature introduced in Chapter 2, and the incorporation of further explanation and description.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe and explore, with a sample of faculty CoP members, their experiences in faculty communities of practice in their University. The case study inquiry was based on the following four research questions:

1. What are faculty members looking for from a community of practice?
2. How do faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice?
3. How do faculty members perceive the related impacts, and potential risks and benefits of participating in these informal learning groups?
4. What are the common aspects that enable or impede the groups to continue to function as a community of practice?

5.2 Discussion

This discussion incorporates the thematic data analysis and description developed in Chapter 4 with a consideration of the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and the incorporation of other pertinent literature. The review of literature in Chapter 2 included: a) the changing nature of faculty work; b) the practice of faculty professional development in HE and the University; c) communities of practice theory and application in HE; and d) organisational learning in universities. This chapter further integrates an analysis and synthesis of the findings organised around five sub-sections that are aligned with the research questions and the thematic analysis. There are inter-relationships between the sub-sections, and these are noted in the discussion. The sub-sections are as follows:

1. The CoP was perceived as an informal, self-directed and community form of faculty development (research question 1).
2. Learning in a CoP had five common characteristics: personal choice, engaging purpose, mutual support, collaboration and reflection (research question 2).
3. Informal faculty CoPs facilitated relationship building for faculty across disciplines and schools (research question 3).

4. CoPs were perceived as informal faculty learning spaces - there were different perceptions about incorporating more formal support from the University (research questions 3 and 4).
5. There were common aspects to group functioning, however each CoP negotiated the organisational, social and political context differently (research question 4).

From a study of three different CoPs in one university it would be misplaced to make too many generalisations. However, the descriptions and explorations of experiences in CoPs shared by the faculty participants offer some insight into different aspects of CoPs in corporate HE settings.

5.2.1 The CoP was Perceived as an Informal, Self-directed and Community Form of Faculty Development (Research Question 1)

The first research question sought to understand what faculty members were looking for when they chose to join a CoP. In the interviews the faculty described three particular aspects that related to their choice to participate in a CoP in the University. First, there was a defining impetus to join the CoP that was articulated in multiple ways; for example, a workshop (ICR CoP) incident (WiL CoP) or a role (PH CoP). The CoPs formed when someone proposed an opportunity to other colleagues that centred around a particular interest area that resonated with others. Essentially, the research participants could locate themselves in the interest area or valued practice, and they were intrigued by the possibility of developing their knowledge and situated practice with other colleagues. After articulating a need or interest area, a CoP was perceived as an informal invitation to gather together. The inception of the group started by finding out if others were sufficiently interested to show up. Each of the three CoPs had a purpose that the research participants could articulate relatively consistently. What is less explored in the literature outside SoTL, are the interest areas in HE that encourage or motivate a faculty member to participate in CoPs. The idea of an impetus for a CoP and understanding the content of these interest areas could help HEI's to inspire or catalyze informal, organic CoPs in their institutions. According to McDonald and Star (2008); "a CoP does not have a

formal, institutional structure within the organisation or an assigned task" (p233). The groups in this study aligned with this categorisation.

Second, associated with the informal aspects of the CoPs, the participants connected their individual faculty development interests with an opportunity to have dialogue with others. There was a clear association made between the CoP and learning. When asked if the CoP was associated in any way with faculty development all interviewees identified their CoP as a form of faculty development that reflected their own practice or knowledge development priorities. This finding aligns with social learning theory and the premise that knowledge is considered a matter of competence as it relates to valued practices and regimes of competence (Wenger, 1998). The interview participants described their individual choice to join, and a spontaneity in quickly coming together around an engaging purpose. This engaging purpose or reason to get together and commit some time and focus was indeed centred around a valued practice: working out how to be a program head, how to navigate professional life as women in academia and the university at large, and how to research, write and publish cases. The community or 'coming together' was also attractive to the research participants. They wanted to find out how others thought, felt, acted, innovated and excelled in the valued practice they cared about. The research participants shared how they were looking for a chance for broader discourse and perspective. Wenger (1998) stated:

> "What we dare consider knowledge is not just a matter of our own experiences of meaning or even our own regimes of competence. It is also a matter of the positions of our practices with respect to the broader historical, social and institutional discourses and styles" (p. 141).

The research participants spoke about their interest and curiosity in how other colleagues made sense of the valued practice in other schools or disciplines. The school and the related discipline, history and socio-cultural backgrounds all contribute to multiple meanings and practices. There was a genuine and palpable curiosity for this kind of knowledge making.

With respect to self-direction and individual choice, the findings reflected the interconnection between the individual and the community. In a discussion of the

role of social learning systems, and CoPs to effect systemic change, Blackmore (2010) noted that Wenger's (2010) discussion of the CoP concept "is as much concerned with individual as with collective learning" (p. 205). In a reflection on the communities of practice concept, Wenger (2010) asserted that the "concept of identity is a central element of the [CoP] theory…Without a central place for the concept of identity, the community would become 'over determinant' of what learning is possible or what learning takes place" (p. 182). Returning to the thematic analysis in Chapter 4, the data captured in 'Theme A: This space is freeing' suggested that individual choice and identity were noticed and valued in the CoPs. This theme reflected individuality within, or alongside, community in multiple ways (Table 5). It is possible that the research method, in-depth interviews accentuated this description as research participants re-counted their own, individually based descriptions of their CoP. However, overall, there was a clear pattern in the data that indicated that the CoP participants related their CoP to personal discretion, changing membership, choice, loose structure and the freedom to express self away from cultural norms and expectations. All of these aspects relate to identity in a CoP that "reflects a complex relationship between the social and personal" (Wenger, 2010, p. 182). Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Unwin (2005) suggested that Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) did not sufficiently elaborate on different learner identities and "what the worker brings to that community from the outside" (p. 66). As noted in the literature review, Arthur (2016) suggested that the abstract and specialised nature of faculty knowledge work has implications for faculty engagement in a CoP and that this may shift the way CoPs function. In this study, competency and the gradual integration of newcomers into full participation in the community was articulated in the ICR CoP where there was indication that some participants identified as old-timers and others as newcomers. In the WiL CoP and PH CoP the research participants articulated their competency and learning trajectory to be more in line with expanding their awareness of the interpretations, experiences and approaches of others. This study suggests that learning trajectories of newcomers and old timers in academic communities of practice are more nuanced. Arthurs (2016) suggested that in academic settings newcomers "have

abstract understandings linked to practice from the start" (p. 233). The participants in this study all had competency at the outset. Furthermore, the CoP participants were from different disciplines and this may have affected the way competency was perceived or recognised thus creating a more democratic and horizontal perception of membership. Follow-up enquiry on the exploration and expression of academic identity in CoPs offers interesting further research possibilities.

Third, the participants described their CoP involvement in informal terms, relating to the CoP gatherings and other related social learning activities. When discussing their learning , the interview participants also described activities, conversations, collaborations and follow-up with other CoP members outside of the convened CoP time. These activities represent engagement in valued practices outside of CoP convened group membership gatherings. Examples included 1) two PH CoP members finding value in sharing practices and knowledge with one another as it relates to program head work in their undergraduate programs; 2) discussion regarding partnering with CoP participants to write and publish a case; and, 3) different research collaborations related to women in academia. At the convened gatherings each CoP had a different form of facilitation (one facilitator or shared facilitation), however, the participants did not associate their facilitator(s) with a formal structure or approach. Not assigned a workload measure on a work plan, or formally recognized as part of faculty professional development, the CoPs were described to offer a professional development alternative that was considered as different, somewhat intriguing and useful. Related to this there was some curiosity to exploring a CoP approach. There was a clear interest in 'how do we do this' which suggests that faculty development opportunities related to theory, practice and approaches for informal faculty CoPs would be supportive of those currently participating or convening CoPs in the University.

The participants' perceptions that informal CoP participation was a form of faculty development suggested that the definition of faculty development by O'Meara et al. (2008) introduced in Chapter 2, 2.3, may not adequately reflect informal learning in CoPs in this particular University context. Specifically, O'Meara et al's definition of faculty growth may not sufficiently capture the ways informal

communities contribute to faculty development. O'Meara et al. (2008) proposed a counternarrative for faculty growth that emphasised individual faculty agency. While the counter narrative does refer to faculty growth "through professional relationships embedded in communities" (p. 166) the attention to community is placed on relationships in communities rather than *learning* in communities. Furthermore, beyond this aspect, the counternarrative favours faculty agency to "choose or invent their own developmental supports for growth that they themselves craft, typically in interaction with a variety of others in their lives" (p. 165). Again, the focus is on relationships and interaction, not social, situated or participatory learning. In this study the analysis presented in Chapter 4 indicated that CoPs generated the conditions for both relationship development (described in Theme B: this is a supportive community) *and* learning (described in Theme C: this is a faculty learning space). The connection between these two aspects are potentially significant as this study suggested that learning and collegial relationship development were at the heart of how individuals described participation in their CoP.

