

Notes on Phase-Change in a Community of Practice



April 2005

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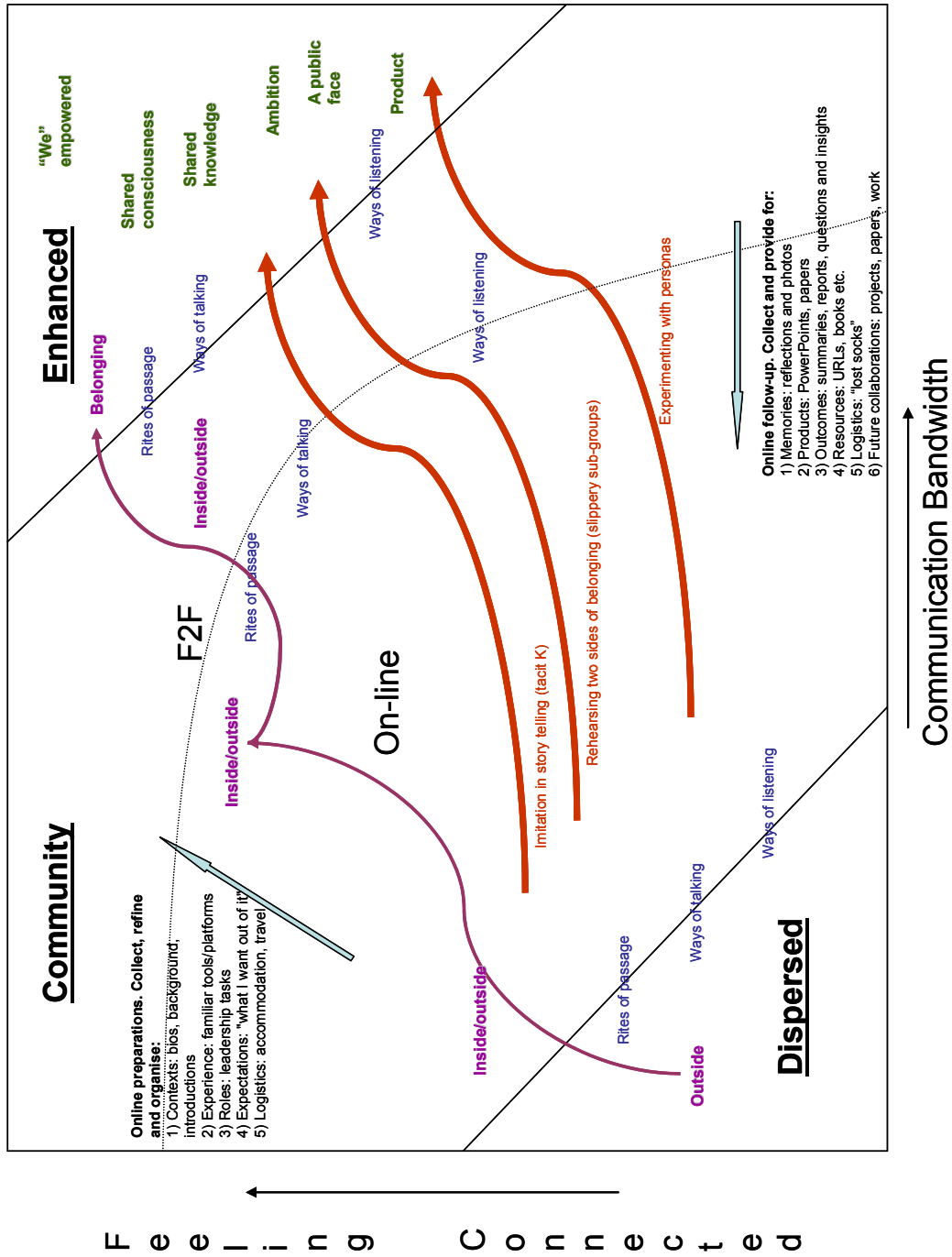
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CONTENTS

	Overview Paul Robinson and Beverly Trayner	3
1.	Introduction John D. Smith and Fiona Peterson	4
2.	Phase Change Paul Robinson	6
3.	Phase Change in a Community of Practice: Synergetic Effects of Online/Offline Cooperation Christina Merl	7
4.	Phase Change Metaphors Collective	10
5.	Kinds of Phase Change in Communities of Practice: Where to look and what to look for John D. Smith, Hemi Gefen and Inkeri Ruuska	11
6.	Insiders and Outsiders in a Community of Practice Patricia Arnold and Fiona Peterson	16
7.	Phase Change in a Community of Practice: Exploring the Issues and Gathering the Insights for “Ways of Talking” Beverly Trayner and Paul Robinson	18
8.	Rites of Passage and Communities of Practice Marc Coenders	27
9.	Concluding Remarks John D. Smith, Fiona Peterson, Paul Robinson and Beverly Trayner	28
	Appendix 1: Workshop Announcement	33
	Appendix 2: Cast of Characters	36

Overview



1. Introduction

John D. Smith and Fiona Peterson

*one thing has become increasingly clear in pursuing the nature of knowing ...
it is a way that grows happy hunches and 'lucky' guesses,
that is stirred into connective activity ... searching out connections,
suggesting similarities, weaving ideas loosely in a trial web*

-- Bruner (1979)

In September 2003 a group of academics and practitioners from around the world met in Amsterdam to discuss **'phase change' in a community of practice**. Online participation preceded and followed the face-to-face meeting, providing different opportunities for exploring the issues and gathering insights. The Amsterdam Dialogue built on earlier work in 2002 – the original Setúbal Dialogue (see Appendix 1). Some participants were involved from the start; others have joined along the way; all share commitment to developing their professional practice and understanding the dynamics of community and knowledge development.

The following people were involved in one way or another during either the face-to-face or the online parts of these two events:

Alasdair Honeyman, Beverly Trayner, Christina Merl, Elisabeth Davenport, Enone Honeyman, Etienne Wenger, Fiona Peterson, Geoff Walker, Hemi Gefen, Hidde de Jong, Inkeri Ruuska, John Gotze, John Smith, Maarten de Laat, Marc Coenders, Marco Bettoni, Markus Rohde, Mike Bainbridge, Patricia Arnold, Paul Robinson, Peter Putz, Reza Sheikh, Rosemarie Gilligan, Don Schauder, Susanne Justesen, and Ueli Scheuermeier.



Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

All of us would agree that reflective practice is a crucial element for developing professional knowledge (Bruner, 1979; Schon, 1991). The notes collected here present insights from both the Amsterdam and Setúbal events (online and offline), with a focus on our significant shared learning. Discussion includes some of the issues raised and challenges faced during 'phase change', emphasizing emergent practices and approaches for participants and leaders in communities of practice.

'Phase change' may occur for individuals, sub-groups or a whole community – simultaneously or over time. Particularly given the asynchronous online environment, phase change may manifest as a gradual trend rather than a single event or moment. If and when it occurs, it may be noticed by some and not by others.

At various times in our journey we have thought about working together to create a final document, even a book, about what we learned from the experience. In fact we speculated that producing a concrete outcome is both a sign of maturity (which we aspire to) and an incentive to further development. However, as with many good ideas in distributed communities this has not (yet) come to fruition. In the meantime it would be a pity not to share some of our notes, reflections and work-in-progress and so here they are. The intention of each paper was to write a summary of the sub-topics that were part of the online and face-to-face workshop at the conference at Amsterdam. Each person, or group of people, interpreted this task in a different way so our shared learning is offered here in different forms. Each chapter remains loyal to the interpretation of the members who wrote it rather than to any overriding genre for the document as a whole. This offering represents an eclectic exposition, ranging from poems and diagrams from flip-charts to more formal and analytical papers situated within theoretical frameworks. Each section represents an experiment with genres and approaches, and provides a springboard for ongoing discussion and further research.

The document also needs to acknowledge some people who were active in the workshop and whose voices echo in the document although whether their name is mentioned or not. It would also be fair to mention that there are some voices which, through a process of omission rather than mal-intention, do not appear at all, even though they came from people who attended the workshop. We acknowledge the contributions made by many, at different times and in different ways. In particular, we were able to draw fresh inspiration from Etienne Wenger, who brought his invaluable texts to life by working with us in Amsterdam.

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Schon, D. A. (1991). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Avebury: The Academic Publishing Group.

