I just don't have time for new ideas: resistance, resonance and micro-mobilisation in a teaching community of practice

Luke Houghton (Corresponding Author)

Griffith Business School,

Griffith University,

Nathan, QLD, 4111.

l.houghton@griffith.edu.au

Aaron Ruutz

Queensland Institute of Business and Technology,

Griffith University,

Mt Gravatt, QLD, 4122

Wendy Green

Teaching and Educational Development Institute,

University of Queensland

St Lucia, QLD, 4067

Ray Hibbins

Griffith Business School,

Griffith University,

Nathan, QLD, 4111.

Abstract

There is growing interest in the role Communities of Practice (CoPs) play in continuing professional development of academics. However, very little research has explored how CoP theory is applied in practice in academic settings. Using the concepts of resonance and micro-mobilisation from social movement theory, we explore academic engagement (and disengagement) in the online aspects of a community of practice in a large, multi-campus, multi-disciplinary university business school. Our findings demonstrate that while some found this environment useful and minor patterns of micro-mobilisation emerged, there were challenges in developing resonance using online technologies. Difficulties in finding technologies fit for purpose, concerns about confidentiality online, and time jealousy were key issues that need further exploration.

Keywords: communities of practice; academic identity; academic practice; learning technologies; social movement theory

Introduction

Higher education has benefitted from communities of practice (CoPs) research first discussed in *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). One significant outcome of this work, and others (for example, Dubé, Bourhis, & Jacob, 2006) has been a noticeable shift from traditional notions of workplace learning, towards a more constructivist view that meanings are shared, contested and negotiated as people in communities socially construct identities as part of their practice (Hanson, 2009). Taken up as an approach to professional development, CoP theory (Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009) illuminates how people in academic communities learn from each other through interaction and participation at work (Buckley, 2012).

Underpinning this is the understanding that meaning, acceptance, identity and understanding are negotiated in specific work environments (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The development of an academic is seen to be part of an apprenticeship process where the 'novice' traverses from the periphery – foundational, or entry level of the community - to becoming 'accepted', as part of the core group.

However, in practice, in the modern, 'enterprise' (Marginson & Considine, 2000) university where disciplinary boundaries – once a central feature of academic identity and practice – shift, or dissolve in response to institutional and wider pressures (Manathunga & Brew, 2012), movement from the 'periphery' to the 'core' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) can be complicated indeed. The implications of this for CoPs in academe have not been explored in depth. Instead, CoPs research has tended to focus on how academic institutions can extract value from CoPs, in order to enhance performance and/or encourage professional development (Cox, 2001, Kitchen, Parker, & Gallagher, 2008).

When functioning well, CoPs can be thought of as social movements, or collective groups of people gathering together around a central theme or cause. We propose that a useful way of thinking about the development of academic identity and practice in CoPs is through the lens of social movement theory (Benford & Snow, 2000; Benford, 1993) because it has been extensively used to study and understand how people group together and take action in society. We explore a single case study of a community of practice developed by academics within a large multi-campus, multi-disciplinary Australian business school, with the following research questions:

What kinds of challenges exist for CoPs in supporting identity work in such an intellectually and geographically disparate environment?

How do academics mobilise and how do they develop resonance around core ideas in this environment?

These are important questions because a large part of Australian higher education takes place within this context.

The CoP in question developed a blended learning approach, using both face-to-face and online systems to address these challenges. The research presented here is part of a larger, ongoing research project undertaken by CoP members (Green, Hibbins, Houghton, & Ruutz, 2013). In this paper, our interest lies in the challenges faced in building resonance around CoP interactivity and engagement, mobilising members to interact online and to provide a framework for future research that takes our findings into account. In the following section we frame

our case study with a review of the relevant literature on academic identity, teaching practice, technology uptake in CoPs, and introduce aspects of social movement theory in order to understand how ideas, particularly about and through online technologies, gain, or fail to gain resonance within communities. After presenting our case study and findings, we discuss implications for practice and further research.

