Implementing Communities of Practice for Improvement

at Kapi'olani Community College

Krista K. Hiser

(Adapted from work completed in EDEA 740 / Leadership Seminar

UHM COE / Dec 2009 / Revised July 2010

The goal of this concept paper is to clarify the reader's understanding of the theoretical framework behind Kap CCs implementation of the C4ward initiative (Creative Circles for Collaborative Change) as the foundational component of professional development programs for faculty[1]. C4wards will replace traditional workshops and programs for faculty designed to improve teaching strategies[2]. Our faculty development programs have traditionally been a "two pronged" endeavor, with faculty attending internal workshops for pedagogy and external conferences that ensured faculty remained current in their disciplinary areas. C4wards are seen as a method to turn challenge into opportunity, as the college deals with increased student enrollment, decreased funds for faculty development, increased pressure to document student learning outcomes, and decreased motivation and morale due to workload and tensions between faculty and administration.

With the ongoing freeze on travel funding coupled with our geographic isolation, faculty need to new find ways to connect with others within their disciplines, or risk an eventual erosion of currency in our disciplinary fields. According to Seaman (2008), this can be called a Knowledge Community (p. 277). The difference between a knowledge community and a community of practice is that the former group is bound by "what they know" while the latter is bound by "what they do". Knowledge communities exist to improve individual practice, while CoPs, exist to collectively redefine shared practices. While some C4wards may take the form of "knowledge communities" within disciplines, the model is focused more on the trans-disciplinary communities of practice model. According to Louis and Cruse (1995), "[a]n unrelenting attention to student learning success is the core characteristic of the learning community of professionals" (Hord and Summers, 2008, p. 10). This focus on student learning is the vision that all faculty share, and the challenge that we can work towards, together.

---

[1] In this paper, I use the term C4ward to indicate the language of the grant and programs being developed at KCC, and CoP when referring to the literature or the Communities of Practice model in general.

[2] Logistics of the implementation are summarized in the powerpoint presentation "C4ward Overview" presented to department chairs and administrative staff in May 2010.

Collaborative Circles for Creative Change (C4wards) are articulated as part of the current Title III grant. The grant states that we will develop "communities of practice for improvement" for the following reasons: 1) **Faculty retention**. "Recruit, retain, and develop a qualified, effective, and diverse faculty, staff, and leadership committed to student-centered performance measures"; 2) **Faculty development**: "Developing "Communities of Practice" will ensure a broad base of faculty, counselor, and staff expertise in student support services, curriculum and pedagogical development, including technology integration"; 3) **faculty leadership**: "Communities of Practices will provide more opportunities for faculty and staff leadership ensuring the effective preparation of a new generation of leaders working collaboratively for strong academic programs and fiscal stability, and sound institutional management**."**

In order to support the institutionalization of C4wards, the first task of the Professional Development Leadership (PDL) team must be to form, practice, and articulate a consistent and confident understanding of what C4wards look like and how they will benefit the members, the students, and the institution. This endeavor will allow the PDL to begin the process that Kanter (2005) calls "Enlisting Backers & Supporters". He says that "[i]nstead of trying to recruit everyone at once, change masters seek the minimum number of investors necessary to launch the new venture and then to champion it when they need help later" (p. 7).

Because CoPs are an *emergent*, or naturally occurring, phenomenon that we will be attempting to implement as a designed structure (Printy, 2008), the leaders of this effort and the administration must remain sensitive to the unique, somewhat paradoxical, design of communities of practice. According to Giles and Hargreaves (2006), "[p]rofessional learning communities are postmodern organizational forms struggling to survive in a modernistic, micromanaged, and politicized educational world" (p. 153). One challenge will be to support this new paradigm of professional development from within the administrative structure of the institution, which remains in many ways entrenched in an old paradigm.