In summary, in their consideration to join a CoP, faculty were looking for an opportunity to join a group that was faculty-initiated and owned. Faculty appreciated an impetus for gathering together that was inclusive of interdisciplinary faculty perspectives and interests in a particular aspect of experience that mattered to the CoP member. There were additional collaborations and output related to knowledge sharing and collaborations that occurred outside the convened CoP gatherings. The CoPs were perceived to offer a focus on the members, not other competing organizational agendas or priorities. The informality of the groups was appreciated, and the groups were described as a learning oriented and faculty owned form of faculty development. All these aspects were reasons provided for joining a CoP in the University. There are two key implications within this sub-section. Most of the faculty valued their CoP and wanted it to continue. As such, questions arise about appropriate ways to encourage informal CoPs and to communicate the different ways they contribute to different stakeholders in the University. Furthermore, if we recognise the various pressures that change implies

for faculty engagement discussed in Chapter 2, the faculty CoPs may offer opportunity for more spontaneous, interdisciplinary social participation around a range of interests that matter to different faculty members and groups.

5.2.2 Learning in a CoP had Five Common Characteristics: Personal choice, Engaging Purpose, Mutual Support, Collaboration and Reflection (Research Question 2)

In the second research question I sought to understand how faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice. In Chapter 4, the thematic analysis indicated that most of the interview participants associated their learning with three themes: A. This space is freeing; B. This is a supportive community; and, C. This is a faculty learning space. In this discussion, the sub-section for learning in the CoP is identified to include: 1) personal choice; 2) engaging purpose; 3) mutual support; 4) collaboration, and 5) reflection.

In section 5.2.1, I discussed the content of participants' descriptions of what they were looking when they chose to join a CoP. Two descriptions noted and discussed in 5.2.1, also inter-connect with how CoP members described learning in a CoP. The participants' descriptions of self-direction and a specific impetus and purpose for joining a CoP inter-connect with two of the five learning characteristics. These characteristics are 1) personal choice and learning associated with 2) engaging purpose. In Chapter 2, I referred to the CoP concept developed by Wenger (2010) that placed the *domain of interest* as an essential component of a learning partnership in a CoP. The analysis indicated that all the interview participants could clearly explain the broad purpose and interest area of the group.

The third aspect of learning described by the CoP interview participants was mutual support as indicated in Theme B: this is a supportive community (Table 5). This theme included the sub-themes: B1.there are supportive relationships, strong bonds in a CoP; and, B2. sharing with others. What is less clear is why mutual support was such a significant aspect of learning described by participants in the interviews. One explanation could relate to the interdisciplinary, cross school arrangement of the CoPs. In a study of teacher learning in English secondary schools, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) examined learning in four different school departments and found that patterns of working and learning were affected

considerably by the four different departmental cultures and practices that represented the 'learning field' for each departmental community of practice (p. 30). In comparison, in this study the CoPs offered faculty a community that essentially rested outside the norms, practices and culture of the faculty member's school. While one, or possibly two CoP members might work in the same school, the overall group members did not. Considering the findings from the study by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004), one implication is that the University faculty members had more opportunity, or a sense of greater freedom to create their own group norms. Most significantly, these group norms were anchored by a shared commitment to create safety, openness and support in the CoP. This sense of mutual support reflected in Theme B: This is a supportive community, may reflect Wenger's account of mutual engagement in CoPs (Wenger, 1998). Interestingly, mutual support was a pronounced group norm in all three CoPs. This is one possible reason why the majority of faculty CoP members discussed peer support, collaboration, open conversation and connection. These are supportive, inclusive behaviours that the interdisciplinary, inter-school members appear to have been able to foster in their CoP together. This is an interesting aspect of the faculty CoP phenomenon in this particular case study. If group members are not part of norms, practices and culture of the faculty member's school, this may affect what group norms the CoP members are able to create with one another – both positive and negative. If the CoP is outside the individual faculty member's school, the learning field is broadly based on a familiarity that resides with being a core faculty member in a corporate University culture and context. For example, the CoP members were able to recognize the macro conditions of the University, and discussed different aspects of faculty work, University culture, language, politics, organisational structures and expectations, and thus had "culturally shared ways of understanding and talking about the world and reality" (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 292). Interestingly, some CoP members noted that they were somewhat outside the norms and expectations associated with their school and also the University at large.

In Chapter 2, I introduced the changing nature of faculty work and the increasingly fragmented and often isolating aspects of academic life. In a study of

faculty participating in academic writing retreats considered as CoPs, Knowles (2017) found that the initiative contributed to the development of 'generous scholarship' (p. 67). This included a supportive, collegial community and the development of a network what was considered generally absent from academic life. The findings in this study suggest that interdisciplinary groups for faculty may offer mutually supportive conditions that work across knowledge and practice fields and can be productive both personally, professionally and collegially. In *Theme B. This is a supportive community* the interview participants described the CoP to offer a social connection, peer support, strong bonds, and an opportunity to not feel isolated (Table 5 - codes).

In summary, the aspect of mutual support as a characteristic of learning in a CoP may relate to the interdisciplinary and inter-school characteristics of the CoP membership and also to the group norms each CoP was able to establish together. The specific characteristic of mutual support is viewed as a potential component of "generous scholarship" (Knowles, 2017) that is under-researched. There are also apparent connections to Barnett's (2014) call to find ways to ensure academics maintain "felt engagement" with their institutions and their professional lives. Exploring the content of mutual support described by faculty and the possible connections to "generous scholarship" and "felt engagement" present a direction for future research. It may be increasingly important to understand the relationship between faculty communities of practice and the development of mutual support and collegial connection. The distinction between mutual support for one another and mutual support for learning is hard to separate. Expressing and demonstrating support for a colleague and mutual support for learning were predominantly discussed as inter-related phenomena.

The fourth characteristic was described in terms that related to collaboration. Nagy and Burch (2009) argued that supporting collaboration in HE is challenging due to "fragmented institutional loyalties" which tend to align most significantly with disciplines. What distinguishes collaboration in CoPs from collaboration in other organisational forms such as teams, schools, disciplines or subjects is that the CoP members collaborated with people outside of their typical relationship network

(Sergiovanni, 2004). Within the academic context in this case study, relationship networks are recognised as individually and organizationally constructed. What is significant in this analysis is the capacity of the CoPs to form new, non-hierarchical and highly collaborative opportunities to learn with others.

The thematic analysis suggested that forms of collaboration related to advancing knowledge or practice collectively as a group, working with one or two other members in a sub-group, and collaborating with another person. Knowledge was created through different forms of participation. Knowledge was made explicit, and available to others in multiple ways. For example, the PH CoP captured discourse visually on white board or flip chart. In the ICR CoP participants shared cases, participated in a round table, and provided each other with written and verbal feedback. Through different forms of participation knowledge was created. The WiL CoP participants shared research articles and digital media. The ICR CoP and the PH CoP had a dedicated Moodle site for the CoP. The Moodle site was discussed briefly. There was no indication that the storage of knowledge was viewed as particularly significant to the research participants. This finding requires further research; one possibility is that academics are typically responsible for storing and sharing their knowledge and thus take this responsibility themselves based on their own judgement.

Collaboration was described to occur within the CoP and then outside the CoP beyond the CoP meeting. Collaboration enabled the CoPs to address issues collectively; explore gaps in practice 'how do I do this'; open discussion about experiences, ideas and possibilities; and problem solve sticky or intractable tensions and uncertainties. As noted previously, research participants also described joint activities and discussions, shared processes, research collaborations, new documents, new interpretations and the discussion of struggles and uncertainties. Wenger (2009) noted that learning in a CoP required mutual accountability and the willingness so share the context of experience (p.5). Collaboration was certainly not a discrete aspect of learning in the CoPs. For example, the sub-theme, *there is goodwill* in *Theme A. This space is freeing* (Table 5) suggested that collaboration is possibly developed, enriched and sustained through goodwill. Furthermore, *Theme*

B. This is a supportive community included the sub-themes: *there are supportive relationships and strong bonds*; and, *sharing with others.* Collaboration is understood to include this expansiveness. In essays on social learning capability Wenger (2009) used the phrase "commitment to candor" (p. 5). This phrase aptly captures the openness associated with collaboration that was shared by the CoP participants in this study. Collaboration included a willingness to be open, vulnerable and 'to not know'. One implication for practice is to recognise these aspects of collaboration in social learning and to also acknowledge the potential mutual insights and connectedness that can be nourished in a CoP.