Academic identity, teaching and communities of practice

A CoP is a socio-linguistic grouping of people who communicate, participate and are actively engaged in shared practice (Eckert, 2006). Members share meaning, conventions, experiences and a mutual respect that shows a commitment to sharing understanding and practices over time. Although CoPs were originally conceptualised as a type of situated learning in a co-located setting (Lave & Wenger, 1991), many organisations, including universities have begun to explore the possibilities of virtual CoPs. For participants in virtual or partially virtual CoPs, their sense of membership in a learning community can be real; the essential difference between physically located and virtual CoPs is that communication in the latter is mostly, if not entirely, mediated through technology (Dubé, Bourhis, & Jacob, 2006). While virtual CoPs offer the benefit of transcending the limitations of space and time, computer-mediated communication in CoPs can also introduce new uncertainties and complicate community building processes. '[B]uilding mutual knowledge, trust among members, and a sense of belonging ... may be more difficult through computer-mediated interactions' (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006, p. 70). For some CoPs, technology plays a central role in building communal relationships, particularly where members of a community find it difficult to meet physically (Nixon and Brown, 2013), yet it can also threaten the social cohesiveness of the community (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). Success in online CoP development is partly dependent on members embracing rather than resisting the use of technology (Rosenkumpf and Tushman, 1998; Schiavone 2012), but in institutionally-located CoPs, organisational discourses and practices play a

critical role in nurturing their development (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002).

While CoP theory has been used as part of knowledge management research over the past decade (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) in business, there have been moves to link it more strongly to continuing professional learning (henceforth CPL - see Green & Whitsed, 2013; Ng & Pemberton, 2012,). Current CPL literature suggests that ideally individuals should be offered a range of ways to learn to develop their practice. Importantly though, the most effective CPL activities are: interactive, long term, authentic, relevant/related to practice, investigative, engaging, reflective and offered in the context of trusting relationships and 'investigative cultures' (Penuel et al, 2007, p.929). CoPs which share these characteristics offer this kind of CPL experience (Webster-Wright 2010). Importantly, department/faculty-based CoPs can play a critical role in academic identity formation (Hanson, 2009).

While academic identity and teaching practices have been characterised as 'tribal' (Becher, 1989), in that they develop within disciplinary communities, this conceptualisation is increasingly contested. Disciplines are not always 'the harmonious enterprises sometimes assumed but [can be] rather territories of warring factions' (Barnett, 1994, p.61). As faculties in modern universities become increasingly large and multi-disciplinary through processes of restructuring in order to better meet industry demands, possibilities for, and the challenges of working in interdisciplinary spaces become more apparent.

Opportunities for face-to-face contact with disciplinary colleagues in this environment are limited. Those who learn about academic practice in this fractured, disconnected, competitive environment might well be exposed to a variety of different disciplinary conceptions about teaching and learning. Such 'critical interdisciplinary spaces' can be productive 'site[s] of contestation between different perspectives', if those who participate do so with the aim of 'com[ing] to new understandings' (Rowland, 2006, p. 93). The way academics tend to understand teaching and learning within departments is internalised

and standardised over time, forming 'regimes' of teaching and learning (Trowler & Cooper 2002).

Mixed with these concerns is the growing trend towards the corporatised teaching university (Coates, et al., 2009). The professional academic is pressured to teach more students, often using rapidly changing, sometimes unfamiliar technologies (Trevitt & Perera, 2009). Ironically, technology is often introduced to build collegiality but often builds resistance instead (Hanson, 2009). This is a particularly salient concern for those wanting to build CoPs in academe. If those involved feel pushed into unfamiliar ways of sharing information online, the experience is likely to be perceived as disruptive and stressful (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006).

Social Movement Theory provides a useful way of thinking about the development of innovative teaching practices in these new kinds of academic workplaces through CoPs. Two core ideas of social movement theory are 'resonance' and 'mobilisation' (Benford & Snow 2000). Resonance is concerned with how people use concepts to build cohesiveness in social movements. Ideas gain resonance as a cohesive set of practices when they gain momentum and support in particular social settings over an extended period of time. For example, in the nuclear movement, resonances developed around ideas like nuclear disarmament (Benford, 1993; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). As ideas gain resonance and use, they diffuse to other groups of people and become adopted as practice (p.627). Interestingly for practices that have a high amount of resonance within a discipline, new ideas, particularly those developed in 'critical interdisciplinary spaces' (Rowland 2006) can be clouded, diluted or even blocked.