2. Phase Change¹

Paul Robinson

(write John Smith to contact)

Online offline
Flip flop
Inside outside
Tick tock
Time's arrow takes us round

Connected:
Near-bound in asynch.
Journey and arrive
Close-bound, touched by presence
and place
Straats and Grachts
Home-bound: to welcome

Ambition grows
With con fiance
We could: we can
We might: we will
Look at what we did

Troubadours in academe
Together, can we
Break some lines and
Softener some structures?
Subversion with a smile
Who's we?

Outside inside
Flip flop
Offline online
Tick tock
Upside downside
Gain loss

Time's arrow



¹ Photos on this page by Paul Robinson

3. Phase Change in a Community of Practice: Synergetic Effects of Online/Offline Cooperation

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Objective and Research Question

The objective of chapter 3 is to analyse phase change and synergetic effects of online and offline cooperation in a geographically dispersed community of practice (CoP) of academics and practitioners. The impact of the different communication modalities on community development and learning progress are discussed.

Background

Workshop participants -- 'insiders' who had known each other from the Setúbal Dialogue (see Appendix 1) and 'outsiders' or newcomers -- from all time zones and different cultural backgrounds started to engage in net-based asynchronous discussion on 'phase change in a CoP' three weeks before their scheduled face-to-face encounter, a one day workshop that was part of the C&T Conference 2003 in Amsterdam. All community members were encouraged to facilitate their 'shared workspace', a virtual discussion landscape with discussion threads relevant to the topic under investigation. To encourage the knowledge sharing and learning process within the community, and also to better integrate the newcomers, this online workspace allowed users to form discussion groups; to share documents; to announce subject-related events; to arrange chats; to respond to each other and reflect together. After the face-to-face event community members went back to their virtual platform to reflect on their experience and prepare written summaries and reports.

Analysis

In-depth analysis of the whole experience suggests that the community development and learning process was subdivided into three major phases. Each phase provided the structures and conditions for the subsequent phase. In retrospect it can be said that well-structured previous online interaction gave rise to meaningful face-to-face conversation, which in turn allowed for reflective and sophisticated online exchange after the face-to-face encounter. It seems that online and face-to-face interactions assisted each other and enabled participants to claim their voices against their diverse educational, professional and cultural backgrounds. The result was a community of learners whose individual voices cycled through a collective process.

Phase One: Defining the Learning Environment

In phase one, workshop participants engaged in online discussion threads relevant to 'phase change in a CoP'. It was important for the community's progress to create an 'in-group' understanding of what their common purpose was and how they would proceed. Initial difficulties of both a technical and psychological nature had to be overcome. The attention of participants, and especially of newcomers, was focused on finding out about each other as well as learning and practising to use the communication tools offered in the virtual discussion platform. They explored all technological opportunities such as the possibility to post and download relevant information; arrange chats; and discuss and reflect with each other. There was no

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

face-to-face conversation at that stage. ('Insiders' probably talked on the phone once in a while.)

Phase Two: Relationships Developed through Online Communication

Once participants had become familiar with the online space they concentrated on establishing themselves as a community with a clearly defined common purpose. Rules of communication were established, and roles within the community were distributed. The principal task at that stage was to initiate and maintain a broad, targeted and academic discussion on the topic – 'phase change in a CoP'. To do so, members shared relevant (tacit) knowledge from prior experience, mostly through story-telling and by posting and commenting on relevant thoughts and information. Importantly, they listened to each other and entered into online verbal exchanges with 'imaginary, theoretical voices from the social and cultural context they were in' (Bakhtin, 1981). At that state, the majority of participants communicated regularly on the platform but still had no face-to-face contact.

It can be said that during phase two, the sense of community, at least among active participants, was bolstered. Their various voices contradicted, supplemented and were contrasted with each other, thus helping to build 'academic reflection chains' (Hoel and Gudmundsdottir, 1999) and strengthening social ties among each other. This helped members perceive their community as 'a rich resource both with respect to human and academic capital' (Hoel, 2001). It can be said that by the end of phase two members had developed a rather strong sense of belonging and identity and that they were ready for the face-to-face encounter.

Phase Three: Face-to-Face Encounter and Development of Critical and Constructive Awareness

After their face-to-face meeting, a one day workshop in the framework of the C&T Conference 2003 in Amsterdam, participants went back to their online communication forum and reflected on their shared experience. They needed to speed up the development of the 'reflection chain among them' (Hoel and Gudmundsdottir, 1999) in order to develop critical and constructive awareness of their learning progress.

This post face-to-face discussion phase seemed to be characterized by increased trust and respect for each other; more significant member responsibility and commitment; a more substantial number of 'initiatives'; and a greater internalised, theoretical substance of the discussion than the pre face-to-face phases.

It should be noted that after the face-to-face encounter participants deliberately discussed how they had constructed their learning community. They shared and discussed their points of view and engaged in meaningful dialogues.

Concluding Remarks

In-depth analysis of the combined online and offline communication efforts of the CoP under investigation suggests that the community development and learning process can be subdivided into three major phases -- the 3-week online discussion, the face-to-face encounter, and the follow-up online reflection.

It seems that community members benefited from the 3-week online communication in that they developed a feeling of security and confidence, i.e., a sense of belonging and identity, within the group before they proceeded to the next 'development stage' in their learning process. This 3-week structured online interaction seems to have

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

prepared participants for their face-to-face encounter by giving them the opportunity to get to know each other and share relevant information and knowledge of the topic under discussion. It thus can be said that the asynchronous work mode proved an effective tool of cooperation and gave rise to meaningful face-to-face conversation.

The face-to-face encounter seems to have been crucial to the community's overall success as it increased trust, mutual respect, and member commitment as a result thereof. It might indeed be argued that the face-to-face meeting facilitated a more reflective and sophisticated post face-to-face discussion on the virtual platform.

Active participation and immediate response in all three phases seemed of crucial importance to enhancing community building and providing for efficient and fruitful interaction. Members, as far as their time and real life circumstances allowed it, spent a lot of time developing efficient cooperation and communication procedures in their virtual platform. As a matter of fact, reading up and commenting on input from other members in an asynchronous work mode is efficient but also takes time, which might have created stressful situations especially for non-native speakers.

The present experience further suggests that, whereas technology may be identified as an enabler of communication, it cannot replace face-to-face interaction which clearly enhances trust, mutual respect, and the essential human connection necessary for constructive conversation, reflection, and knowledge uptake by means of ICT. Accordingly, whereas the asynchronous work mode may be seen as a clearly enhancing dimension in the community's learning process it appears to have been the synergetic effects of the combined online and face-to-face communication efforts that ultimately fostered the community's learning process. The two work modes assisted each other and enabled active participants to build confidence and knowledge as well as make their voices heard. The result was a community of learners whose individual voices cycled through a collective process.

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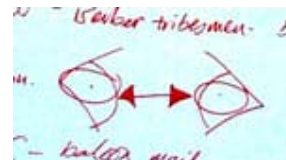
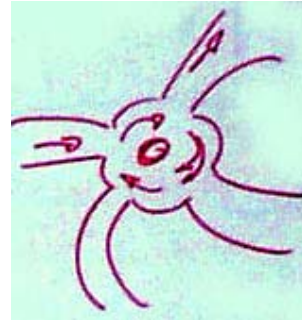
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4. Phase Change Metaphors – Collective

- John Smith: How water turns into steam – bubbles boiling up to the surface
- Beverly Trayner: Abstract Oil Painting – more colours – changing
- Enone Honeyman: Rubics Cube – First side in one colour and then what happens?
- Susanne Justesen: Round About – when you enter a roundabout from a one-way street and therefore can never go back. It means “not being able to go back from where I came.” Sometimes I will need to take several rounds around the roundabout before being able to decide which road to take next (illustrated here)
- Fiona Peterson: Hermeneutic Circle – even if you go back to where you started, you will never be the same again because of the experience along the way
- Patricia Arnold: Thresholds
- Etienne Wenger: Climbing a mountain; you see many false summits (illustrated here)
- Paul Robinson: Waterfall
- Inkeri Ruuska: Sailing Boat – external conditions – stopping on the way
- Rosemarie Gilligan: ?
- Hemi Gefen: Windmill image – something about flowing from the valleys
- Hidde de Jong: Water forming out of clouds
- Don Schauder: Rainforest Ecology – and desert
- Geoff Walker: Berber Tribesmen – beacons and night – safe arrival *and* writing graffiti on a wall
- Marc Coenders: Balloon Mail – flying off at the top of the picture
- Reza Sheikh: Eyes facing – seeing each other (illustrated here)
- Christina Merl: A puzzle – you start with one little piece, then find others that fit. And you reach a more advanced stage every now and then from where it becomes much easier to find the missing pieces ... until you have the whole image, hopefully!