Wenger (1998) identified issues of identity as "an integral aspect of a social theory of learning and are thus inseparable from issues of practice, community and meaning. Focusing on identity within this context extends the framework in two directions." (p. 145). Wenger positioned the two directions as the personal in relation to others; and beyond to identification with social structures. In this case Wenger argued that identity serves as a "pivot between the social and the individual" (p. 145). As noted, the fifth characteristic of learning in CoPs was reflection. The data suggests that reflection offered a process related to experiencing this pivot described by Wenger; operating as a means to explore both the personal and social character of identity. This exploration is set within the social and historical context of experience in the University and also in one's own life experience. For example, some participants appreciated the opportunity for self-reflection and also reflection with others. While reflection is typically considered an individual activity, the analysis suggested that participants identified with reflection as an individual and a collective activity in their group. Collective reflection is also discussed in the work of Welsh and Dehler (2016) on organized reflection in communities of practice. As a process, their definition is useful in understanding reflection as described in the CoPs.

> "organized reflection can be defined as a process with the following elements: it is accomplished both within and as a collaborative entity; it is critical in that it questions underlying organizational arrangements, including the status quo;

it fosters transparency in power relationships; and transformation and emancipation are central to its aims" (p. 31)

Bringing a less political emphasis, he defined reflection as the "ability to engage and to distance – to identify with an enterprise as well as to view it in context with the eyes of an outsider" (p. 217).

The CoPs offered the opportunity for reflections on aspects of faculty work that were possibly not accessible until the CoP offered an opportunity to re-visit an individual or group experience. Interview participants described opportunities in the CoP to consider new approaches and ways to 'do the job better'. The participants also alluded to un-clear expectations, and uncertainties, for example, 'how does one practice the program head role?' and 'how do we support each other as women faculty members?' This description connects to 'CoPs fill gaps' that was part of the sub-theme, *C4: CoP members notice they self-reflect and discuss gaps in their professional understandings and experiences*. There were incongruities that the CoP members wanted to explore with one another, reflect on, and understand more fully. The interview participants were also able to share different perceptions of gaps for example, organisational gaps, gaps in roles, gaps in practice and more. These examples represent the critical reflections of individual members inside the social and political institutional arrangements in the University (Welsh & Dehler, 2016). As such this study supports the contention presented by Welsh and Dehler that individual and organized reflection are an integral aspect of learning in CoPs. The CoPs were described to bridge into dialogue regarding these gaps. The gaps contained some emotional and intellectual challenge, and this was recognised and supported within the groups. Some of the organisational gaps or practice gaps referred to in the interviews included application of the LTM outside of formal education inside the organisation, transition in roles, connection with other colleagues from other disciplines, opportunity to discuss inequality, share ways to do the job better and mitigate loneliness and isolation. The opportunity for, and significance of reflection in faculty communities of practice appears to be an area that is under-studied. This aspect of social learning, and in particular, organized reflection (Welsh & Dehler, 2016) and reflection and identity (Wenger, 1998) were

not the focus of this study, yet the analysis offers some contributory insight. Both conceptualisations of reflection offer further potential to contribute to our understanding of how faculty reflect individually and collectively in CoPs.

In Chapter 2, I referred to the CoP concept developed by Wenger (2010) that placed the *community* as an essential component of a learning partnership in a CoP. Cater-Steel, McDonald, Albion and Redmund (2017) refer to community as the ''social fabric of learning" (p.7) in a CoP. In summary, drawing from this metaphor, the social fabric of learning created and then described by CoP participants were personal choice, engaging purpose, mutual support, collaboration and reflection. Further study to compare these learning characteristics with learning characteristics in other faculty CoPs would contribute to our understanding of the common qualities and possibilities associated with faculty-initiated CoPs.

5.2.3 Participation in Informal Faculty CoPs Facilitated Relationship Building for Faculty Across Disciplines and Schools (Research Question 3)

For the third research question faculty members were asked in focus groups to describe the related impacts, and potential risks and benefits of participating. The focus group participants primarily discussed the benefits and impacts associated with participating in their CoP. I invited discussion regarding risks, and the risks were primarily associated with the groups ceasing to convene. The focus group participants appreciated that a benefit of their CoP was the opportunity to connect with faculty from other disciplines around a shared interest and primarily discussed a range of ways that their CoP supported the development of their professional network and relationships in the University. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) noted that CoPs can reside inside a school unit or discipline, or, span organisational structures or boundaries. As noted in 5.2.2, the findings suggested that each of the CoPs spanned school and disciplinary boundaries and offered an opportunity for interdisciplinary relationship building that was meaningful and purposeful, creating a clear benefit and a positive impact. Furthermore, the research participants shared multiple examples of the different ways that they connected with other CoP participants outside of the 'convened' gatherings. This study explored how faculty members in three different convened CoPs described their social learning

experience. As noted in 2.4.3, the form of CoPs in this study most closely align as modified CoPs. It is important to emphasise that the focus group participants did refer to learning together in smaller and different configurations outside the convened gatherings. It became clear that the convened time was in some cases a door to other projects, meetings, and collaborations that led to the application of new knowledge and also tangible outputs. For example, different participants in the ICR CoP wrote and published cases together. WiL CoP participants co-authored papers and designed workshops and seminars and PH CoP participants shared and adapted policies, processes and documents.

Whether identified as network development or community building the participants described a CoP that supported professional relationship building. In a profession that is commonly accepted as an isolating one, examples of outcomes included feel more empowered, less alone and more connected with colleagues. This association of CoPs with a changing HE environment and a deeper need to consider mutual faculty connection is supported by other studies of CoPs in HE (Churchman & Stehlik, 2007, Nagy & Burch, 2009, Raeburn & McDonald, 2017).

Benefits described in the focus group included an impetus for gathering together that was inclusive of interdisciplinary faculty perspectives and interests in a particular aspect of experience that mattered to the CoP members. The CoPs were described as operating with self-determination and at arms-length from the University structure, with a democratic, horizontal structure; this was considered a rare opportunity that was appreciated by the CoP members. Another benefit expressed was that the CoPs focussed on the members, not other competing agendas or priorities. Each CoP generated a focus on the individual CoP members' experiences, inquiries and interests first, and conversations happened that would not otherwise have occurred in other meetings or forms of professional development. The implications of this approach are that CoPs offer the flexibility to work towards alignment with members' needs as they present 'in the moment' individually suggested and collectively expanded. This degree of flexibility is not feasible with formal learning designs.

5.2.4 CoPs are Informal Learning Spaces - There is Uncertainty and Hesitancy about Incorporating More Formal Support from the University (Research Question 3 and 4)

Risks and impacts noted in research question three were described primarily by participants in relation to research question four. Research question four sought to understand the common aspects that enable or impede the groups continuing to function as a community of practice. Although the CoP participants described the CoPs as informal learning spaces there was interest, yet some hesitancy, in taking steps to formalise certain maintenance aspects of the CoP. The CoP participants appreciated the informal and inclusive structure that cut across hierarchy and disciplinary boundaries perceived to exist outside the CoP. This allowed a space for different kinds of conversations that did not typically arise elsewhere and the opportunity 'not to know'.

There was some concern regarding the fluid membership of the CoPs. Some participants sought more proactive organization within their groups and there was concern that the informality of the group and the reliance on one leader/convenor made the group fragile. There was an interest in capturing and sharing the learning and history of the groups within the University to bring profile to the work accomplished and the contributions made.