On the other hand, when people who work together in a community resonate, there is a chance for cohesiveness. This creates small movements; certain practices become mobilised and become part of the social fabric of a community (Benford, 1993). Micro-mobilisation is when actors are moved from the 'balcony to the barricade', compelled by a shared set of ideas to take action (Benford &

Snow, 2000). In this paper we use the concept of micro-mobilisation firstly, to explain the way in which academics within one intentionally developed community of practice engage with ideas of teaching and learning, how they frame value about this from their differing disciplinary conceptions, and secondly, to explore the challenges associated with these practices, particularly in relation to the online aspects of CoPs.

The Teaching Community of Practice

This case study is concerned with one teaching community of practice (henceforth, the 'TCoP'), which is part of a large interdisciplinary business faculty. This school is situated across five major campuses in four geographically dispersed areas. The TCoP came into being in 2007, with the aim of building connections between the faculty's disciplines and campuses. Like many faculties situated in Australian universities, ours has become increasingly reliant on sessional staff. In response to this trend, the TCoP began with a commitment to including all staff involved in teaching, including casuals.

From the beginning, the TCoP has been made up of two kinds of members. The first were the 24-hour 'core' members consisting of sixteen people from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and levels of appointment, who were dedicated to the planning and facilitating of the community. From this group a facilitator for the TCoP was chosen on an annual rotating basis. The core group expands and contracts according to movement of staff. The second group primarily only attend meetings. The TCoP also has the continuing support of the Dean (Learning and Teaching). Foundational and enduring values of the community include a commitment to the concept of CPL and to offering a development trajectory for all members. These values, supported by collegial aims and organic focus of the CoP, shape protocols, both in the face-to-face and online settings. From the beginning, room for development has been made through monthly seminars around teaching and learning scholarship, where practices and issues are discussed in a friendly and non-restrictive atmosphere, and where personal opinion and expression are encouraged. The outcome has been a community

environment that provides support and structure without being driven as a management initiative (Green et. al., 2013).

To date this community has produced considerable scholarship and provided leadership for the development of other CoPs across the university. Our findings, published previously demonstrate that members report a positive experience in these meetings. Yet, we noticed that members were mobilising around concepts of practice in meetings, but rarely engaged with each other between meetings. Another issue was the geographical distance between campuses; micro-communities within the TCoP tend to develop on the larger campuses, which in turn means that those members have less incentive to travel to inter-campus meetings. The TCoP has attempted to address these problems by using various online technologies. One significant advancement was holding the monthly cross-campus meetings using video-conferencing technology. Over a period of years, members of the core group have attempted to extend the use of technology to foster interaction between meetings. These attempts occurred in three phases, as summarised in Table 1 below. These were: firstly, the development of a website, developed by the university's central IT division; secondly, the adoption of a Web 2.0 social media site; thirdly, the adoption of the university's centralised LMS site. The essential characteristics of each iteration, and their pros and cons are outlined in Table 1, and discussed in the findings.

First iteration (2007-9)	Second iteration (2009-10)	Third iteration (2010-13)
CENTRALISED PILOT SITE (Institution-led with some initial member consultation)	WEB 2.0 SOCIAL MEDIA EXTERNAL SITE (Entirely member-led)	CENTRALISED LMS SITE (Institution-led with member consultation)
Custom built by central IT division with some initial member input to support community activity.	Custom built by members to support community activity through social connectivity.	Built by central IT division to support community activity at the course-community level through LMS.
DESIGN: Static	DESIGN: Dynamic	DESIGN: Dynamic
FUNCTIONALITY: - Resource repository - Discussion Forum/Commenting: Resources & activity - News/Events - Staff profiles	FUNCTIONALITY: - Blogging - Article and report bookmarking - News/Events - Professional-social networking and linking	FUNCTIONALITY: - Video conferencing and Resource repository (including Event video library) - Blogging and commenting - News/Events - Linking to School/University courses/communities

Table 1 - Development of TCoP Technology

The purpose of these initiatives was to facilitate the sharing and co-development of teaching and learning ideas. The core group assumed that minimal, or no

specific training in these technologies would be required, as they were already used commonly in academic practice. This group hoped that members would begin to share knowledge and co-develop practice outside of the formal TCoP meetings for a number of reasons. Firstly, being mindful that dominant '24 hour' members might steer meetings towards their own interests, they saw online engagement as a way of enabling those with less confidence, or those on the periphery to contribute. Secondly, , some felt that the meetings tended to become 'toolkits' focused on practical, just-in-time solutions, and that various online technologies would provide opportunities for in-depth, ongoing discussion about more complex issues. Thirdly, online connections had the potential to address the needs of those who could not attend meetings.