Wenger (2009) describes three dimensions of a community of practice: what it is, how it functions, and what capability it has developed (p. 2). CoPs are groups that form around *particular areas of interest*. CoPs are held together by the *social commitments of*

the members, and CoPs *develop capabilities in the members* as well as artifacts and shared practices. CoPs do not replace other organizational structures like committees, teams, and task forces. The defining characteristic of a CoP is that it is based around *learning* rather than a task or problem (Wenger, 2009, p. 3). Membership in a CoP is flexible and some members may be more involved at the "core" while others are peripheral. Printy (2005) describes CoPs in an institution as a "constellation" of communities with overlapping membership.

Hord and Summers (2008), reporting from the more extensive use of the CoP model in K-12 settings (also called Professional Learning Communities or PLCs) , emphasize five components the model: shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and its application, supportive conditions and shared personal practice.

Figure 1: Components of PLCs (Hord and Summers, 2008, p. 9).

Shared Values and Vision	Shared and Supportive Leadership	Collective Learning and its Application	Supportive Conditions	Shared Personal Practice
The faculty focuses on students' learning, which is strengthened by the faculty's own continuous learning – hence "professional learning community"	Administrators and faculty hold *shared power and authority* for making decisions	What the community determines to learn and how they will learn it in order to address students learning needs is the bottom line	*Structural factors* provide the physical requirements: time, place to meet for community work, resources and policies, etc. to support collaboration. *Relational factors* support the community's human and interpersonal development, openness, truth telling, and focusing on attitudes of respect and caring among the members.	Community members give and receive feedback that supports their individual improvement and that of the organization.

Faculty should understand CoPs as the method in which knowledge is organized in the 21st century. Wenger notes that "knowledge management" has evolved from technology (providing access to knowledge); to people (connecting practitioners); to strategic capabilities, "emphasis on the strategic stewardship of knowledge domains" (2009 #2, p. 8). Sorcinelli et al (2006) also identify current trends in faculty development as evolving towards the "Age of the Network" in which: "…faculty academic leaders, and faculty developers will need to connect, communicate, and collaborate to meet the challenge of how to do more with less while simultaneously maintaining excellence" (p.

158). I understand both "age of the network" and "strategic capability" to imply that the complexity of knowledge domains means that individuals must constantly exchange knowledge in order to maintain the highest effective currency in knowledge for the organization: no one person can be the "expert" and since "expertise" will be constantly changing, all members of the learning organization must be committed more than ever before to the constant disequilibrium of change.

While CoPs originated in the business world, and have been implemented (as PLCs) in K-12 institutions, there is less research literature focusing on CoPs in higher education, much less in a community college. Kapi'olani can thus be a leader in this area and should commit intellectual resources to both assessment and scholarship in the implementation of C4wards. Shacham and Od-Cohen (2009) described the use of CoPs among PhD students in Israel. CoPs were introduced into graduate study because, as just described, the traditional concept of an individual acquiring his/her own level of expertise is in fact outdated in terms of knowledge as a strategic capability. Shacham and Od-Cohen note that CoPs are consistent with what is known about adult learning, or andragogy (p. 282). They cite Knowles (1984) on key components of andragogy: self concept and the ability to self-direct, experience as a reservoir of knowledge, readiness to learn as tied to social roles, problem- centered orientation to learning, and internal motivation to learn. Gail Mellow (2008), the president of LaGuardia Community College, also notes that "some practitioners argue that the term andragogy is a better term for collegiate education because it indicates that adults, not children, are being taught" (p. 107). In the case of C4wards, the particular learning styles of faculty as a particular category of adult learners must be studied.

Faculty members have been referred to as "like herding cats" or "wild horses", implying that you can't tell them what to do. C4wards can remedy prior weaknesses in our professional development programs (for example, the fact that innovative programs tended to appeal to those who were already innovative, and the irony that the faculty most in need of professional development were least likely to seek it.). Shacham and Od-Cohen describe the administrative structure of creating the CoPs for PhD students, and they used the term "guardian supervisors" to describe the role of the research advisors.