5. Kinds of Phase Change in Communities of Practice: Where to look and what to look for

John D Smith, Hemi Gefen and Inkeri Ruuska

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This reflection on the discussions and experiences that took place at and around the Setúbal and Amsterdam conferences focuses on significant kinds of phase change and the kinds of evidence that might help community members and leaders notice, think about, and detect phase change. Since the ways in which communities grow and mature are more frequently described in the literature from an outside observer's perspective, we complement the discussion by emphasizing the experience of phase change *from the inside* of a community.

We see "phases" in the life of a community of practice as distinct periods or stages in a process of change or development. For us, a "phase" has some kind of coherence or inner logic that provides a reference point for individual and group behaviour within a community. A community's focus, composition, or way of being together might shift when a phase change occurs. Although we see the conversations and activities in a community of practice as dynamic and flowing, there do seem to be distinct demarcations or turning points when a phase change occurs. Although phase change is not necessarily an **increase** or **improvement**, we see such changes as being irreversible, although not linear. To talk about a phase change requires that we identify aspects of a community of practice that remain unchanged as well as aspects that have changed. Because we see that our perception of ourselves and of our communities is always embedded in the current "phase," there are some built-in limits on our perception and therefore to our account in this essay, since we try to not resort to the pretentious fiction of omniscience or prescience.

The paper describes four different **kinds** of phase change, each perceptible in a different way, each having some kind of irreversibility. Specifically, we focus on the community's *communication venues*, its *capacity to handle its own boundaries*, its *ability to balance improvisation and planning*, and the *confidence and ambition* of individual members and the community at large. In some way, we see all of these phase changes happening over the periods of time described here. In the following discussion, each aspect of phase change is briefly described, followed by an illustrative example or vignettes from the Setúbal or Amsterdam experience (indented, in italics). We then discuss the relevance or possible impact of the change in terms of both its internal and external consequences. Finally, for each case we draw out some of the implications that might help practitioners (community leaders or members) think about the community phase change.

Obviously the discussion here is limited because it's based on the experience of **one** community, even though we draw upon discussions and literature that reflects the experience of other communities. Our particular community is itself focused on understanding learning and communities of practice. As such its engagement in reflection may seem like so much navel-gazing. We would submit that its experience of phase change is relevant to other communities that focus on very complex issues.

1. An evolving palate of communication venues and media. As a community finds new venues or media (channels) to think and work together, it may incorporate

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

more of them into its repertoire. Although it may enjoy more ways of learning internally, new channels require more competence to coordinate conversations and activities: greater self-awareness about the use of its communication channels may be necessary. Externally, new channels may increase a community's resource requirements and present a more complex face to the world, especially to new members.

*Most participants in the Setúbal dialog had previously “met” online (mostly in the Foundations of Communities of Practice workshop) and much of the planning occurred in the online, asynchronous discussions. As the face-to-face meeting drew closer, the planning process intensified, and telephone conferences became more important, building on the preceding online conversations. The telephone conversations turned out to be a rehearsal for face-to-face conversations. Many people reported that they appreciated each other's online messages because of having experienced the richer, synchronous exchanges on the phone and face-to-face. The online conversations, however, were not **replaced** by telephones and face-to-face: the community's repertoire included all of them. The same sequence was repeated around the Amsterdam conference.*

Because some technologies or social situations may be useful to some people but are inaccessible, invisible, or personally unappealing to others, the implication of this view of phase change for the practice of community development is that community leaders above all need to be multi-literate: aware of and competent in using as many of the channels at a community's disposal as possible. Community leaders who are not comfortable with one of the media or venues being used by a community may suffer significant



blind spots. Adding a new communication channel requires some collective learning not only about its use but about the timing of channel switches (i.e., when do you resort to the alternate channel?). Weaving and integrating across channels can become a significant area of new activity. New leadership roles or models may be required to cope with the increasing complexity of the community's conversations. In many cases, as a community has more choices about where and how to meet, newcomers face a longer and more complex learning trajectory to even find the community or fully participate in all its conversations. Mentors are an example of a significant new leadership role that can be developed to respond to increasing complexity.

2. Increasing understanding of and greater creative capacity in handling community boundaries. We see a community's awareness of its boundaries and increasing creativity in managing them as an important kind of phase change. Vibrant and productive communities of practice are characterized by complex boundaries with many layers (i.e., increasing circles of peripheral participation). Instead of more choices between communication channels discussed in the previous section, this one involves a proliferation of social situations and boundaries. Internally, this phase change involves more work – a commitment to remain open and connect with opportunities in the community's environment. Externally, this may require that

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

peripheral members feel authorized to speak for the community in welcoming and orienting newcomers.

*At Setúbal, almost everyone reported some experience of feeling like an “outsider” and there was a general presumption that **someone else** was somehow more of an “insider”. The idea that participation in the Setúbal dialog might become an inappropriate barrier to welcoming new people in the conversation came up early in the planning process for Amsterdam, and people became very conscious of the issue and much more sophisticated about handling the boundary. People evolved more nuanced ways of talking about “we” and “us” – demanding an explanation as to who was included when those terms were used. New practices were improvised to extend the sense of belonging and to create a trajectory toward full participation in the conversation. For example, “non-Setúbal” participants were invited to take a leadership role in the online exploration of the Amsterdam workshop’s themes, even though the initial focus was on “phase change at Setúbal.” During the organizational face-to-face meeting in Amsterdam we adopted a practice where someone would offer an on-the-spot oral summary of the conversation for latecomers and we made significant efforts to make the Amsterdam conference more transparent than Setúbal (e.g., producing the published notes that you are now reading).*

As the periphery becomes larger and more complex, it takes more of an effort to see or manage it. The implication of this kind of phase change for the practice of community leadership is that leadership cannot remain centralized: leadership roles may need to be reinvented *at the periphery*. Several of the leadership issues discussed in the context of increasing venues and media apply here as well. Therefore community leaders must attend not only to their own leadership work but also observe, interpret, and respond to leadership activities of other people at other locations in the social structure. Specific practices for dealing with complex boundaries, or an extensive periphery, may become vital issues. This may feel like a reinvention or reconfiguration of leadership roles.



3. Greater integration of improvisation and planning skills. When a community first comes into existence, the roles of improvisation and planning may seem to be in opposition. However, as a community evolves, those two modes need to be intertwined. A community needs to be skilful with planning in advance (i.e., of agendas or activities) and, at the same time, with handling new issues, emerging roles, or unforeseen circumstances improvisationally – according to the logic of new situations that community interactions themselves create. The demand for more sophisticated skills at both planning and improvisation may come from both the inside and outside a community.

Although there had been extensive discussions before Setúbal about the agenda and about leadership roles during specific conversations, during the first day and a half of the meeting, many of the agreements that had been made

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

had to be renegotiated on the spot. Several important areas of “self-organization” (such as tea time) had not been anticipated at all. In preparation for the Amsterdam conference, much less advance effort was expended on agreements about leadership or the meeting agenda: it was assumed that many of the essential decisions would have to be made when the group convened face-to-face. On the other hand, there was much more preparation for the conversations in Amsterdam in the sense of gathering data about the group and preparing introductions to the various topics. The extended discussion of “trust in communities” was not on the Amsterdam workshop agenda until the conversation was well on its way.

This view of phase change for community leadership implies that leadership is a situated and complex skill. Neither planning nor improvisation can be learned “in general” or abstractly: practice is fundamental. Although there are many reasons for community leadership to remain grounded in the competence of the community’s practice, community leaders may require significant new skills to fulfil their potential. Because a community of practice can constitute a significant social container, a community leader can encounter a kind of isolation that limits her growth as a leader. Community leaders can benefit from observing other communities or other leaders and may benefit from being coached by more experienced leaders. Conversely, coaching other community leaders can provide the opportunity for reflection that would help a community leader rebalance her improvisation and planning skills.

4. Increasing confidence and ambition at an individual and community level.

This kind of phase change can happen at an individual or a community level. One significant benefit of participation in a community is that individual practitioners become more confident in their self-assessment of their own competence. (At the same time they may become more aware of the limits of their competence, which in turn contributes to building trust in the community.) A similar phenomenon can occur at a community level, where greater confidence and ambition among several community members leads to an increase in confidence and ambition at a community-wide level. Such a phase change may involve the community taking on more ambitious projects or handling more complex cases. The importance of this kind of phase change is that confidence and ambition typically precedes high performance. Externally, the reputation for performance may be a spur to further community growth in terms of the number and kind of people who are attracted.