While some members took up the opportunities afforded by various technologies, the majority preferred to engage solely or predominantly in face-to-face meetings. The technologies failed to garner the desired participation, particularly from those on the periphery. What follows is an exploration of why this occurred.

Methodology

Our study is informed by Yin's (2008) exploratory case study design – a useful approach for exploring issues where no clear identification of a problem has been made, and where the aim is to analyse context-specific events so that relationships between context and action can be better understood. Data was collected through individual, in-depth, loosely structured narrative interviews with 15 T-CoP members who agreed to have their interviews recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were selectively invited so as to be representative of the whole TCoP membership (approximately 90 academics and sessional staff are active members) in terms of discipline and level of appointment. Each author conducted roughly equal numbers of these interviews, including one interview with another member of the research team. Each participant was invited to tell their own story about their experience of, and in the community. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Prompted by their interviewer, each

interviewee addressed a series of loosely-structured questions regarding relationships with colleagues, the faculty, ideas of teaching and learning, and the role the TCoP had played in their development. One of our questions, our particular focus here, was if the technology had helped to facilitate better community relations, engagement and connection.

Following initial analysis of the data focusing on face-to-face engagement (by far the dominant and preferred mode of engagement, according to the narrative interview data), we returned to the data to explore more latent and worrying issues around engagement (and rather disengagement) with, and through the various online technologies introduced by the TCoP. This reanalysis was conducted separately by each of us, then discussed until consensus formed around emergent themes. Interviewees were invited to provide feedback and corrections on the findings at intervals in this process.

To make sense of our findings in the following section, we draw on concepts from the Social Movement literature (Benford & Snow, 2000). In particular 'resonance' (Snow et al., 1986) and micro-mobilisation can shed light on why pockets of the community responded to the online initiatives of the TCoP.

Making sense of the findings

In contrast to the value members saw in the face-to-face activities of the TCoP (Green et. al. 2013), most expressed lack of interest in online activity and did not perceive its value. This is problematic, particularly in a large, geographically dispersed faculty. Those who don't, or can't travel to meetings due to geographical isolation, and/or teaching and other commitments are excluded from the sense of developing resonance face-to-face attendees enjoy. Here we focus on the three areas of concern interviewees expressed about the TCoP's use of technology. These were difficulties in finding technologies fit for purpose, concerns about confidentiality online, and time jealousy.

Difficulties in finding technologies fit for purpose

One commonly expressed reason for the lack of interaction online was that the technologies themselves were difficult to access. While most members were aware of the resources on each of the successive sites set up by the TCoP core group (see Table 1), many members expressed frustration with some of them, a few expressed frustration with all of them, and only a small minority found them to be useful.

Location and access were particularly significant concerns in relation to the centralised institutional sites (first and third iterations). As one interviewee said about the LMS site, 'you have to be signed up to get it; it's just hard to get access to that'. Others did not seem to even be aware of the resources available on the TCoP site(s). As one lamented: 'There's a lot of confusion around policies, procedures, forms. All of that stuff should be in one place so that we can [access them]'. Ironically, the 'stuff' was in one place (the TCoP site), but it was not easy to access for members due to fundamental problems with the design of the LMS technology used.

Initially it was hoped that the pilot website (first iteration) could function as a landing page where community members could interact with each other and talk about teaching issues, activities and resources provided through the website. Unfortunately, many members quickly became frustrated: interactions did not have the same depth or speed, in essence did not achieve the same 'value' as the meetings. The second phase involving an externally developed social media platform offered more flexible access, autonomy and spontaneity, through blogs, wikis and other related technologies. Although overcoming the flaws in the pilot site, many members had lukewarm responses to the use of such social technologies to support academic work.