The Center for Excellence in Learning, Teaching, and Technology (CELTT) and the Professional Development Leadership team (PDL) envision a sort of *guardian supervisor* role to support and assess the work of C4wards. Taking an organic function and turning it into an institutionalized program is tricky. CoPs cannot be "formed", they must be "seeded" (Wenger, 2009, p. 7). Leadership of CoPs is distributed and internalized; they cannot be made to "report" to upper administration in the way that a task force or committee can. Leadership of CoPs must have "intrinsic legitimacy" and trust both among members and between members and the administration.

In the Spring 2010 pilot of three C4wards at KCC, the PDL team learned much about the "guardian supervisor" function. The C4wards must have an institutionalized "facilitator" to document the learning of the group, report and share the products of the group, and provide two-way communication about the work of the group with administration. After deliberation with various titles, the PDL proposed two leaders in each C4ward: the most visible is the Concierge, who is trained in the CoP model, as well as in active listening and mediation techniques. A key characteristic of the Concierge, however, is that s/he is NOT an invested member of the group; in order to assist the learning and work of the group, the Concierge must remain neutral, not driving the group with his/her own ideas. This is in great contrast to the traditional committee "chair" role. Within the C4ward model, the most passionate advocate in the group, the "driver" of the group so to speak, is known as the "Host". The Host may be the initiator of the group or any person highly invested in the work of the C4ward. The Host communicates with the Concierge before and after group meetings, advising the direction of the C4ward.

A Plan for Developing and Implementing C4wards at KCC.

Now that CELTT, the PDL, administrators, and department chairs have come to a common understanding of what C4wards look like, and what the role of the PDL is in nurturing them, we can follow a developmental process to support C4wards at KCC. C4wards have a lifespan of longer duration than a task force, but shorter than a committee. Wenger describes the CoP using a dating/relationship analogy, and in this metaphor, the PDL and the Concierges are the dating service.

1. POTENTIAL Identify potential topics for CoPs, and the key members. Four areas have already been piloted : sustainability across the curriculum, Hawaiian Teaching &

      learning, electronic portfolios, and gaming. A more comprehensive method of identifying less obvious areas should be undertaken by the PDL.

2. COALESCE Bring together group members "you do not come to your first date with a life plan, you come with a rose" (Wenger 2009 #2, p. 2). Groups are seduced to come together for social interaction.

3. ACTIVE C4ward is identified and gets married, "taking vows" is the process of defining, as a community, the shared outcomes/practices/artifacts that will be created, taking personal responsibility for the group.   A CPI may remain active as long as the members want it to.   As they garner accomplishments as a group, the relationship may be "put to work," which is like having children or starting a business: the community gains authority and is turned to for guidance and other roles.

4. DISPERSED. At some point, the community will "grow old together" and the questions/problems that brought the CoP together are no longer the current questions. A ritual should exist for harmoniously dispersing a CoP while celebrating its accomplishments and creating a way to keep the members in touch.

The diagram at the end of this paper is modeled after Sergiovanni's (1999) Figure 1, which summarizes "'value added leadership dimensions' that contribute to teachers' sense of efficacy, motivation, and commitment" (p. 154). The goal of each C4ward is the same: to increase educational attainment, engagement, and persistence of students at KCC. The areas identified as potential C4wards can be identified as topics around which faculty are already talking and sharing ideas informally. If the area is of interest to the institution, but NOT being talked about by faculty (as may be the case with "gatekeeper courses"), then steps backward must be taken to create or capture spontaneous faculty interest around the topic, perhaps by bringing a speaker to campus, by highlighting faculty work, or sharing data about a problem in a compelling way.

Once identified, this table outlines the respective *tasks* of the CPI and the *role* of the PDL as "guardian supervisors", the Concierges as facilitators, and the Hosts as drivers.