One graduate student reported that her use of a community of practice perspective on learning had created a sense of separation between herself and her academic department; presenting some of her findings at Setúbal convinced her that she was on the right track and she felt that the experience gave her a great deal of confidence during the final stages of writing and defense. During the year after the Setúbal conference, not only did participants initiate new writing and publication projects, they managed to organize many face-to-face visits even though they came from 9 different countries on three continents. At the same time, as people sought to apply what they had learned about the design of learning events to new settings, they tried more ambitious experiments in Montreal and Amsterdam.

The implication of this view of phase change for community leaders is that they need to pay attention to individual and collective ambition and confidence. A zone of proximal development for the community itself may be worth thinking about, although it may not be the prerogative of any one community leader to steer in a particular direction or set a particular speed of development. Community leaders should consider rewriting community vision or mission statements at the right time so that

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

they are appropriately ambitious. A community leader may be able to advocate against skipping developmental steps.

Conclusion

Phase change is local, uneven, parallel and global. Almost all the different versions of phase change that have been discussed seem to have a paradoxical characteristic of being local, uneven, parallel and, at the same time, global (in the sense that the changes being discussed do affect the group as a whole). Just as a community of practice provides a powerful context for the learning of individuals, larger organizational and social forces also shape the community. Conversely, a change in any one of a community's individual members or conversations can have a significant influence on the whole community. Some of the boundaries around a community of practice may only be visible from inside the community, detectable to its leaders and members. (Just as some changes may only be visible from the outside.) We observe that phase change can happen simultaneously or in parallel in apparently separate pockets in a community. It is the many levels of context and the complexity of their interaction that makes community leadership so complex and time consuming.

Which conversations, events, or people are "included" in the story of the development of the community that has formed around Setúbal and Amsterdam is the subject of some disagreement. There are arguments on both sides for the propositions that "there was a phase change during the teleconference where we agreed to disagree about the benefits of videotaping ourselves in conversation"; that "a phase change occurred at the Setúbal conference"; that "the Setúbal conference was a phase change leading to the formation of CPsquare." Each of those statements motivates and provides context for some people and, for others, is untrue or even meaningless, depending on their stance, involvement or role in the network of relationships and their presence in specific conversations and events.

Phase change implies a change in a community's structure, practices, and capacity. We propose that it's essential to observe and respond to phase change **from the inside** rather than just observe it or theorize about it from the outside. We hope that, because of the emergent nature of the phenomenon, the kind of examples given here are useful. The social sensitivity of individual community members is a resource for community development that results in some kind of collective sensitivity. We suggest that noticing the reactions or perceptions of the most sensitive community members—who are aware of what's happening in the community—is the best advice we can offer: borrow and build upon the capacities of your community members.

Community leaders must remember that they cannot see the whole community and that on some level a community of practice is never fully comprehensible. They need to spend time "working the network" and comparing different people's stories to find out what's happening from the many different perspectives that makes up a community. Weaving the community together is really important so that innovation or insight at one end is communicated to other locations: this is very situated work. At the same time, the view of a community from the inside cannot be absolutely privileged. What "outsiders" see is relevant as well.

This paper was intended to be helpful to community leaders or community members who take a leadership role. We're not convinced that this kind of discussion by itself is sufficient to sensitize community leadership to the changes they are likely to

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

encounter. Since we see the lives communities of practice as chaotic and community leadership as a fundamentally improvisational practice, the comments and recommendations that we offer should be regarded at best a good story providing some inspiration for other practitioners.

6. Insiders and Outsiders in a Community of Practice

Patricia Arnold and Fiona Peterson

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This summary is presented in simple narrative form, demonstrating experimentation used with genres and approaches to reveal experiential insights. This section is intended as a backdrop to the other papers, which provide higher-level analysis.

Identity

Much online discussion before and after Amsterdam focused on issues to do with identity and a sense of belonging, including time and place.

Patricia began by relating her own experience of doing a PhD in a department not sharing her concerns and interests. When Patricia went to Setúbal, she felt 'at home' with like-minded people; she had found 'community' and belonged. Later, Beverly described feeling an outsider at CPWeek, related to "being me..., being European, coming from Portugal – when for 96% of people, what happened at the Setúbal Dialogue was not part of the history of CPsquare."

Fiona noted with surprise that she had presented an Australian identity face to face and online and reflected on the significance of this. Was it to do with Australians' perception of their place in the world, how they view the rest of the world, or how they think others perceive them? Was it related to being 'new' and unsure of the 'audience' – John raised the issue of improvisation according to the audience. Or was it because national and cultural identity was a point of difference in the group, complementing accepted common interest in learning more about practice in a cross-cultural setting? It was probably a combination.

Connectivity and trust

John discussed the issue of inclusion/exclusion around use of idiom, suggesting that complete avoidance of this may result in lost opportunity to develop personal connections.

Earlier, Ueli discussed physical distance and connectivity, suggesting that the latter was the real issue for community. Beverly and John raised concern about disjointed discourse in a floating population, while Ueli advocated focus on the 'practice' rather than the 'community' – community emanates from and around shared practice. While the concern about disjointed discourse resonated with some, Paul added that the community comprises the people in it at the moment and described being in the present, with the diverse mix of people who happen to be there. Christina also highlighted the importance of a community accepting and respecting individual differences, and that useful outcomes may be achieved built on trust.

Listening was discussed in terms of interested silence. Nancy pointed out the impact of time and place on emotional responses in synchronous and asynchronous environments. Others described silence as a consequence of external factors, competing priorities and so on, rather than lack of interest. Fiona suggested that it

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

may be helpful to raise the issue of silence in a community, to help avoid misunderstanding and feeling of not belonging or being connected.

Outside or inside – phase change

Marc and Ueli described the advantages of being able to provide an ‘outside’ perspective – it may be positive rather than negative to be an ‘outsider’. On boundaries, Ueli asked how we define ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and highlighted thematic boundaries as being important.

The idea of an evolving ‘inside’ emerged and this may well represent ‘phase change’ – depending on the time, place and participants, the ‘inside’ may be different and this may help to put participants on a ‘level playing field’, rather than ‘inside’ or ‘outside’. John suggested that a community holds some constant phase change within itself as ‘members’ become less or more peripheral, or as the centre evolves. Further, perhaps the historical phase change that happened at Setúbal (and again in Amsterdam) was that afterwards there WAS an inside to relate to.

Further work

Etienne suggested that **identity** is becoming increasingly important as a journey between memberships of different communities. This may also impact on communities within communities, as in Beverly’s example under ‘Identity’. A person may feel confident of ‘belonging’ in one setting, but not in another. Further exploration of this issue is recommended.

At the same time, Nancy raised the issues of group identity and anonymity, asking what impact there might be with a reduction of focus on identity. Discussion followed on the use of different visual cues (or not) for mutual understanding. Alasdair and Fiona highlighted the importance of visual cues such as cartoons contributing humour to discussion and assisting people to get to ‘know’ others.

John concluded by reflecting that we have good evidence from observing ourselves and each other, but **how might this influence our design and our leadership of communities?**

How might we ‘make a difference’?

It is hoped these notes – Phase Change in a Community of Practice – may serve as a starting point for consolidating and sharing our learning through our dialogue. In the following section, ‘ways of talking’ are analysed using a discursive practices approach.

7. Phase Change in a Community of Practice: Exploring the Issues and Gathering the Insights for “Ways of Talking”

Beverly Trayner and Paul Robinson

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Introduction

In September 2003 a group of people met up for a workshop at a conference about Communities and Technologies in Amsterdam to talk about phase change in Communities of Practice. Our objective was to reflect on the phase changes that took place during the process of preparing and participating in the Communities of Practice Dialogue in Setúbal with a view to trying to “capture” some of the learning that happened. This paper is a reflection on one of the sub-topics of the workshop: “ways of talking”.

Participants in the workshop were represented by members of the Setúbal Dialogue and by academics and practitioners who registered because they were interested in the notion of phase change. People who registered for the workshop were invited to join the workshop preparations online before the event and to continue the discussions and preparation of a workshop report after the event.

During the process of carrying out this workshop about “phase change in Setúbal” in Amsterdam, we realised that this workshop event was signalling another phase change in “the” community. The following description of “the Setúbal phase change” written for the Amsterdam workshop guidelines could be easily adapted for a description of “phase change in Amsterdam”.

In June 2002, a face-to-face dialogue was held in Setúbal, Portugal. About 27 people from 9 countries and several different online workshops attended. There were some “non-alumni” who participated and they played significant roles. This was a potent mix. A number of issues emerged, some of them painful. Objectives and expectations were varied: some brought case studies and live problems; others wished to see what would emerge in an offline forum. The core groups wished to explain a proposal to change the structure and institutional status of the community, to ensure its viability. This is the phase change of the title.