During the third iteration, a hybrid, centrally managed learning management system was developed which interfaced with an externally sourced social media bookmarking site. The uptake of this technology has again been limited. Many said that the technical limitations of the earlier attempts were significant enough

to discourage them from trying to engage online again. Even those who continued to be interested in online engagement identified issues across the various iterations of technology used by the TCoP. As one said: 'The development of the website has had many challenges, [most significantly] in finding the best technology to support online conversations'. Thus, the technologies themselves were perceived to be one significant barrier to building resonance. A second issue concerned confidentiality, privacy and management's access to information.

Confidentiality

Concerns about trust and confidentiality in an online environment were voiced by several interviewees. They feared their time together could become another layer of performance management; they were skeptical of the privacy, trust, ownership and viewership of the TCoP sites, particularly the institutional ones. One of the developers of the first website reflected that the public, 'open' design of the pilot website engendered a lack of dialogue amongst members. Knowing that individual supervisors, faculty and university management could access the site led some to feel it could become a surveillance mechanism. Some interviewees said that discussing their 'failures' or 'uncertainties' on an open website, left them vulnerable and exposed to potential performance problems.

This was in contrast to interviewees' perceptions of safety and trust in face-to-face meetings reported elsewhere (Green et. al. 2013). Meetings enabled members to share 'the good, the bad and the ugly' of their practice. Managers could come to meetings yet members reported feeling comfortable in voicing their feelings, even in the presence of the Dean. The LMS system used was particularly problematic because it was the same one used throughout the university for teaching courses. Some interviewees commented that it looked and felt like the system used for management of teaching in 'official' courses

even though it was specifically developed for the TCoP. It looked and felt 'corporate', and this led to suspicions about its purpose.

From the perspective of those who were actively engaged in the development of the first website, these issues were compounded by the fact that the site was designed *for*, not by them. Thus, they believed that they were engaging with institutional politics and management which was perceived to be unsupportive, and unsympathetic to grass-roots, school-based communities of practice. As one said, "I think the complexity of the technical support and funding arrangements ... have got in the way of what we originally [envisioned]. It simply hasn't been supported. We had significant challenges in establishing what we had drawn up in plans".

The heavy influence of management on the technical 'design' of the online community further solidified the fractured nature of the community, particularly for core group members, where many grew skeptical of the management 'agenda'. It is worth noting that the issue of trust and confidentiality has been a dominant point of discussion from the inception of the TCoP (Green & Ruutz, 2008) and clearly remains one of significance. How do we create a safe space to develop a shared practice among TCoP members *within* the school, while remaining open to potential members and supporting strong external connections? The question of who can or should join the TCoP (and who has access to discussions and interactions) over time, becomes more difficult to answer with the introduction of online technologies, which carry both the potential to promote a greater sense of identity and belonging through online community (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006) and the potential loss of confidentiality. Differential power relationships between teaching areas (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), between staff and school/university management and TCoP members within a context of increasing performance appraisal have meant that TCoP members have continued to be guarded in their contributions online.

It's also interesting to note that the designers of the three online systems used were in the disciplines of IT and management. Their trust in technology and its ability to foster community was not been shared with other community members who were from different disciplinary backgrounds. Those who habitually engaged in online discussions were more confident with the tools. However, the most significant barrier to interaction online was not the technology or lack of trust, but what we term 'time jealousy'.

Time Jealousy

A common thread across the interviews was an overriding concern for time management, and the perception of time poverty. Even the use of more modern Web 2.0 tools, like blogs, that are designed to facilitate conversations drew complaints because of the amount of time involved in learning and developing skills in their use. Two members, both senior academics suggested that the tools didn't match the sensibilities of their disciplinary communities because they were not used to sharing ideas in a public forum. One pointed out that unless she was really interested in talking to others about a certain topic outside of the meetings, there really wasn't the time, or the need to learn new technologies. She felt it was at odds with academic practice in her discipline: to engage in ongoing conversation online might create the impression that you were a 'nut', she said. Another senior academic said, "I really haven't used [the blog] much, and maybe it's a generational thing, but I don't think people really have time to do that, because it's hard for it to be effective. You want it to be spontaneous and most people are busy doing other things".