In consideration of how CoPs could be supported and expanded at the University it is worthwhile noting that Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) chose to emphasise that characteristics associated with communities of practice reflected a 'cultivated' approach in organisations. The authors noted the significance of voluntary engagement, informality and autonomy in CoPs and cautioned any tendency to over scrutinize or direct a CoP. In this aspect of the discussion the distinction between FLCs and CoPs explored in Chapter 2 becomes significant. Cox and McDonald (2017) provided a useful comparison between FLCs at the University of Miami and CoPs at the University of Southern Queensland in the form of a comparative table of defining features (p 58). With 21 categories the table included features such as timeframe, membership process, institutional support, champions/sponsors. While FLCs are closely associated with CoPs, they are typically

part of a formal faculty development strategy and incorporate more formalised structures such as: timeframe, curriculum, out-come focused, application for membership (Cox & McDonald, 2017). This sub-section raises some questions about the differences between informal CoPs in HE and formalised approaches such as faculty learning communities (FLCs). In chapter 2, I described the three CoPs in this study as modified CoPs or M-CoPs (McDonald et al. 2012). Defined as predominantly informal, an M-CoP does include some formal aspects expressed in different ways (organized times to meet, a convenor, facilitation and so on). The CoPs in this study are modified CoPs or M-CoPs.

McDonald, Star & Margetts (2012) presented another typology that could be used to understand CoPs in HE. This typology presented in Table 9 reflected the types of CoPs operating within higher education in Australia. The findings generated from this study relative to the categories created by McDonald, Star & Margetts (2012, p. 22) are indicated in the right-hand column in grey.

Table 9: Types of CoPs in Higher Education (McDonald, Star, & Margetts, 2012, p.22 and adapted to include faculty CoP in this study)

Type of CoP	**Nurtured/supported**	**Created/intentional**	**Organic**	**Faculty CoP in the University Modified/Organic**
Structure	Modified bottom up	Top-down	Bottom up	Horizontal
Support level	Subsidised	Provided	Minimal	Minimal
Membership	Voluntary or Suggested	Encouraged	Voluntary	Voluntary
Themes	Discipline or issue related	Guided issues and cross discipline	Discipline related	Cross discipline and varied (organisational, societal and inter-disciplinary)
Agenda	Self-determined/steered	Guided theme	Self-determined	Self-determined
Timing for outcomes	Self-determined and funding-related	Short-term rather than long-term	Self-determined	Self-determined and loose

This table offers differentiating categories related to structure, support level, membership, themes, agenda and timing for outcomes. This comparison of types of CoPs in HE suggests that the faculty CoPs in this study broadly aligned with the organic categorisation for 'types of CoP'. With respect to this particular categorization of communities of practice the faculty CoPs in this study also indicated two notable differences. The first difference relates to the category *structure*, and the second to the category *themes*. The research participants described a structure in the CoPs that was *horizontal.* Within the faculty community, the initiation and participation in the CoPs was both created and supported by faculty, for faculty, and open to all faculty members across the University. Thus, the CoPs were not discipline related and were described as democratic and horizontal. The *themes* that related to the content of the CoPs were all *cross-discipline* and reflected learning interests that were organisational (PH CoP, WiL CoP) societal (WiL CoP) and inter-disciplinary (ICR CoP, WiL CoP, PH CoP). In summary, the CoPs were convened to address interests that were cross discipline and also varied, and the structure of the CoPs was described as horizontal. The difference in 'theme' and 'structure' suggests that these interdisciplinary CoPs may function in different ways to discipline related CoPs in HE. In particular, as previously discussed, the interdisciplinary groups were described as a place for reflection, both individual and collective. Reflective conversations may broaden possibilities for the appreciation of different disciplinary perspectives leading to innovation in CoP interest areas. Further study is needed to tease out these possible opportunities in interdisciplinary, horizontal CoPs.

In addition to the modifications noted in Table 9 the findings supported other small 'modifications' to accommodate the differences in the faculty CoPs to the CoPs observed and described by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). The notable differences align with Arthur's (2016) summary that contrasts Lave and Wenger's (1991) CoPs and CoPs in a university. In particular, there was not a clear delineation between newcomers and old timers. This distinction was less evident with research participants describing a broader sense of mutual recognition and acknowledgement of diverse knowledges, practices and perspectives. The focus

group participants discussed the fragility of the groups, the changing and shifting demands of their work, and the possibilities for knowledge exchange and development. This may reflect the abstract and specialized nature of knowledge work and the collegial culture.

The University does not have an organised faculty learning community program in place, and this was reflected in the interviews and focus groups as FLCs were not discussed. One implication is that FLCs and also different forms of CoPs may offer different approaches that collectively support social constructivist forms of faculty development. As noted, the findings suggested that these informal CoPs may present a modified expression of the CoP concept that reflects differences in the nature of faculty work and the context of higher education. These modified types of CoPs and FLCs are options that could be supported in different ways, for example, through CTET, the University's TLC. If participatory communities for faculty development are visibly supported or visibly celebrated or acknowledged, more faculty community groups, both organic, nurtured, and created (McDonald, et al. 2012) may be encouraged. Furthermore, in this University, the LTM framework was mentioned by most of the participants suggesting that this framework has created a mental model or supporting set of assumptions for the CoP approach and this could be nurtured.

5.2.5 There were Common Aspects to Group Functioning, however, each Group Negotiated the Organisational, Social and Political Context Differently (Research Question 4)

In consideration of research question 4, there were some factors that the focus group participants perceived as aspects that enabled or impeded group functioning. These aspects are noted in the table below.

Table 10: Aspects that enabled or impeded the group to function

Aspects	Faculty Participation in CoPs in the University
Internal Enablers	Discretion and choice on whether to participate Organic, informal gathering not constrained by a particular structure

	Faculty appreciation of interdisciplinary opportunities to gather together around a specific purpose A recognized constructivist and social constructivist Learning and Teaching Model (LTM) and the general support from CoP members for this model. 'Outcome' not specified, this can be subjective and heterogeneous Convenors and facilitators willing to bring people together
Internal Impediments	Discretion and choice on whether to participate (this can lead to inconsistent participation) Different expectations around CoP tasks/output The maintenance and continuity of the group was uncertain Convening typically resided with one person
University Enablers	Learning and Teaching Model (LTM) and the general support from the University community for this model. Faculty autonomy; for example, no approvals required before meeting. Some external funding support for ICR CoP workshops Some facilitation support from CTET (PH CoP)
University Impediments	Inconsistent faculty schedules between schools (so hard to convene the CoP) Changing external and internal factors CoPs not necessarily recognized or understood across the University. Support not in place to communicate out about the CoPs thus limiting visibility and acknowledgement of the contribution from CoPs. The PH CoP had more of an organisational learning connection – practice related to particular political and structural dimensions, processes and understandings that were outside the influence of any one individual.

The focus group participants discussed University support in terms that related to visibility and communicating the existence of the groups. There was some discussion of small budget allocations for refreshments. The aspects that enabled and also impeded the CoPs are generally reflective of three CoPs that primarily

focused on a supportive learning orientation for knowledge and practice development and autonomy. This focus essentially recognised potential connections to university priorities, but significantly, worked alongside or aside from them. Saldana (2017) argued that legitimising or institutionalising the role of CoPs through mechanisms such as resource allocation "endangers the community's identity" (p285). Notably, the enablers discussed in the focus groups were not connected to formalised recognition or connection to institutional priorities. This was further supported in the interview data and the perspective that CoPs 'are for faculty' as indicated in *Theme A. This Space is Freeing*. The main implication from this finding is that informal faculty CoPs have a particular character that is valued and that members seek to protect. The University has, to date, enabled the CoPs by not getting involved in their activities. This approach may be intentional, or, some CoPs may have limited visibility, and are thus not noticed. The main institutional impediment identified by the focus groups was a lack of visibility for the CoPs. Visibility was perceived to signify a recognition from the University that the CoPs exist and contribute. A second and related impediment was a lack of communication support. For example, communicating out to the University community that the CoP exists, their purpose, how to join and updates on information the CoP members might share with the broader community. The groups sought visibility and recognition *and*, an arm's length involvement in the CoPs. This may seem unconventional; however, it was a paradox that was repeated in the different focus groups. It could also be understood as a call for the acknowledgement of faculty socially constructing knowledge together and the alignment of this form of organisational learning with the externally focussed LTM. This highlights the opportunity to bring the LTM components inside the institution. Notably the LTM was discussed in each of the three focus groups.

This sub-section also includes a discussion of the differences that were noticed in the data between each of the CoPs in the study. It became clear that each CoP had a different relationship with the broader University context, and this affected how each CoP negotiated social learning. The CoPs were shaped by their focus, the University at large, the purpose of the group, and the dynamics of the

group members when they met and socialised with one another and the individual and collective goals of group members. More granularly, some examples of contextual differences included: different approaches to convening, the timing and length of meetings, the group's purpose and interests, leadership, visibility to the institution and institutional support through CTET or other funding mechanisms.