These changes were reflected in our discussions about the non-linear nature of phase change and the notion of a series of ongoing phase changes, rather than any one moment of phase change. We also discussed if these phase changes took place within individuals at different times as part of their *own* development, or if they were represented by *one* collective moment, or if they were a *combination* of both. In summary it seemed that these phase changes were represented by individual moments of phase change that fed into and were fed by a collective phase change that was signposted by an event, like “The Setúbal Dialogue” or “The Amsterdam Conference”. Seen like this, it may be helpful to relate phase change to Wenger’s

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

“temporal notion of identity” (1998:158). If we do, then phase change, like identity, could be seen as:

- 1) a work in progress;
- 2) shaped by efforts – both individual and collective – to create a coherence through time that threads together successive forms of participation in the definition of a person;
- 3) incorporating the past and future in the experience of the present;
- 4) representative of paradigmatic trajectories which “provide live material for negotiating and renegotiating identities” (ibid:156);
- 5) involving generational politics “with different degrees of emphasis on continuity and discontinuity as old-timers and newcomers fashion their identities in their encounter” (ibid.:157)

About this summary and final report

This paper has turned out not to be a summary of the discussions that took place in WebCrossing about “ways of talking”. Rather, it is an analysis of our *ways of talking* using a *discursive practices* approach. Analysing discursive practices has its origins in Michel Foucault’s use of discursive practices as a way of establishing what is accepted as ‘reality’ in any given society by analysing its discourse.

The first part of this paper is a brief description of discursive practices and a proposal as to why it is helpful to identify and analyse them. The second part of the paper is examples of our “ways of talking” through a discursive practices lens. We look at:

- a) Some signs and symbols of the journey,
- b) Some rituals of personal phase change including language rituals,
- c) Texts: genres and discourses
- d) Texts: categories that helped shape our discussions
- e) Texts: styles and metaphors we employed.

Although this is supposed to be a closing report, it is very incomplete and should be seen as a work-in-progress. We would like to continue working on the ideas and welcome (outside WebCrossing) any suggestions and disagreements you have with how you may or may not have been represented in *our* (Paul’s and my) text on *our* (everyone who participated in Setúbal and Amsterdam) discursive practices. In particular we should thank Geoff Walker for the perceptive and useful suggestions and comments he made (outside WebCrossing).



Discursive practices: origin & development

Discursive practices is a way of analysing how we establish our “truth” or “reality” through our (orders of) discourse. The term discourse includes texts, symbols and rituals. The concept of discursive practices is grounded in four insights about discourse:

- 1) social realities are discursively constructed;
- 2) discourse is context-bound;
- 3) discourse is social action,

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

- 4) meaning is negotiated in interaction rather than being present in one utterance.

<http://www2.soc.Hawaii.edu/css/anth/subfields/discpage.html>

Relating this to our summary, our aim is therefore to look at phase change in a community of practice as the renegotiation of our reality(-ies) through our discourse (our texts, symbols and rituals).

A discursive practice approach is based on the premise that the causal relationship between phase change and discursive practices is both multi-directional and dynamic. In other words, phase change is both a consequence of, and a reason for, changes in discursive practices. We think this symbiotic relationship between phase change and discursive practices could have a number of implications for building communities of practice.

Firstly, articulating and becoming more aware of the dynamics of discursive practices helps us become “players” of the practices, rather than subjects of them. This is true for all meta-level thinking and action. Moreover, a critical awareness of the dynamics at play in our discursive practices changes our actions. For example, many discussions took place before and after Setúbal about the “insider-outsider” issue. This led us to become ever more self-conscious about using the words “we”, “us” and “ours”. Each time the “we” word was used, the group questioned who was included, and by extension, who was excluded. Among other things this self-consciousness focused attention on our practices for greeting someone who entered the room and to specify the “we” each time it came up in discussion. It is a simple, but important, example of how analysing our own discourse led to changes in social practice.

Another reason why discursive practices are important is that they play a significant role in helping create a collective identity by becoming part of a community’s shared and negotiated repertoire. They become an integral part of “community membership” (Wenger, 1998:152) helping to form a collective identity that provides the context for our social action. Attention to discursive practices can enable (or disable) our action. This is illustrated in a story Nancy White told in one of the Practice group in CPsquare. It was entitled:

“How we talk about it matters”

Nancy’s story that starts the discussion, begins with a reference to a phase change:

Sometimes it is hard to identify that moment when something changes; when a tipping point is reached and things start to move in new directions. We may be too close to catch the moment, or too busy to sense it.

Although Nancy doesn’t refer to discursive practices, she does allude to it in one of the lessons learned about the phase change that took place in the project she is describing:

When the staff went out into the regions to start discussing their work, they realized they had a new view and way of talking about the online components of their work.

In other words, negotiating a shared discourse and mutually understandable signs for our practices is part of the process of developing a collective identity with a point

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

in its negotiation marking a phase change in the community that leads to social action.

The first part of this paper now concludes with four questions for further reflection in the light of our reflections on discursive practices and phase change(s) in Setúbal and Amsterdam:

1. Is it possible that attending to the signs, symbols and rituals of discursive practices in the processes of community building is a key element in the success (or not) of phase change in a distributed community of practice?
2. Do you agree that having common discursive practices helps create common norms, values and agendas (Bergquist & Szezepanska, 2002) and it is these discursive practices that help provide a meaningful context that enables us to “talk” and act across our disciplinary and geographical boundaries?
3. Was one of the reasons for the “success” felt by most people who participated in the Setúbal Dialogue and in Amsterdam at least partially a result of (unarticulated) attention by experienced community builders, like John Smith, to the signs, symbols and rituals of both the events and the design of the online spaces preceding and after the events?
4. Without attending to the processes of discursive practices that create a collective identity and which provide the context for social action, are we left with mere technological solutions and design blueprints for an absent community and tepid phase change?

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

Examples Of Signs, Symbols, Rituals, Categories And Texts In Our Phase Change(s): Amsterdam C & T 2003

(a) Signs and symbols

Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
A space set up for “us” in WebCrossing – both the Dialogue, post-Dialogue and Amsterdam C& T.	We are a group of people in CPSquare with something to discuss and things to do and a community to build!
Amsterdam C&T in a folder named: “Projects”.	We have a mission.
44 days ‘till	Our mission has a deadline.
Photos of people at the events	People from our group participate at outside events together.
Giving a name to “us”.	“We” exist (within, but separate from, CPSquare).
Post cards	Some people are included in the group but who are not physically here.
IM messages (increased number)	I want to touch base with other people in the group.
Increased number of post-event postings	People want to engage more with each other.
Summaries of conversations	We have said something worth recording and “publishing” outside the group.
Changing one’s personal photo in WebCrossing	How I want to be represented physically has changed.
Alasdair’s drawing.	This is “us”.
Windmill	Air/movement/direction in the group
Glasweg jokes	We “share” things, which someone outside the group won’t know.
(E)we	Through playing (with words) we show our seriousness at addressing the we/you dichotomy.
Flip-flop	A change between online/offline encounters.
Chocolate	We love Nancy!
Aussie	I am up-front and in your face.
Sitting together in the Amsterdam conference sessions	We are a “We”.
Among the last people to sit down in Alasdair’s session were: Paul, Ueli Patricia	This “We” supports Alasdair, a member of our group.
hijack	It is important to be attentive to the words one chooses for “our” actions.
Etienne Wenger’s presence	The author of a seminal book about CoPs mingles with us ☺

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

(b) Rituals that mark the phase change(s)

Entering WebCrossing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Getting a password and code to enter WebCrossing. ▪ Supplying a photo. ▪ Participating in a teleconference.
<i>Online communication phase change rituals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First posting ▪ First replying to a post ▪ Seeing someone's reply to your post ▪ Engaging ▪ Feeling ignored ▪ Feeling OK that people are listening even if they aren't posting. ▪ Playing a supportive role ▪ Taking on a leadership role ▪ Starting a new discussion thread ▪ Opening a new folder
F2f communication phase change rituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making first comment ▪ Telling first story ▪ "Liminal moments" e.g. walking into a room of people who you feel are already part of an existing community with practices e.g. walking into the workshop room at Roed Hoet. ▪ Observing/feeling other people's reactions and responses to you ▪ Feeling left out ▪ Feeling like you have something to contribute ▪ Taking the initiative ▪ Playing a leadership role ▪ Playing a supportive or peace-maker role ▪ Taking a stand
Changing to f2f	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Online preparations for f2f encounter ▪ A journey (to Setúbal or Amsterdam) ▪ Negotiating living arrangements (sometimes sharing floors and bathrooms with other people from CPSquare) ▪ First meeting
<i>Changing back to online</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hearing someone's tone of voice in their message ▪ Feeling empathy for people ▪ Developing a clearer sense of audience/other. ▪ Feeling more committed to the "group" ▪ Feeling responsible for fellow members' well-being ▪ Feeling accountable in one's actions to fellow members. ▪ Becoming "one another's work of art - a permanently evolving installation of our lived experiences of each other". (A. Honeyman)
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sadness ▪ Excitement ▪ Left out, if not staying till the very end

This table is being expanded into an article currently titled "Practices, phase changes and rubrics: a media cycle for community development" by John D. Smith and Beverly Trayner

Examples of speaking the “same language”

- English! As a first, second, third, language.
- Being “caught” by the Glasweg joke and understanding it.
- Understanding/using discourse from Communities of Practice publications.
- Using facilitative language i.e opening gaps for different people to speak, diffusing conflict.
- Conscious of financial constraints of different members of group.
- Attention to space and physical layout of room(s).