	Create Social Interaction	Taking Responsibility	Building High Expectations
Group members, concierge	Get to know each other Observe each others' classes Decide what meetings will be like Learn what each person knows	Craft outcomes: what will the group learn or do together? What artifacts or procedures may result?	How will the group know when it has been successful? What impact will the group have on the campus?
PDL, CELTT	Create campus community to support social interactions: activity hour, "community lunch day",	Collegial Values & Decision making: dossier category alignment, recognizing leadership, taking CPI	Data collection & analysis, connection to other groups and to campus strategic plan documents.

	membership privileges	concerns and ideas to administration	

Barriers and Obstacles

According to Printy (2008), "studies of designed communities frequently reveal a pattern of initial success followed by disintegration of the community". To sustain C4wards, KCC's institutional leaders will need to practice patience and resist the urge to prescribe the activities and outcomes of the C4wards. Printy notes that communities of practice "appear to germinate best when participation on many different levels by many different people is not tied to one group, set of meetings, or prescribed social boundaries, but rather is viewed as enduring over time in a way that makes sense of and creates opportunities for learning" (p. 192).

Administration leaders must consider organizational changes that might be needed in order to support CPIs at KCC, and they must think creatively to leverage existing incentives and mandates, including:

• redefining promotion categories and what is accepted or expected in terms of professional development;

• rethinking the role of the department chair, and possibly creating a new role to support professional development and knowledge communities (discipline-based communities of practice) at the department level (see Hargreaves on "Distributed Leadership" and "teacher leadership");

• changing scheduling practices to allow faculty common times to meet;

• promoting creative use of technology to connect and document the work of C4wards;

• caring for new faculty with reduced workload, reasonable responsibilities, and supported learning in order to develop their teaching innovations leadership potential.

In her book, *Minding the Dream*, Gail Mellow (who is much admired on the KCC campus) makes only two recommendations regarding faculty development at community colleges. According to Mellow (2006), we must:
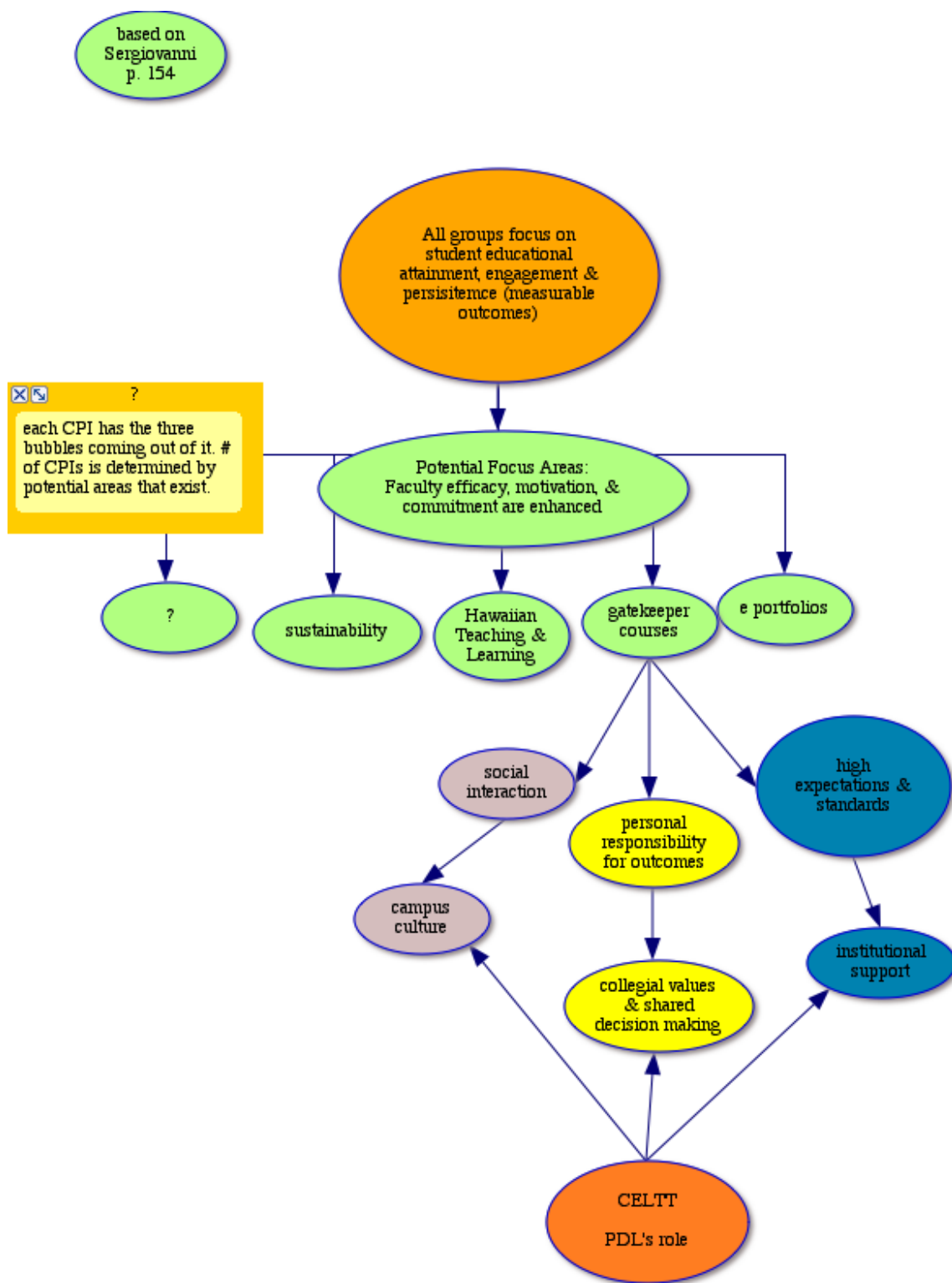
• Establish faculty development experts as guides at community colleges to support new faculty roles and to help faculty to learn the skills of the assessment of student