In each group, the connections between the domain of interest area of the CoP – the reason they came together, and the relationship between the domain of interest and the University were different. For example, no two groups shared a focus on SoTL or technology or research – the social learning in these groups related to broadly different interests. Taking a social learning systems approach to CoPs, Blackmore (2010) captured these potential differences in social learning by referring to 'a landscape of social learning systems praxis' (p. 207). This concept is similar to "landscapes of practice" developed by Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015). Moving beyond the University, a landscape is about shared practice (Blackmore, 2010) and not necessarily an affiliation with an institution. For example, Blackmore (2010) included the following landscapes to illustrate this concept: institutions, organisations, ethics, values, communication, knowledge and knowing, design for learning, communities and networks (p. 207). Blackmore's examples are illustrative of the array of interests, formations and applications inherent in the CoP concept and CoP practices. The three CoPs in this study are illustrative of this heterogeneity. Each focus group generated a more fulsome description of their CoP and the implications for these differences are further analysed by CoP in the remainder of this section.

In the WiL CoP, social learning was linked to a more pronounced socio-political frame than in the other groups. The WiL CoP was described to offer some sense of reprieve for members from the status quo in society and also to some extent in their professional lives in the University. The CoP was a place that offered an opportunity to openly share critical perspectives, different emotions, and experiences with other women academics. These activities related to a shared interest in building capacity to lead and thrive in the University. The focus group members discussed social time, space for the CoP to share and generate

understandings and new practices together that were situated in their experiences. Some decisions were made that related to mutual support for one another.

The PH CoP negotiated their social learning within the organisational framing of the program head role thus the organisational structure and operations of the University created a political and structural dimension to learning and participation within the group. The PH CoP domain of interest was connected to organisational practices, role expectations and understandings. The focus group participants agreed that these contextual factors had an influence on the content of social learning in this group and the opportunity to effect system change. The participants described discussions that presented a tension between the explicit and implicit dimensions of the work processes they discussed together. Some faculty members preferred to work in the implicit/tacit dimension with others. As previously discussed, most participants did not describe learning in their CoP in relation to completing specific tasks or tangible outputs. The PH focus group participants discussed how they had struggled with how the CoP should connect to developing tangible outputs. One focus group member discussed how a particular tangible output had felt like a pressure, and ventured that tangible outputs perhaps dissuaded some members from continuing with the CoP.

These findings suggest that some CoP members perhaps had different perspectives on the content, processes and purposes associated with informal learning (Golding, Brown & Foley, 2009) with a preference to focus on explicit work process that could be re-produced and formally organised (Ellström, 2011). Wenger (2009) noted that a social learning space does not have to objectify knowledge formally, nor is it in contrary to documentation or research-based knowledge. Rather, Wenger (2009) placed the focus on the negotiation of the significance of these to the practice within the group. As noted, in the PH CoP the focus group indicated some difficulties and hesitancies related to recognising and negotiating these distinctions. This suggests that "negotiating relevance" (Wenger, 2009, p. 4) is not necessarily an easy or identifiable step in a CoP.

In understanding the connections between individual, tacit learning, and explicit organisational learning and the tensions experienced in the PH CoP,

Ellström's work on practice-based innovation is useful (2011). Ellström argued that individual learning is not sufficient to produce organisational learning. The rationale for this position was that organisational learning required shared interpretation, for example, a shared understanding of events and information and institutionalization, so that organizational knowledge could be exchanged and accepted by others. Ellström (2010) defined organisational learning "as changes in organisational practices (including routines and procedures, structures, systems, technologies etc.) that are mediated through individual learning and knowledge creation" (Ellström, 2010, p.37). The tension that Ellström identified for practice improvement and innovation was in connecting individual learning to organisational learning. Specifically, the transfer between "the implicit work process: work as subjectively interpreted and performed in practice" and "the explicit work process as officially prescribed and formally organized" (p. 32). This theorising is helpful in understanding the tension that PH CoP members noted between knowledge creation and practice change. As noted, the CoPs were informal with limited support. With an informal and voluntary structure there was little connection or feedback loop to the University.

The implications of this finding relate to faculty CoPs that form to explore an interest area that is embedded in organisational learning – for example, organisational roles, structures, processes and priorities. If a group has a shared interest related to an organisational problem, issue or priority that requires a focus on both implicit and explicit dimensions of work (Ellström, 2010) an informal CoP may not connect individual and group learning to organisational learning. To connect learning in a CoP to the organisation the alternatives may include:

1. Form as a faculty learning community as noted in Chapter 2. This option typically includes an alignment with a teaching and learning centre, deans or the provost.
2. Seek institutional support and endorsement before convening. This option creates different options for connection with the institution and can include a sponsor or champion from senior management.

3. Purposefully discuss and explore both tacit and explicit knowledge to inform change. As noted, this requires considerable expertise from the group and the convenor of the group.
4. Alternatively, focus primarily on individual, tacit learning and create agreement within the group regarding this focus.

These options may be discrete decisions made at the outset, or, they may represent developments within the group that occur over time.

Returning to the third CoP in this study, the ICR CoP came together to advance the case research method and the focus group connected clearly and consistently with an interest in researching and writing cases for publication. This was one of the galvanizing forces for the CoP and this context created a clear alignment with the University LTM. The ICR CoP was notably the only group that had a specific research focus that was described in most respects, to be arms-length from University organisational processes and structures. The ICR CoP members were the most unequivocal regarding the purpose and professional development focus of the group. One implication related to this finding is that a domain of interest that has fewer political, social or organisational layers may be less complex to navigate as a social learning endeavour. It may also generate a more specific social learning opportunity.

5.3 Summary

In a critical case study of a SoTL CoP in an Australian university, Dzidic, Castell, Roberts, Allen & Quali (2017) noted that the CoP members in the study "explored and contested dominant university culture and values" (p. 227) and noted that the groups were perceived as a safe and empowering space for exploration and learning; collaboration and mentorship. In the analysis phase in this study, I was able to connect back to the points made in Chapter 2, regarding the internal structural context factors that may impact a CoP in a university. In negotiating the organisational, social and political context in the CoPs in this study, there were frequent connections made to the LTM and in some instances the University's values. Some faculty members alluded to their rank, annual faculty work planning process and other associated experiences connected to practice as a faculty member

and institutional histories and possible futures. These conversations were critical, supportive, questioning, developmental and more, indicative of different groups of professionals seeking to 'make sense' of their work and understandings with one another. Dzidic et. al., (2017) found that "the success of a CoP is not determined by tangible outputs alone. Rather, it is characterised by equity, collaboration, genuine participation and empowerment among all members to meet the individual and collective aims of the group" (p. 238).

In closing this discussion, I am drawn back to an article by Inoue (2015) that I read at the beginning of my doctoral studies. Inoue (2015) discussed East-Asian epistemology and opportunities that can be uncovered in 'middle ground'. Middle ground is reflected in the Japanese word 'ba' and represents an approach that shifts away from binary thinking. Inoue (2015) noted that a direct translation of ba is 'a place', however, in educational and work settings ba is "a social space for intersubjective, organic communications to co-create a new understanding or identify a solution to a complex problem" (Inoue, 2015, p. 641). According to Inoue, Ba, encourages social dialogue and a perspective that values intersubjectivity and thus reduces possible tendency to binary thought that can also limit social dialogue. The CoPs in this study offered a 'middle ground' as explored in the analytical categories in this discussion. There was an inter-subjective middle ground and an inter-institutional middle ground that ran counter to the institutional structures in place. Practice, knowledge and learning as an individual and as a community all had a place in this intersubjective middle ground. Focus groups data suggests it takes attention and care for faculty members to create these horizontal communities with one another. This study suggests it is worth the effort.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore faculty experience in three informal, faculty-initiated communities of practice. The study aimed to analyse and describe faculty experiences in communities of practice in a specific University context.

Divided into five sections, this chapter starts with a discussion of the main conclusions drawn from the study. In the second section, recommendations related to University practice are presented and discussed and also recommendations for further research. Considering both theory and practice the third section explores the significance of this study and the contribution it makes to knowledge. The fourth section introduces the limitations of the study and concluding insights. This chapter closes with the researcher's final reflection on this research journey.

This study has generated findings that relate to communities of practice (CoP) theory, faculty professional development and informal learning in universities.

6.2 Conclusions

A multi-case study design allowed for the comparison of three CoPs in the same University. In this qualitative case study, a thematic analysis was applied to identify a particular pattern of characteristics associated with three faculty CoPs. The data analysis also included the identification of some characteristics that were specific to each CoP, or to the different views expressed by individual CoP participants. This discussion starts with four major findings and conclusions that represent characteristics associated with all three faculty CoPs.