(c) Texts: genres and discourse

(1) Genres (written and spoken)

Written genres	Online	▪ Short postings/discussions
		▪ Narrative/story-telling
		▪ Discussion summaries
	F2f	▪ Academic papers
		▪ Case studies
▪ Workshop flip chart		

Spoken genres	Telephone	▪ Teleconference
		▪ Two or three people
	F2f	▪ Presenting a case
		▪ Informal talks and chats
		▪ Story telling
		▪ Academic papers
		▪ Workshop (large group/small group)

(2) Discourse

Comes from education, business, organisational, medical, consultancy, NGOs, theatre, improvisation.

We propose that one of the more exciting challenges of a Dialogue is the potential for discursive dissonance and discursive flows between people from these different discourse communities. This leads us also to reflect on the significance of the locations for these discursive flows: big group/ small group, shared living arrangements, other backchannels, talking with other people at the conference. We think that these aspects of “ways of talking” should be explored further in the future.

Another aspect we have earmarked for further exploration is our ongoing development of a shared discourse, or perhaps in this case repertoire, related to greetings and helping people through liminal spaces.

(d) Texts: categories that helped shape our discussions

A summary of the folders and discussions and the number of postings give a primitive indication of the volume of discussion generated in that category. Two

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

important discussions that took place at the Amsterdam workshop, but which are not represented here by a discussion folder are “trust” and “identity”.

Pre-Amsterdam

Introductions	36
Travelling on the path to Amsterdam	2
Phase change workshop topics	
1. Authority and legitimacy.	35
2. Ways of talking.	50
3. Rites of passage	25
4. Online and offline.	57
5. The reflective community.	12
6. Being a "founding outsider".	48
7. Phase Change Outcomes	46
Sub-total:	311
Organisational matters	
Planning meeting: 21 August 2003	4
Pre-meeting conversations	8
Correspondence with the conference organizers	6
Logistics	43
The online component	3
Topics / topic leaders	48
Amsterdam conference on Communities and Technology	6
The day's schedule	15
TOTAL:	444

Post-Amsterdam discussions

The Water Cooler	13
Community-friendly meetings and conferences:	
Upcoming conferences	16
Politics of relating in large groups	23
hard v soft	16
Peripatetic inquiry	8
Small workshops	11
Hijacking big conferences	59
What happened - stories of being face to face - ambitions for the future	
Who is "we"?	6
Dreams and Designs for the future	18
Community friendly designing - what are we learning? How can we do it better?	10
Workshop critique and next steps	16
Other discussions	
Phase change metaphors	33
Online-f2f-online	24
Signs	26
The individual and the community	7
TOTAL:	286

(e) Texts: Styles and metaphors we employed

Posting styles:

Ueli's stories
Paul's terse interjections
Alasdair's cryptic flights of fancy
Christina's care and support
Bev's outsider inside
Enone and Etienne: Trappist (is Enone logged on as Alasdair?)
Geoff's effusive teaching
Hemi's solid, sparse support
Inkeri's voice of community
Marc's integrity personified
Markus' single issue
Patricia's thoughtfulness
Susanne's accuracy

Metaphors:

CPSquare: catching the winds of change.
Phase change: water, condensation and flow.

Different uses of English from: Britain, Yorkshire (!), US, Germany, Switzerland, Kenya, South Africa, Australia, Holland, Austria, Israel, Denmark.

Desirable styles: listening to all sorts (tolerance for diversity), crossing intellectual, cultural and practical boundaries (learning through difference), accepting and defusing conflict, welcoming newcomers.

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8. Rites of Passage and Communities of Practice

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This discussion was focused on exploring the use of the concept 'rite of passage' with respect to communities. The concept 'rite of passage' goes back to 1909 and was introduced by Arnold van Gennip. The concept 'rite of passage' sounds intriguing and could function as a sensitizing concept to explore how CoPs transform, from the perspective that CoPs are living and developing groups of people. This means that they constantly change rather than just keeping and repeating fixed ways of doing.

The traditional view of rite of passage is something like:

- Lead by outside authority
- Change in individual social state
- Stages: separation-transition-incorporation

Possible transfer to community thinking:

- Lead by inside (intersubjective) authority
- Change in collective social state
- Stages seem closer together since CoPs do not undergo formal rites of passage

The question here is: are there informal rites of passage occurring during a community of practice's period of existence? The **transition stage** is of greatest importance. Van Gennip already labeled it as 'liminality'.

From a facilitator's perspective the challenge is to create and keep a liminal space (it must exist for a certain amount of time) in which transformation can take place – working on a threshold or border. From a research perspective a question to start from could be: What are the dimensions or characteristics of liminality or liminal spaces?

More questions: Is there something before and after (separation and incorporation) in the case of a community of practice? What is the relation between liminality and legitimate peripheral participation? The verb 'legitimate' puzzled me for a long time and still does. In Dutch one could easily translate LPP into 'gelegitimeerd perifeer participeren', but this sounds meaningless to me. I often use the word 'erkennen' (recognize) to make clear that participation is much about the recognition of the (possible) contribution of a person. Recognition of that (possible) contribution is a stipulation for (peripheral) participation.

During the workshop we talked a lot about holding the (or a) space. Maybe we should distinguish several types of spaces. Then liminal space is a space that functions like a threshold to another social state (of a CoP) – another way of doing or being.

9. Concluding Remarks: an unfolding trajectory

John D. Smith, Fiona Peterson, Paul Robinson and Beverly Trayner

“Learning itself is an improvised practice: A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice. It is not specified as a set of dictates for proper practice.”

-- Lave & Wenger, p. 93.

In the social construct of our community of practice, phase change (and learning) have unfolded as the result of many interactions in small settings that support improvisation: our dialog, our transitions and their reifications are serving to create a common history, relationships of trust and mutual endeavour leading to collective and changing identities.

This paper is the result of a focus on **phase change in a community of practice**. Our experience confirms Schon’s claim that peer support and alternating of leadership roles is important for fostering innovation (1987) and, we would add, improvement of practice. The ebb and flow of participants contributing at different times during these phase changes has contributed to dynamic social processes and an evolving community.

Through the shared experience and reflections expressed in this collection of notes, we have attempted to move a body of knowledge forward in articulating, strengthening and shaping aspects of our professional practice. Personal transformation on a small or large scale has been a real outcome of the shared experiences for some participants.

While the processes of the phase change have been stimulating, producing a tangible outcome has proved to be rather more difficult. As Creech and Willard (2001) point out, a **“knowledge network” is more “work” than “net.”** It is one thing to experience something; it is another to harness the energy and drive to transform shared learning into a more durable record. It is yet another thing to identify specific projects and activities considered worth following up, and then to find people interested, willing and able to take up the challenge. And then you have to find the time to actually do it.

We suggest two possible approaches. One approach is to take a more free form style with little or no formal structure and the potential for developing creativity from “chaos”. A second approach, proposed by Creech and Willard (2001), would be to determine the shared strategic intention of a knowledge network, identify specific network objectives then select projects or activities which support achievement of those objectives. Different people will feel comfortable with different approaches. Our own phase changes have tended to represent the former approach bringing with it both advantages and disadvantages.

In an article from the Journal of the Organization Development Network, Verna Allee advocates that organizational development practitioners partner with knowledge management champions and press for organizations to learn real collaboration for the creation of new knowledge, rather than merely cooperate (2000).