The reality of academic life is that most people do not have time for development activities outside of those demanded by management. This is hardly surprising given the academic on average in Australia works around 50-60 hours a week (Coates, Dobson, Edwards, Friedman, Goedegebuure, et al., 2009). Most interviewees said they did not participate in community building activities online because of time pressures. As one early career member concluded that, "The web component of the community has gone through a variety of iterations,

but we haven't, in all this time, hit on the perfect model ... [I feel] that many members simply enjoy the face-to-face side." When reflecting on time the same member of the TCoP said, "They cut a small amount of time in their busy schedules [for that]; for them this is the important part where they get to meet and talk. Trying to move that online is not necessarily appropriate, useful, or going to be effective long term."

Another staff member also pointed out that most of the time academic work does not allow the 'luxury' to sit down and watch an online presentation or to participate in the 'extra-curricular' development activities offered by the community online. This was a recurrent theme and it appears a direct inhibitor of fostering community engagement. The following comment was typical: 'I have research pressures, I have two courses to teach this semester, I have service roles and so on'. The result, as many concluded: 'I just don't have time to participate outside of meetings'.

Many interviewees acknowledged that it was the social connections of the monthly meetings that had most value for them, particularly when it brought people together from different campuses and departments. A senior member of the TCoP noted, "It's a social thing as much as anything. In a big business school you relate to those in your own department... We're very insular. So for me it was really good just to go out and talk to a lot of people. That was a motivation for me."

It was to combat such 'pedagogical isolation' (Shulman, 1986) that the TCoP began. While the meetings gave members opportunities to share experience with their colleagues, some interviewees felt the meetings provided limited opportunities to develop community, that the meetings had become 'toolbox' sessions where new and innovative practices were discussed but no actual 'apprenticeship' took place. However, others spoke about significant changes beginning to occur in the CoP, as they sought to take a more active, ongoing and informal approach to professional development, though they also acknowledged

that this interest wasn't shared by all in the CoP. The then current TCoP chair said, "Instead of just coming to the seminars, let's just have a month where we ... do more active things". The activities he, and others, referred to were, for example, peer mentoring, peer review of teaching and activities that focus on teaching as contextualised practice. But he added, "That's possibly where [we'll] run into trouble, because people are extraordinarily busy [with] all kinds of commitments and it's really hard to sell this extra activity." Those who engaged with these new highly contextualised activities felt they offered good value for the time spent, though as the facilitator indicates, the perception of time poverty means that many find regular formal presentations preferable.

It is worth noting that the more senior, permanent members of the community found it easier to respond to the problems of teaching through face-to-face conversation than new and sessional staff. Interviewees from this group were particularly apathetic towards the use of technology because it didn't match their well-established practices of discussing teaching challenges privately, in collegial conversations. While there was a pervasive sense through the interviews, that meetings provided a greater level of spontaneity and more certainty of effective outcomes in developing their practice, younger members felt concerned that they didn't have the time to develop core ideas about practice between meetings because they were too busy.

However, many members, irrespective of age, did not see enough value in online TCoP activity to invest time in developing the skills required to make their engagement meaningful. A common theme in the interviews with both younger and older members was a focus on maximising individual returns for time spent at work. Several worried about the extra time spent at the TCoP, and/or did not discuss the value in mentoring and sharing knowledge and saw no point in working outside of meetings to establish such practices. Although active and enthusiastic contributors within meetings, many members spoke of jealously guarding the time they spent on community related activities outside of meetings.

To sum up, we found that the biggest inhibitors to building resonance in this community were: difficulties in finding technologies fit for purpose; lack of trust/confidentiality in the online systems and their intended purpose; and time jealousy. For these reasons, TCoP meetings are the only place for all members, whether senior or early career, to engage in scholarly conversations - apart from those incidental gatherings in hallways, water coolers and coffee machines, which are more likely to occur between full-time, permanent members of staff, and even then, between members within the same department. Several interviewees expressed frustration with this, complaining that even in a multi-disciplinary school, conversations about teaching and learning across disciplinary boundaries are rare. Yet, most interviewees felt that using technology to extend connections did not add enough value to justify the time spent using it; they were inherently distrustful and skeptical towards the technologies introduced to the TCoP; and some (commonly older) members had a general lack of interest in technology for the purpose of community building. Even those who were highly motivated to develop their teaching practice felt constrained or inhibited about furthering their professional development online. Underpinning all of these reasons was a concern about a lack of time.