6.2.1 Faculty CoP Members were Motivated by the Opportunity to Join an Informal Faculty Initiated and Horizontally Organized CoP

In their consideration to join a CoP, faculty were motivated to join an informal interdisciplinary group that was faculty-initiated and horizontally organised with membership from across the University faculty community. The CoPs were perceived to offer a focus on the members, not other competing organizational agendas and were described as a learning oriented and faculty owned form of faculty development. If CoPs in the University are considered a form of faculty

development this has implications and possibilities for the University. These characteristics discussed in Chapter 5 contribute to our understanding of CoPs in HE and offer a new theoretical contribution to CoP typology. An immediate question to consider relates to how to encourage and support this type of 'modified/organic' CoP.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that some faculty members are open to alternatives to formal, conventional faculty development. A further and related conclusion is that there appear to be organizational limitations in the way professional development for faculty is currently conceived and organized. The majority of faculty members in this study appreciated the loose, horizontal structure of their CoP, a space outside the institutional structure and dynamic of the University and this informal approach to faculty development could be acknowledged and encouraged.

6.2.2 Learning in a CoP had Five Common Characteristics: Personal Choice, Engaging Purpose, Mutual Support, Collaboration and Reflection

The second research question sought to understand how faculty members describe their learning in a community of practice. The finding was that the majority of participants associated their learning with five characteristics: 1)freedom to choose whether to join and how to contribute; 2)an engaging purpose for attending; 3)mutual support in the CoP; 4) a collaborative and open approach to learning and sharing and 5) an opportunity to slow down and take time for reflection. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that there are distinguishable characteristics associated with faculty learning in CoPs. Furthermore, the characteristics of mutual support, collaboration and reflection created opportunities for different conversations and explorations that were described as empowering, regenerative and reflective. Building on these distinctions, the CoPs may offer a 'middle ground' that is inter-school, inter-disciplinary and inter-subjective.

6.2.3 Informal Faculty Learning Groups Facilitate Relationship Building for Faculty Across Disciplines and Schools

The participants appreciated that a benefit of their CoP was the opportunity to connect with faculty from other disciplines around a shared purpose. A conclusion

that can be drawn from this finding is that the CoPs created a channel of communication between schools and disciplines that is under-developed or un-available through other institutional organizational structure and communication channels. This is an example of an organisational design limitation that the CoPs affected in some meaningful ways. Through the interactions and learning in the CoPs, faculty described a venue where it was possible to build faculty relationships through sharing of practices, disciplinary frameworks, understandings, aspirations and uncertainties. A related conclusion is that informality is an essential aspect of the relationship building that the CoPs supported. Research participants were hesitant and cautious about linking their CoP to the University through structural or reporting mechanisms. As with a conference, where professional relationships are made in between the formal events on a conference schedule, the CoPs supported professional relationships and personal connections. Furthermore, the relationships that developed in the CoPs were described as mutually supportive.

6.2.4 CoPs are Informal Learning Spaces - There is Interest and Hesitancy about Incorporating more Formal Support from the University

The fourth major finding was that although the CoP participants described the CoPs as informal learning spaces there was interest, and some hesitancy in taking steps to formalise certain maintenance aspects of the CoP. The CoP participants appreciated the informal and inclusive structure that cut across hierarchy and disciplinary boundaries perceived to exist outside the CoP. This allowed a space for different kinds of conversations that did not typically arise elsewhere and the opportunity 'not to know'. There was some concern regarding the fluid membership of the CoPs. Some participants sought more proactive organization within their groups and there was concern that the informality of the group and the reliance on one leader/convenor made the group fragile. There was an interest in capturing and sharing the learning and history of the groups within the University to bring profile to the work accomplished and the contributions made. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that although CoPs are described as informal learning groups with associated benefits, there are also maintenance risks associated with this informal approach. These risks include unpredictable

attendance, concern the groups might not continue, a reliance on the leader/convenor, uncertainty about the nature and length of a commitment to a CoP and a lack of awareness or recognition within the University for faculty CoPs.

In summary, there are four major findings and conclusions that relate to a particular pattern of characteristics found in each of the three CoPs in this study. There is also a fifth major finding and conclusion that is specific to each CoP. It is to this finding that I now turn.

6.2.5 Each Group Negotiated the Organisational, Social and Political Context Differently

The fifth finding is that each CoP had a different relationship with the broader University context, and this affected how each CoP negotiated social learning. The CoPs were shaped by their context, the University at large, the purpose of the group, and the dynamics of the group members when they met and socialised with one another and the individual and collective goals of group members.

A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that if an informal faculty CoP's purpose has a political and/or organisational dimension there are implications for the group. The ICR CoP was notably the only group that had a specific research focus that was, in most respects, arms-length from University organisational processes and structures. The ICR CoP members were the most unequivocal regarding the purpose and faculty development focus of the group in terms of what the group wanted to achieve together. The explicit outcomes, publishing cases, was achievable without institutional endorsement or support. A further and related conclusion is that CoPs with a domain of interest that incorporates organisational practices and structures as part of the community engagement may need to consider how to negotiate tacit and explicit learning within the group. If explicit knowledge is sought, the CoP may need to develop some more formal linkages with the institution. For example, in an informal faculty CoP such as the PH CoP where the learning focus is embedded in institutional practices, roles and structures, it may be necessary for the University to broker or support learning within the group in some way. This largely rests with the way the CoP negotiates learning internally, and how they decide to focus their time with one another.

6.3 Recommendations for Faculty Development & Organisational Learning

The following recommendations are based on the findings, analysis and related conclusions presented in this study. The recommendations that follow are for: (a) faculty members currently in CoPs, (b) faculty members not in a CoP (c) faculty development administrators, and (d) recommendations for further research.

6.3.1 Recommendations for Faculty Members Currently in CoPs

Participants and convenors/facilitators currently in a CoP should consider:

a) Discussing and sharing interpretations of knowledge as practice. Some faculty members connect practice with application, and some connect practice with knowledge and meaning making. It is important to discuss this interpretation as it affects individual expectations of the group.
b) Related to the recommendation above, a discussion and regular review on how the CoP seeks to self-define would support group maintenance.
c) While recognising that much of the social learning for individuals and groups occurs outside the convened group gatherings, consider a closing date for a convened CoP. This approach acknowledges the commitment on time and associated scheduling. Schedule some gatherings in advance so that time is blocked off for the CoP.
d) If the domain of interest for the CoP is clearly embedded in organisational structure, policy and cultural practices, consider what focus the group would like to take together. If the group seeks to connect individual learning with organisational learning, invite institutional support to reduce the possibility of running into barriers that are outside the influence of the CoP members.

6.3.2 Recommendations for Faculty Members not in a CoP

Faculty in the University are generally expected to maintain their learning currency on their own – and rarely as a collective, group or community. There is potential for social learning to have a place, whereby faculty are encouraged to make their own decisions on practice related faculty development that could be undertaken in CoPs with colleagues.

Faculty members may wish to consider the following:

a) Join or start a CoP and thereby contribute to the development of social learning for faculty at the University. The findings in this study indicate that CoPs offer an opportunity to learn with and from faculty in other disciplines. A CoP offers a distinctive form and process for faculty development and learning.
b) Develop a personal practice as a social learner either through CoP membership, or through the experience of taking the role of CoP convenor or facilitator.

6.3.3 Recommendations for Faculty Colleagues Leading Faculty Professional Development

In collaboration with faculty who have previously participated in a CoP, develop a faculty learning and teaching plan for faculty members that recognizes communities of practice as an aspect of faculty development. The communities of practice framework should include some specific tools and resources for faculty members on how to set up and run a CoP at the University. This framework could include:

a) Explore different forms of CoP design, for example, the frameworks created by McDonald, Star & Margetts (2012). This study has generated a new contribution to the typology of CoPs in HE. The contribution is called Modified/Organic and represents CoPs that have a horizontal structure and a cross-discipline or varied learning theme. This addition to the typology offers a clear articulation of the different ways a CoP can organize in a university, while also recognising there are different approaches. When new members can conceptualise the CoP and the CoP structure there is a clearer contextual and theoretical path to create a functioning CoP.
b) Related to the previous point, early on, identify if a CoP domain of interest intersects with organisational structure and governance, policy or procedure. If there is interest in a CoP that is embedded in organisational practices and culture (for example, the PH CoP and WiL CoP) consider an appropriate way to connect the CoP and the institution's leadership. Come to a mutual agreement regarding the degree of institutionalised focus and support that is

suitable to align with the purpose of the CoP without stifling their autonomy and informality.

c) Provide faculty development support for CoP convenors/leaders so they can develop their social convening skills and also know that they are noticed, recognized and supported. CoP leadership is complex and challenging, it can be particularly intensive in terms of the time required to prepare and facilitate, maintain membership, develop congruency from one meeting to the next and maintaining artefacts related to learning.

d) Feature CoPs in the University's communications plan for teaching and learning to highlight the learning in the CoPs and the learning, reflection and practice change generated in these groups. Communicate the independence of the CoPs. It is important to consider how the CoP participants in this study valued their individual and group autonomy, choice and freedom in their CoP.

e) Provide a small grant to CoPs to cover refreshment costs, a per-diem for an invited guest, and other small budget needs.