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

Real collaboration requires trust with the construct of organizational trust described as “positive expectations individuals have about the intent and behaviors of multiple organizational members based on organizational roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies” (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2000). Through shared endeavour, common history and social relationships, collective identity may emerge (Daniel, 2002). Through real collaboration, trust may be created as people work together over time (Cohen and Prusak, 2001).

Some tangible advice

In addition to the insights already presented in this paper, during the online, post-face-to-face discussions, John Smith offers the following guidance to leaders in communities of practice, based partly on his experience with Nancy White in the Nahcotta “Muckabout”. John proposes that the roots of his reflection are in Setúbal and Amsterdam and that reflecting on the processes may help the design of future phase change events.

During the online set-up we can collect, refine and organize:

- bios, background, context
- questions gathered from the registration form - a way of forcing introductions
- offers for presentations or leadership at various levels
- information to support room-shares, transportation, plans for sharing chocolate, etc.
- individual statements about "what I want out of it" or “what interests or communities of practice I represent”
- debates on some fundamental dichotomy
- information on tools and platforms participants are or have been using (just to get a sense of experience ranges)

During the online follow-up we collect and provide for:

- sharing PowerPoints, papers or joint products
- sharing and commentary on photos from the event
- posting URLs, books and other references: what two people want to share might be of value to the rest of the group
- ‘lost socks’, follow-up of a logistical sort
- posting final participant roster
- summarizing and reporting to reveal and record some of the shared learning, and to identify significant or promising areas for further work
- launch of future projects / collaboration

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

Most of these themes are explored further in an article titled "*Practices, phase changes and rubrics: a media cycle for community development,*" by John Smith and Beverly Trayner.

An alternative to the task-oriented approach is to think of the on-line / face-to-face / on-line 'flip flop' in process terms under three headers. Paul Robinson describes these in terms of the set-up but thinks that they apply in the obverse to the follow-up too:

Personas: Experimenting with personas is a key part of adult development and change. The on-line environment is a uniquely rich place to try out different aspects of persona: with the added frisson that it is followed by face to face.

Tacit knowledge: Tacit knowledge sits in actions rather than in the cognitive realm. People are natural-born imitators, and this works on-line. The activity of on-line is recursive story-telling: the tacit knowledge lies in the way that we tell stories and respond to them. The on-line phase allows people to meet face to face for the first time having already got the issues of "who we are" somewhat sorted.

Inside outside: In a healthy community people can move in and out of different subgroups seamlessly: who is in a particular group is not so important, which means that exclusion can be less of an issue too. Some of the time at Setúbal we demonstrated this. On-line we get used to the idea that different people are attending at different times: we get used to the idea of speaking to a space and accepting what comes back, rather than having expectations that are conditioned by the manners and customs of f2f conversation. This is a great way of rehearsing for the ever-changing subgroups in a f2f community.

These concepts and ideas from John Smith and Paul Robinson are represented graphically in the Overview of this paper. A cyclical interpretation is proposed for this illustration, demonstrating that impetus can be sustained for the community over time.

'Hijacking' Conferences and Building Bridges

Finally, in taking the "creativity through chaos" approach we have been left with some fundamental omissions in our paper. There were several critical moments during "Amsterdam" that represented important issues, dynamics and social processes which ran through the phase change but which have not been addressed or reified here. We briefly describe the incidents with a view to exploring them more fully in the future.



After two days of academic presentations in a hot amphitheatre, with the audience seated in rows facing the stage, Etienne Wenger was scheduled to provide his final conclusions. At the last moment Etienne, Alasdair, and a few others rearranged the

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

room so approximately 200 people could sit in two rows in a large circle. Etienne spoke briefly from the centre and then suddenly handed the microphone to several individuals who talked about the work they were doing with specific communities and then invited stories from participants, which he wove into his own presentation. While on the one hand this led to comments like “This showed the power of communities and people relating to each other even in big groups” it also led to considerable discomfort from some participants who considered it “too much of that touchy feely stuff” and “not enough critique.”

This finale was orchestrated in the context of several incidents led by Alasdair Honeyman in which he actively challenged the spatial and power dynamics of the conference as a whole. After the conference and back online, John suggested that what happened could be part of “our” repertoire of “hijacking” a conventional conference (alluding to the way he and Bronwyn Stuckey had added a significant thread to the Montreal E-Learn Conference in the Fall of 2002). In using the word “hijack” John was referring to ways of attaching a smaller component to a larger conference both to influence the larger event and to appropriate the host event’s infrastructure for a new conversation.

The use of the word “hijack” (and the activities led by Alasdair) led to a serious and critical challenge by one member of the workshop who considered it manipulative. The post-workshop online phase allowed for these challenges, reflections on those challenges and discussion about them. However, certain separate and related issues were raised which we would like to flag for future consideration: (1) “ways of talking” at a conventional conference that both respects the academic genre while playing with it e.g. improvisation and the use of story-telling; (2) exploring spatial issues in a conventional conference; (3) the opportunities for inducing phase change if we use a conference hosted by another Institution; (4) including critical and challenging voices into the collective identity.



Our Future

*“We must work out the connection
between the praxis of the relationship,
talk, and action in the moment.”*

-- Alasdair Honeyman

We need to “work” at our relationships and our professional practice. This will continue online and in various activities, which may include “hijacking”, “hitching onto” and engaging with conferences organized by others. It may include organizing our own conferences, too!

In addition to the basics of “practice,” and “community development,” topics that we see as needing work include:

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

- Refining and grooming our language (belatedly following the lead in Lave and Wenger): what kind of talk do we need to have *within the practice* of cultivating and supporting communities of practice? Might we need to minimize our “*talking about*” the practice?

“It is thus necessary to refine our distinction between *talking about* and *talking within* a practice.”

- Considering what other fields we need to borrow from in order to advance our understanding of communities of practice and our competence in supporting them. How should we go about appropriating what we need and to what extent do we need to re-state or re-shape their insights? Fields or disciplines that come to mind include: improvisation, story-telling, appreciative inquiry, technologies of all sorts, management science and organizational metrics.
- Asking how can we become more sophisticated in dealing with all the contextual issues that we find in the growth and development of communities of practice? What works or makes sense in one social “place” doesn’t elsewhere.

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Appendix 1 - Workshop Announcement

Full Day Workshop for C&T 2003, Amsterdam

Phase change in a community of practice: exploring the issues and gathering insights

Organisers: John D. Smith, community organizer and technologist, LearningAlliances, USA John.Smith@LearningAlliances.net (contact organizer); Alasdair Honeyman, Executive Coach, Health Process Consultant and Primary Care Physician, London UK alasdair.honeyman@onet.co.uk; Angela Lacerda Nobre, Lecturer, Escola Superior de Ciências Empresariais ESCE-IPS, Setúbal, Portugal alnobre@mail.telepac.pt; Beverly Trayner, Lecturer, Escola Superior de Ciências Empresariais ESCE-IPS, Setúbal, Portugal btrayner@esce.ips.pt; Elisabeth Davenport, Professor of Information Management in the School of Computing, Napier University, Edinburgh, Scotland e.davenport@napier.ac.uk; Enone Honeyman, MRCpsych, Psychiatrist St George's London, UK enonehoneyman@aol.com; John Gøtze, Agency for Public Management, Danish Government, Denmark john@slashdemocracy.org; Marc J.J. Coenders, MLD, Leer Architectuur, The Netherlands marc.coenders@leerarchitectuur.nl; Paul Robinson, Hon. Research Associate Sowerby Centre for Health Informatics, Newcastle University; Primary Care Physician, UK. paul@scarbyts.demon.co.uk; Patricia Arnold, Research Associate Faculty of Educational Science University of the Bundeswehr Hamburg, Germany patricia.arnold@unibw-hamburg.de; Susanne Justesen, Entrepreneur and consultant, Innoversity, Denmark and USA susanne@innoversity.dk.

Structure of the workshop:

This full day workshop that will consist of a number of sections covering different aspects of phase change in distributed communities of practice. These will feature in-depth examination of one case where we think a phase-change in an emerging dispersed community of practice occurred. The case features an account of one of the threads leading to the development of CPsquare—a nascent community of practice. In the spirit of the co-production of meaning amongst people, we will use an appreciative enquiry model, to invite contributions from potential workshop participants to share their comparable or contrasting experiences. This activity will be offered both prior to meeting face to face in an online environment and at the workshop.