We found a consistent message that is borne from the institutional context: I don't want to participate outside of meetings because there is no 'cash' value in it. This sense of pragmatism meant they focused on practices that are seen to enhance career prospects or personal satisfaction, and it left little room for developing innovative practices in community. In the following section we explore the implications of these findings for further research.

Implications

In considering the wider implications of this case study, it is worth noting that while CoPs can take several forms, depending on size, membership, geography et cetera (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006), the context in which the TCoP developed has much in common with many other school/faculty structures in modern

Australian universities. Therefore, we suggest that a number of implications can be drawn from the study, especially when considered in the context of the current literature.

Three interrelated issues were found to inhibit resonance and micro-mobilisation within the teaching community of practice explored in this study. Firstly, most interviewees felt the technologies used were not user-friendly, and this in itself deterred online engagement outside of meetings; secondly, uncertainty about confidentiality and trust in the online environment prevented many from engaging online; thirdly, most felt there wasn't 'enough time' to engage in any activity outside of face-to-face meetings. Time jealousy, in turn, stemmed from the sense that: firstly, this was not the way things are done in some disciplines – it went against the grain of disciplinary culture, training and practice; and secondly, the time spent would not 'pay off' in terms of tangible, individual benefits. We cannot explain these findings as a generational issue, though this is clearly part of the picture, with younger members expressing more openness to online engagement and a greater need for connection to the TCoP outside of meetings.

In our case, TCoP members perceived considerable benefit in face-to-face meetings and participated actively in them. Over time, some members have started to seek out and create more active, agentic, ongoing opportunities for CPL – again in the physical settings of the TCoP. Yet, these opportunities are more available to permanent staff and those on the largest campuses than those who are marginalised by geography and/or their sessional status. We hoped that the online environment would extend the possibilities for the 'resonance' and 'mobilisation' (Benford & Snow 2000) emerging from face-to-face meetings, particularly to the more marginalised staff, and in this way, we'd see new ideas about teaching gaining momentum in and across the school's departments. What we found, was that the means by which we attempted to foster greater resonance – various online platforms – did not resonate with most members of the TCoP.

These findings raise a number of questions about the nature of endeavours such as ours in the modern university, dominated by neoliberal discourses, promoting instrumentalism, individualism, competition, and economic efficiency (Lingard & Rizvi, 2010). In such an environment, where the perception (and reality) of time poverty and a lack of trust in management are strong, pressure on individuals to engage in unfamiliar ways of communicating/sharing online can cause stress, particularly if the measures are driven by management (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006). While in our case, interest in the virtual environment was not driven by management, but rather a core group of members, the employment of centrally controlled technologies (phases 1 and 3 – see Table 1) may have given this impression to other members. Encouraging CoP members to adapt technology to meet specific needs as they arise in future, rather than offering a ‘one size fits all’ option for the whole community could be a more productive way forward (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob, 2006), and this approach is worth further exploration. At the same time, further research is also needed to explore how disciplinary and institutional discourses and practices can support – though not dictate - academics’ engagement in CPL.

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented the case of a teaching community of practice that struggled to engage geographically dispersed members in a meaningful, interactive way online between face-to-face meetings. The primary intention, in fostering online engagement over and beyond the community’s meetings was to promote further resonance of new ideas about teaching and foster micro-mobilisations around new practices. What we found was that online engagement itself did not resonate with many members. From our analysis three interrelated issues emerged which blocked community mobilisation outside of meetings: difficulty in finding technology fit for purpose, lack of trust in the online environment and time jealousy. Findings from this case study suggest that disciplinary background may shape individual academic’s responses, as those from IT and management were more open to online engagement than those from other disciplines. Another, somewhat surprising finding was the emphasis CoP

members placed on online activities as an individual practice, which had to yield direct, personal benefit to 'pay off', despite a strong commitment to sharing practice and supporting others in meetings.

Without engagement online, it is difficult to imagine how the resonance (Benford, 1993) developed within CoP meetings could gain further momentum in a large, geographically dispersed faculty with heavily casualised teaching staff. Given the need for continuing innovation in teaching practice and the possibilities for supporting this through CoPs, the challenges of doing so beg further research. In modern universities, where faculties are often geographically dispersed, disciplinary communities fractured due to frequent restructuring and the demands of the market, and the workforce is increasingly casualised, more attention needs to be given to the possibilities and the limitations of technologies for CPL-focused communities.

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