6.4 Limitations

A limitation in this study relates to the case study design. This study is situated in a specific University structure that includes a highly contextual descriptive account of how faculty members experience communities of practice in their University. While this study provides specific, contextual case-bound knowledge, a limitation is that the findings are not necessarily applicable to other university contexts. However, this stated, it is certainly probable that the findings relate to other university contexts, and in particular, smaller universities that operate on a limited or reduced public funding model and a more corporate business structure. Furthermore, the pattern of learning in CoPs in faculty groups may be applicable to other faculty CoPs. the case study findings do provide an example to other HE institutions, and recommendations that certainly could be transferable (Flyvbjerg, 2006). I cannot know empirically if the three faculty CoPs are similar to faculty CoPs in other universities. There is certainly the potential to develop the CoP concept and underlying theory as it relates to learning in informal faculty CoPs, however, more studies are required to identify if the findings are present in other faculty CoPs.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) suggested that case studies support the understanding of complex relationships, and as such, an associated limitation is the accurate representation of this complexity. I have endeavoured to present the complexity of the relationships in the data by carefully following the six-phase approach to thematic analysis developed by Braun & Clarke (2012). In particular, as noted in Chapter 3, I took considerable time to familiarise myself with the data and to generate initial codes. Because of my positionality as an insider researcher, as both a faculty member and also a CoP participant and convener, it was particularly important to be diligent to ensure that I was describing the meaning of the words before me appropriately. The participants in this study are also my colleagues and this has been a positive reminder throughout this study to describe and analyse their words with care.

6.5 Recommendations for Further Research

The communities of practice approach to social learning in organisations is supported by well-developed theories; for example, Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) and practices in different sectors and settings, for example, Churchman & Stehlik (2007) and McDonald & Cater-Steel (2017). This case study contributes an understanding of the perspectives of faculty regarding their community of practice in a specific university setting. The researcher recommends further studies to explore the relationship between communities of practice, the shifting environment in higher education, and changing expectations made of tenured faculty and sessional faculty. In light of this recommendation, the following research should be considered:

a) A further longitudinal study should be undertaken to explore the outcomes of communities of practice as a sustained faculty development activity.
b) A participatory action research study would offer an opportunity to explore the learning process more deeply so that a chronology or pattern of learning in a CoP could be explored collaboratively.
c) Further study should be undertaken to explore the understandings and perspectives of senior leaders and PD administrators on informal communities of practice in their HE institutions.

d) Related directly to this study, further research is needed on how communities of practice support novice researchers, early career faculty members or faculty who have recently joined a HE institution.

e) There is more to learn about the role of convenor/leader in a CoP. Those participants in this study that had a convenor role shared an account of some of the pressures they experienced with CoP maintenance; for example, the time involved, skills required to facilitate social learning to achieve members goals and internal communication with members. CoP convenor needs should be explored more fully in the context of a HE institution with a view to develop social learning capacity of CoP convenors that address the challenges and opportunities for CoPs in HE.

6.6 Significance of the Research

As discussed in Chapter 2, when universities are organized into faculties and schools, often in multi-campus locations, these physical and organisational structures can inhibit the opportunity faculty have to build professional relationships that often lead to interdisciplinary social collaboration. If a faculty member has minimal opportunity to dialogue or problem solve from the perspective of their own individual practice and knowledge, this inadvertently further encourages individual work and relative isolation of practice. Finding ways to bring faculty members together across academic disciplines, ranks, and schools, to explore, examine, and respond to complex strategic issues or areas of mutual interest is hard to generate. White and Weathersby (2005) capture this point in their assessment of whether universities can become learning organizations they state: “Faculty consider themselves knowledge creators for their professions and groups...but are not usually willing or empowered to learn to create knowledge on behalf of their organizations” (p. 293).

The significance of this study is exploring multiple CoPs in one University context through the perspectives of contributing faculty CoP members. This study gives shape to a learning experience that is informal and ‘under the radar’ at the University and contributes both an analysis and documentation of this phenomenon.

For faculty who are interested in joining or starting communities in their university, this study offers an insight into how learning was experienced by faculty members in different CoPs in a Canadian University. As previously noted, these five characteristics were described by the participants in this study as: freedom to choose whether to join and how to contribute; an engaging purpose for attending; mutual support in the CoP; a collaborative and open approach to learning and sharing; and, an opportunity to slow down and take time for reflection. The CoP participants in this study chose to participate in a social way, they sought to inquire and learn together, and they appreciated the community support that they experienced in their engagement with one another. There were also maintenance challenges, including the fragility of the groups, occasional disagreement regarding purpose, and ongoing group maintenance and support that tended to reside with one person or a few people.

Wenger (2009) speaks to the idea of learning citizenship as an ethical dimension to the social discipline of learning. If we believe that each person brings a unique contribution to enhance the learning capability of others in a learning system this would be another means by which CoPs might sustain themselves in a university context. It provides another way of considering the contribution of a CoP aside from a task related 'getting the job done' way of thinking.

This study explored a social constructivist understanding of learning through the rich theoretical and conceptual grounding that informs communities of practice. This social approach to learning is juxtaposed within a corporate governance structure with a comprehensive managerial and financial focus. This research contributes to research undertaken to understand faculty CoPs in universities by providing empirical evidence to support debate (Churchman & Stehlik, 2007) and theoretical advancement of CoPs in academe (Nagy & Burch, 2009). This empirical study indicated that CoPs created a faculty learning space and a supportive community, where choice, autonomy and goodwill were 'freeing'. This suggests that CoPs may connect with the concept of 'generous scholarship' (Knowles, 2017) and 'felt engagement' (Barnett, 2014). Furthermore, the interdisciplinary, horizontal membership was an aspect of this study that is an under-developed consideration

for CoPs in HE. This study suggests that interdisciplinary faculty CoPs encourage individual and group reflection and a rich social learning experience that many members valued as different and valuable.

6.7 Reflexivity – Final Reflections

At the outset of this study I was keenly interested in the opportunity to establish connection and understanding through learning with my faculty colleagues. Working in a small University with only a small number of core faculty, I was driven to understand the work of other faculty members to situate or ground my own experiences. How did they navigate the role, the expectations and their lives in this University culture and structure? The domain of interest for the CoP was a jumping off point on a reflexive journey to understand how to be a thriving faculty member and not a struggling one. I was motivated to learn faculty members' ideas, input, experiences and learning. There was also a broader practice gap that I needed to bridge – I needed to understand how to live and work as a faculty member in the organisational conditions I navigated in the University. Informal learning in different communities of practice has been particularly meaningful to me. In a study of communities of practice in universities in Australia, Churchman and Stehlik (2007) suggested that in times of change, communities are attractive to faculty who "seek to make sense of their situation and ways in which to negotiate their professional identity in the new context" (p. 272). Through this study and in my participation in CoPs I have continuously negotiated my own professional identity through community with other faculty members. I have found a way to articulate both a teaching philosophy and a research agenda and through this work I am much clearer about my faculty and academic identity. The significance of this point is that I now realise that my motivation to participate in CoPs and also study them was generated from a deep need to explore other faculty perceptions of experience in CoPs. As noted in Chapter 3, 3.10, this reflexivity has also supported an exploration of my positionality as a researcher in this study.