This workshop extends the usual workshop format to explore and demonstrate the possibilities of phase change in practice. Six weeks prior to the workshop at the C&T conference in September 2003, each of the organizers will present a position statement in an online discussion space to which participants will be invited to join, share their stories and to ask clarifying questions. The position statements, the online discussion and the face-to-face session will all address a series of questions around the focal points described below. The questions we will use to explore each focal point, or issue, include:

- *What was observable around this issue?*
- *What was the actual experience?*
- *What forces were at play?*
- *What actions or interventions occurred?*
- *What were the outcomes?*
- *What was the logic of the change?*
- *Why does this matter?*

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

In the morning of the face-to-face workshop, there will be moderated interaction to present the main case study, recapitulate the online discussion and elicit experience from workshop participants that helps illuminate the main case.

In the afternoon session (the structure will depend on the number of registrants for the day) small groups will work with the morning's contributions and discuss phase change as a pattern of development in communities of practice. The groups will reflect on what the discussion might mean for our understanding and for our practice. In a concluding session, the group will collaborate on organising and presenting these reflections as an online resource. There will be an opportunity for some online discussion after the workshop. The workshop should be limited to 30 participants. Flip charts and a projector (i.e., from a computer) will be needed.

Background to the main case being presented:

CPsquare is a community of practice about communities of practice. Its development has several threads, many of which intersect in the case being presented here. Etienne Wenger, John Smith, Bronwyn Stuckey and colleagues conduct an online workshop that is offered several times a year. It has evolved a distinctive design, an archive of the interactions and a growing group of affiliates, associates and workshop alumni. This workshop has attracted a very diverse group of participants with a broad spectrum of expertise: some have attended in their organisational role, while others have sought personal development. The 'stuff' of the workshops includes theory, case studies, and the practice of inquiry, much of which is aimed at harnessing the improvisational nature of community and of learning. Although CPsquare entails other threads, the workshop has proved to be an important vehicle in the development of; new ideas and practices, technologies and their implementation, mechanisms for networking of contributors and participants and styles of collaboration.

Since its inception, the Foundations of Communities of Practice workshop has been offered online 10 times, and there are currently about 300 people with access to the Web Crossing system on which it is currently offered. The social and technical structure is generally considered to be effective. For most participants the experience of interacting in the workshop is intense, and many alumni become involved in follow-on projects, as mentors in subsequent workshops, in collaborative projects or in bringing others into the network. This bonding may be partly attributed to a number of factors including; the nature of the issues being explored, the dedication and insight of the core members of the community, the way community values are expressed in the Web Crossing platform (i.e., support of community interactions and resources). Access to the workshop community and its resources depends on what you want to do: workshops from the start require a fee to be paid, though alumni participate in further sessions and access the archive or other project spaces under a variety of arrangements.

In June 2002, a face-to-face dialog was held in Setúbal, Portugal. 27 people from 9 countries and different online workshops attended. There were some "non-alumni" who participated and who played significant roles. This was a diverse and potent mix. Many issues emerged, some of them painful. Objectives and expectations were varied: some brought case studies and live problems; others wished to see what would emerge in an offline forum. The core group wished to explain a proposal to change the structure and institutional status of the community, to ensure its viability. This is the phase change of the title.

Focal Points

We have selected the following issues as focal points for the workshop:

1. **Authority and legitimacy.** Do 'core' members of a community have greater authority to change things? Without formal leadership, can change be legitimized? Can newcomers shape the course of a community of practice?
2. **Ways of talking.** Finding effective ways to talk (large groups vs. small, walks to and from lodging vs. "sessions", case studies vs. "inquiries") were challenging domains of experimentation. Does phase change require new genres and new language? What might this mean? Where do the new ways come from and what happens to the "old"?
3. **Rites of passage.** At the Setúbal meeting, plans to 'hatch' the next stage of CPsquare were discussed. These were contested by participants comfortable with the ideology, modes of address and structures of the 'earlier' version. How easy is it for CoPs to survive different stages of development? Can personal growth be aligned with community transformation? Does phase change mean new members, or are existing community members 'renewed'?
4. **Online and offline.** The Setúbal dialog, an offline interaction, drew much of its power from the online preparation and work of many of the participants. The 'maintenance' of the experience, after the week's event, has also happened online. What is the status of 'visitors', or those who were not involved in the pre and post online activity? How active and how constant do members of a community have to be? Can a community be 'held' by a few dedicated members? How do strangers and visitors affect the status quo?
5. **The reflective community.** CPsquare may be seen as a metalevel, or 'second order' organization, that drives exchange of experience among practitioners from a wide range of domains who have an apostolic role in their different professions. To what extent can the CPsquare experience inform local practice? Are there transferable or foundation experiences? Can lessons be learned? How complex are these?
6. **Being a "founding outsider".** During the four and a half days, a majority of the participants reported that they felt like "outsiders" in one way or another—and at one point or another. What was that about? Is that kind of discomfort a correlate of learning depth in a social learning environment?
7. **Phase-change outcomes.** Many participants had the strong sense that a phase change had occurred, but there would be a remarkable diversity of accounts of what exactly the change was. Would someone outside "the community" be able to recognize the significance of the event or of the change?

Appendix 2 – Cast of Characters

Etienne Wenger is a thought-leader and independent consultant based in the US. He founded CPsquare in 2003. Etienne@ewenger.com

John D. Smith is based in the US and has relevant expertise in the design and facilitation of online workshops and face-to-face dialogs. He coaches communities of practice, their leaders and their sponsors. He is a community steward at CPsquare. John.Smith@LearningAlliances.net

Paul Robinson is a family physician who also works in health informatics. His relevant expertise is educational (particularly group work and communication skills teaching) and in informatics (particularly the ways that human and manufactured computational systems interact). (Contact through John Smith)

Alasdair Honeyman, Executive Coach, Health Process Consultant and Primary Care Physician, London, UK. alasdair.honeyman@onet.co.uk

Elisabeth Davenport is Professor of Information Management in Napier University Business School, UK. She is head of the Social Informatics Group in the School of Computing at Napier, and a Board Member of the International Democracy Centre there. An eminent international researcher, her current areas of teaching and research include knowledge management, communities of practice, strategic information management, social intelligence and ethnographic methods in the workplace. e.davenport@napier.ac.uk

John Gøtze has worked with e-governance for more than 10 years. He was probably the first Dane to get a PhD in participatory design, but left research for a career in the civil service. He worked in Sweden for 5 years building the Swedish e-government strategy. Today, he is a senior advisor in the Danish National IT and Telecom Agency. john@slashdemocracy.org

Beverly Trayner, MSc, Development Management, Lecturer, Escola Superior de Ciências Empresariais, Setúbal, Portugal btrayner@esce.ips.pt

Patricia Arnold, PhD is a Research Associate, Faculty of Educational Science, University of the Bundeswehr, Hamburg, Germany. She has worked and has been involved in research on e-learning since 1996 with a special focus on online communities within the educational realm. patricia.arnold@unibw-hamburg.de

Marc Coenders, has worked in the design of networks in which intra-organizational communities of practice are embedded and in the facilitation of these communities. His current areas of interests are: the creation of space for learning, learning infrastructures, knowledge productivity. marc.coenders@leerarchitectuur.nl

Susanne Justesen, Entrepreneur and consultant, Innoversity, Denmark and USA susanne@innoversity.dk

Fiona Peterson, MEd, PhD and Senior Lecturer at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, leading the MA (Virtual Communication). She teaches and facilitates online collaborative projects for graduate students with international business mentors. Her research interest is knowledge sharing networks for global education. fiona.peterson@rmit.edu.au

Notes on Phase Change in a Community of Practice

Geoff Walker, MSc is a PhD candidate and is Information Systems Development Officer at Newcastle City Council in the UK. He takes a particular interest in how differing organisational cultures use Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to support their core activities and advises community-based organisations on how to make the most appropriate use of ICTs. geoffw@communityknowledge

Christina Merl works as a freelance journalist, translator and English language trainer for adults in Austrian continuing education facilities and business companies. She is a PhD candidate at the University of Vienna. Her dissertation deals with a technology-supported cross-border communications agency overlaid by a CoP. The focus is on cross-cultural knowledge management, i.e., cross-cultural knowledge-sharing and collaborative learning on a multicultural and trans-national team basis. christina.merl@chello.at

Ueli Scheuermeier consults world-wide on agricultural and economic development. He's based in Switzerland and leads the Rural Innovation Practice Group at CPsquare. uscheuermeier@dplanet.ch

Nancy White teaches and consults in online interaction and facilitation. She was an organizer of the Setúbal dialog, did not attend the C&T Workshop, but did participate in some of the online conversations after we met in Amsterdam. She's based in Seattle, Washington. nancyw@fullcirc.com

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