learning.

  • Create an environment in which faculty and staff come together and speak from their hearts about issues of substance: student learning, new roles, and new learning strategies. These conversations of consequence can be part of a general culture of inquiry and quality engendered by the leader (p. 132).

The language of Mellow's recommendation can inspire our intentions behind this project of implementing C4wards at KCC: let's begin now by "speaking from the heart" about what this transformation of professional development really entails for the institution, to create a "conversation of consequence" among the PDL, the administrative leaders, stakeholders in the Title III grant, and key faculty identified as preliminary drivers of this effort.

based on Sergiovanni p. 154

All groups focus on student educational attainment, engagement & persisitemce (measurable outcomes)

each CPI has the three bubbles coming out of it. # of CPIs is determined by potential areas that exist.

Potential Focus Areas: Faculty efficacy, motivation, & commitment are enhanced

?

sustainability

Hawaiian Teaching & Learning

gatekeeper courses

e portfolios

social interaction

personal responsibility for outcomes

high expectations & standards

campus culture

collegial values & shared decision making

institutional support

CELTT

PDL's role

References

Giles, C., & Hargreaves, A. (2006). The sustainability of innovative schools as learning organizations and professional learning communities during standardized reform. Educational Administration Quarterly, 42, 124-156.

Hord, S. and Sommers, W. (2008). Leading Professional Learning Communities: Voices from Research and Practice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Kanter, R. M. (2005). Leadership for change: Enduring skills for change masters. Harvard Business School Note 304-062.

Printy, S. M. (2008). Leadership for Teacher Learning: A Community of Practice Perspective. Educational Administration Quarterly, 44, 187-226.

Mellow, G. and Heelan, C. (2006). *Minding the Dream: The Process and Practice of the American Community College.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Seaman, M. (2008). Chapter 19. Birds of a Feather? Communities of Practice and Knowledge Communities. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*. 10.1 (269-279).

Sergiovanni, T. (1999). Rethinking Leadership: A collection of articles. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Training and Publishing, Inc.

Shacham, M., and Od-Cohen, Y. (2009). Rethinking PhD learning incorporating communities of practice. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International.* 46.3 (279-292).

Sorcinelli, M.D., et al (2006). *Creating the Future of Faculty Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Title III Excerpted Program Narrative. Personal Correspondence.

Wenger, E. (2009). Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System.

Wenger, E. (2009). Communities of Practice in and across 21st century organizations.