I close this study recognising my potential as a qualitative researcher. I have sought to examine and understand the University context and the phenomenon of faculty-initiated communities of practice. Applying a thematic analysis, I have

described the patterns in the data that closely reflected the participants' descriptions. I can locate myself in the study, while also understanding that I have attempted at all stages to accurately and ethically explore and analyse data shared with me. I believe the balance is appropriate and I am confident that the research findings closely reflect the descriptions and experiences shared. Furthermore, through this case study the process of deeply examining the context of my professional life and the applied experiences in three communities of practice have enabled me to shift my expertise in practice as a CoP member and convenor. I recently assisted in advising the conveners of a new CoP for administrative staff and I find that I am able to express my ideas and understandings and draw from my research and practice as a confident CoP practitioner.

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APPENDIX A.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study

Faculty Initiated Communities of Practice in a University: A Case Study

Research Purpose

You are invited to participate in a doctoral thesis inquiry (EdD, Higher Education, The University of Liverpool). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe and interpret faculty CoP members' experiences in communities of practice in their University. This study will inform our understanding of how faculty experience communities of practice, providing insight into faculty academics engage in learning and practice development with others, and how they experience this engagement. I am interested in understanding both the positives and negatives associated with communities of practice, and encourage participants to describe their experience.

There are two particular audiences for this research. One are faculty that are seeking informal and collegial ways to learn and collaborate with their colleagues in areas that matter to them. A second is higher education researchers, practitioners and administrators with responsibilities in organizational learning, professional development and organizational change.

Scope of the study

The three communities of practice at RRU that are proposed for this study are: 1) case research, writing and publication; 2) women in leadership; and 3) administrative and program (degree, graduate degree) oversight and attendant responsibilities. You are the recipient of this invitation because you have contributed to one (or more) of these communities of practice.

You are invited to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview and a focus group interview. There are two options for your participation.

Option 1: Participate in 1) an individual, in-depth, semi-structured interview; AND, 2) a focus group interview.
Option 2: Participate in 1) an in-depth semi-structured interview; OR, 2) a focus group.
Further details are provided below.

Overview of research method and time commitment

In-depth semi-structured interviews

Participation in an in-depth interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I will be conducting the interview and it will take place on campus in a location that is convenient for you. In some cases, follow up interviews may be required. I will complete transcription and you have the option to read, review and approve your transcript. Interview questions may include: What has stood out for you? What people or conversations do you remember and why? How does this experience affect you?

Focus group interviews (4 – 6 participants in each focus group)

Participation in a focus group will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes. A focus group will be convened for each community of practice in this study. In the focus group I will invite you share your experience and perception of how the group functions, outcomes of the group and other associated experiences. Questions may include: What type of community are you in? How does this group work? What is your experience in this community? I will facilitate each focus group, and encourage discussion between group members on the questions posed.

Data Collection Procedures

Data will be collected using audio recordings for interviews and focus group interviews. No data that identifies participants will be shared inside or outside the institution. Upon transcription, data will be stored in an anonymised filing system. Participant names will not be used, and participant data will not be linked to any public or personal records. On completion of transcription, audio and video recordings will stored at Royal Roads University in digital format under password protection.

Benefits

Benefits to Researcher: This study is particularly significant for the researcher as it is her doctoral thesis study. It is anticipated that this inquiry will enable the researcher to further advance her expertise with qualitative research and that she will further develop her research and scholarship capabilities to meet the rigours of the EdD doctoral thesis stage.

Benefits to Participants: This research potentially has multiple benefits which may include: sharing perspectives on communities of practice, adjusting practice, interdisciplinary thinking and problem solving, collegial relationship building, and a broadened understanding of how to effectively convene and participate in communities of practice for academics in university settings

Benefits to Sponsor: The study will be of value to the university and the higher education community though a contribution to our understanding of informal learning for faculty in higher education institutions, and in particular, informal learning groups that are established as communities of practice. The researcher seeks to also contribute to theory development related to communities of practice in academic settings

Ethical Concerns for Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

Consent, and withdrawal of consent

If you participate in an in-depth semi structured interview please note the following information regarding consent and withdrawal of consent.

- Before the interview, you will receive and review a consent form for your agreement and signature.
- On the completion of your interview please advise me within 7 days if you wish to withdraw your consent.
- If you chose to withdraw consent within a week, your interview data will be destroyed.
- Once interviews are transcribed the data will be anonymised. At this stage individual data cannot be removed from the data set.

If you participate in a focus group interview please note the following information regarding consent and withdrawal of consent.

- Before the focus group interview, you will receive and review a consent form for your agreement and signature.
- During the focus group interview you can leave at any time.
- During the focus group interview you can choose to not participate at any time.
- On the completion of the focus group, please advise me within 7 days if you wish to withdraw your consent.
- After the focus group interview, if you chose to withdraw consent, I will be unable to remove your voice from the audio recording.
- Once focus group interviews are transcribed the data will be anonymised. At this stage individual data cannot be removed from the data set.
- Consent includes your agreement to maintain the confidentiality of other participants' input shared within the focus group

Permission Granted

For this study an ethical approval process has been completed through Royal Roads University and also The University of Liverpool. The researcher for this study has

been granted permission for all relevant data access, facility use, and use of personnel time for research purposes.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Potential conflict of interest for primary data collection activities has been considered. As I have been a community of practice facilitator in the past I would like to emphasize that my association with a community of practice, or my role as a facilitator should not, in any way, limit how you chose to share your experience in this study. Please note that I am interested in exploring the full range of your experience, both positive and negative.

Reimbursement

There is no reimbursement for taking part to the study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

If you choose to participate in the in-depth, semi structured interviews, your identity will be kept confidential, and no individual opinion will be attributable to any one individual. Loss of anonymity will occur if you choose to participate in a focus group because other group members will be present and hear what you say; however, I will still maintain participant confidentiality in any analysis or reporting. Audio recordings will be stored on the RRU computer system under password protection. To protect your anonymity, pseudonyms will be used to identify the data obtained from each participant.

Internal dissemination may risk identifying individuals through a process of elimination (given your membership in one of the CoPs). I will do my best to protect your anonymity by not using names, job titles, or any comment that could be readily attributed back to you. However, I cannot guarantee that your input will not be identifiable. For my thesis, and in dissemination of this study, I will use direct quotes. Please only share during interviews and focus groups what you are comfortable sharing with others.

Questions

Please share your questions with me at any time during your participation in this study. This project can be confirmed by contacting the LOREC Chair at the University of Liverpool email: liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com

Contact Details

Primary thesis supervisor:

Dr. Rachel Maunder, University of Liverpool, email:
rachel.maunder@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Principal investigator:

Rebecca Wilson-Mah, EdD student, University of Liverpool, email: rebecca.wilson-mah@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me with any question or concerns you may have.

Rebecca Wilson-Mah		
Researcher	Date	Signature

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Faculty Initiated Communities of Practice in a University: A Case Study

Researcher:

Rebecca Wilson-Mah

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the Participant Information Sheet dated [DATE] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time from any aspect of this inquiry without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. ☐

3. I understand the timelines for withdrawal as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet and I agree to these timelines. ☐

_____ _____ _____

Participant Name Date Signature

Rebecca Wilson-Mah

_____ _____ _____

Researcher Date Signature

A copy of this consent form will be returned to you for your records.

The contact details for the primary thesis supervisor and also the principal investigator are:

Primary thesis supervisor:

Dr. Rachel Maunder, University of Liverpool, email:
rachel.maunder@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Principal investigator:

Rebecca Wilson-Mah, EdD student, University of Liverpool, email: rebecca.wilson-mah@online.liverpool.ac.uk

This project can be confirmed by contacting the LOREC Chair at the University of Liverpool email: liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com

APPENDIX B.

June 11, 2018

Ethical Review – Rebecca Wilson-Mah

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter confirms that the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board (RRU REB) has approved research for the project: **Faculty Members' Accounts of Experience in Communities of Practice in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study**, in accordance with TCPS 2 (2014) *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and RRU Research Ethics Policy.

Approval was granted on **June 8, 2018**, pending any additional approvals required by the sponsoring organization or any other organization.

Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Gina Armellino
Research Ethics Coordinator

2005 Sooke Road, Victoria, BC, Canada, V9B 5Y2 Tel: (250) 391-2600 ext. 4425 Fax: (250) 391-2500
www.royalroads.ca

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Dear Rebecca Wilson-Mah	
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.	
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	School of Histories, Languages and Cultures
Title:	Faculty Members' Accounts of Experience in Communities of Practice in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study
First Reviewer:	Dr. Marco Ferreira
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Alla Korzh
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Kalman Winston, Rita Kop Julie Regan
Date of Approval:	4th July 2018
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:	

Conditions		
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

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This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC