



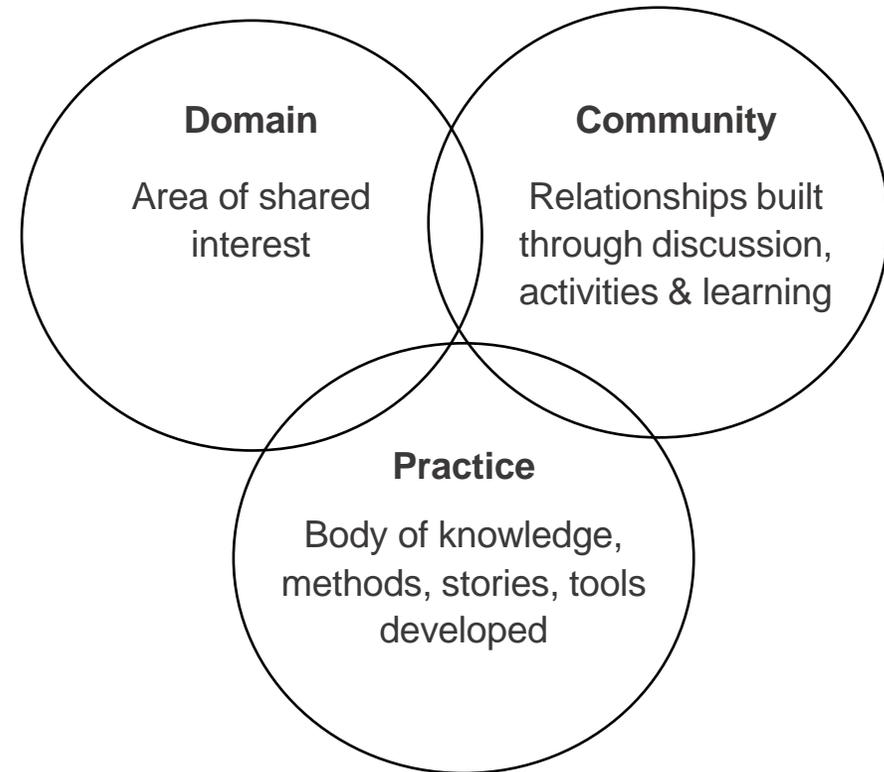
# Putting the heart back into Higher Education:

Reconnecting and  
learning from HE  
Communities of Practice  
to enable hybrid ways of  
working

Communities of Practice in  
Higher Education  
ODHE Network 2021

# What is a Community of Practice (CoP)?

A group of people who perform similar functions and share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly



# Aims



**To develop and share practice** for the benefit of staff in HE working in OD roles, **around enabling and sustaining communities of practice in HE**



To consider **the impact for learning and application within the context of 'hybrid working'** notably how the conditions created enable opportunities for stakeholder led, continuous improvement (lean), strategic alignment and cultural change in the sector

# Collaborating team



DANIELA BULTOC  
ENABLING YOU TO EXCEL

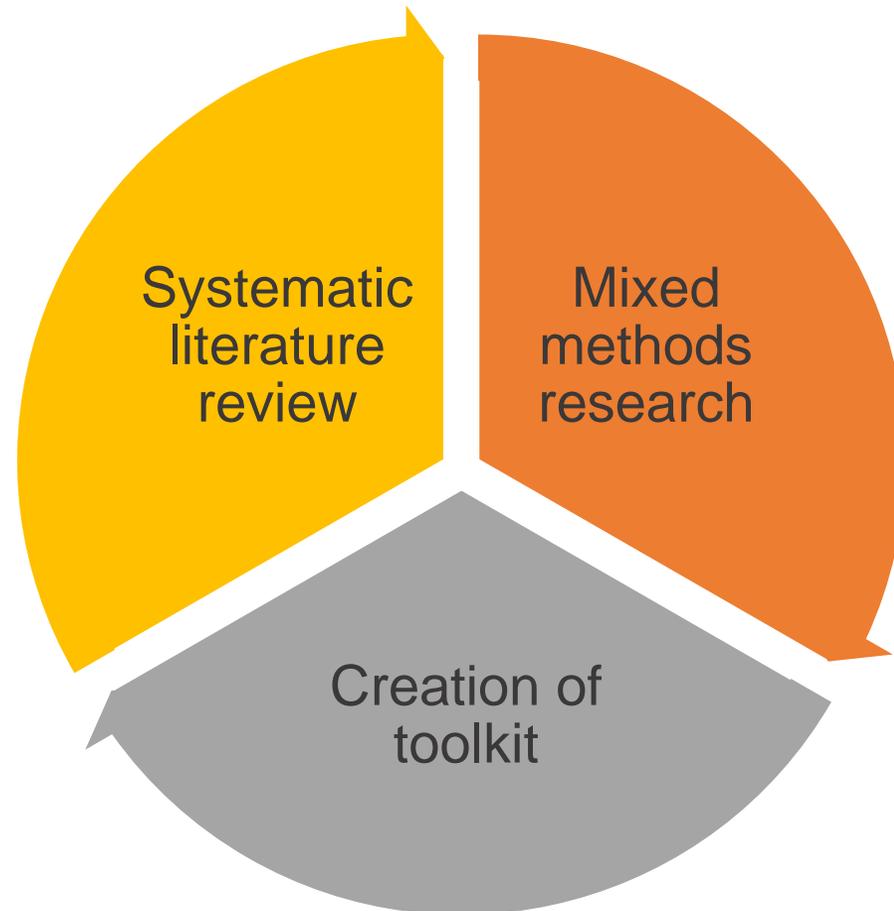
**SOLENT**  
UNIVERSITY



**BU**  
Bournemouth  
University



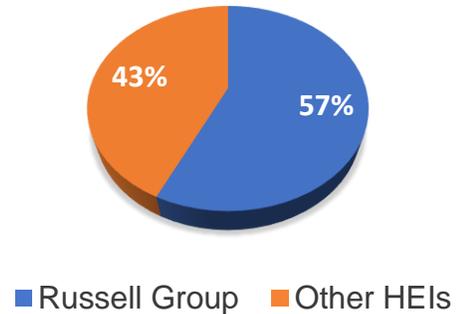
# Activities



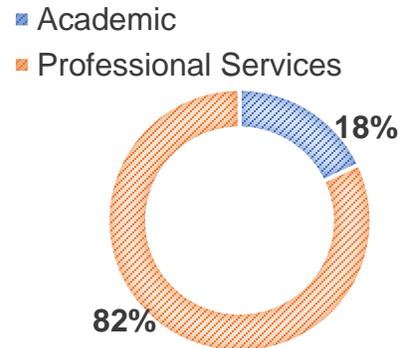
# Respondent participation

## 52 Survey respondents

### Type of UK HEI



### Job family



## 7 Focus group participants



2/7 Russell Group  
5/7 Other UK HEIs



3/7 London based HEIs  
1/7 Scottish HEIs



3/7 CoP Members  
4/7 Change/Improvement Practitioners

# Survey headlines: CoPs in HEIs



## About the CoPs

**2 in 3** respondents were members of **1 or 2 CoPs**

**43%** were established during the pandemic; 69% in last 2 years; 80% in last 5 years



## Covid-19 experiences

**3 in 5** respondents identified increased membership, participation & accessibility in participating virtually

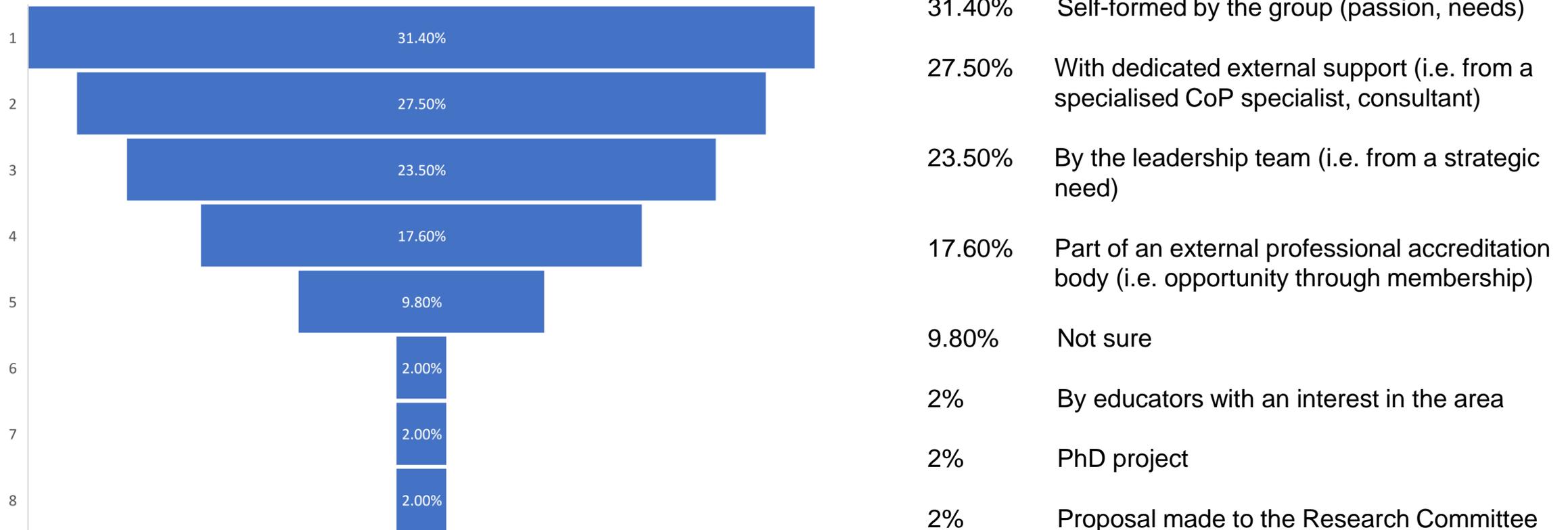


## Learning from CoPs

**3 in 5** respondents identified the importance of leadership and/or a values focus (including diversity, flexibility, inclusion)

# Survey headlines: CoPs in HEIs

## CoP Formation Process





# Survey headlines: Response to hybrid



## Policy provision

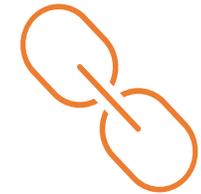
**45%** of respondents identified that a **hybrid working policy was in development** at their institution



## HEI approach

**2 in 5** respondents identified their **institutions are taking a flexible approach**

**1 in 2** respondents identified a **split of on and off campus**



## Terminology

Common terms are **'Hybrid'** (33%) **'Flexible'** (17%) **'Blended/ Mix/ Combination'** (17%)

# Literature Review: Key findings



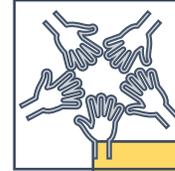
## Communities of practice (CoPs)

- CoPs emerge from social learning theory and there is a correlation to social constructivism.
- CoPs enable social capital and will become the main differentiator between Universities due to their facilitation of internal mobilisation, knowledge and alignment.



## Higher education (HE)

- The sector context is one of change and organisational transformation with a greater need for efficiencies, maximising internal resources, knowledge and expertise.



## High performing teams (HPT)

- There is a correlation between CoPs, HPT, and virtual teams. Some of the common characteristics are a shared purpose; intentional creation of conditions that enable psychological safety & trust; innovative practices; distributed and situational leadership and; core values including compassion, inclusion and participation.



## Hybrid ways of working

- Current context requires for different approaches to work, in terms of place and time, in addition to processes that are purposeful, agile and flexible.
- The hybrid approach enables a shared and distributed leadership model.

# Research methodology



# CoP learning to enable hybrid working

## Enablers

### Tangible

Collaboration

**Increased accessibility working virtually**

Different levels of group discussions

**Increased understanding of colleagues work/life**

Provision of toolkits and defined processes to establish ways of working

### Intangible

Be clear on 'Why' and identify what's in it for me

Networking, meeting others – active participation & citizenship

Incidental connections and enabling connection spaces.

Enabling connection spaces

Building communities cross disciplines and cross institutions

## Challenges

### Tangible

Space and social distancing

Limited resources and support

The lack of practical outcomes

The lack of clarity around roles & responsibilities

Communication including onboarding new members

Enabling participation from all members

### Intangible

Impact of virtual/zoom fatigue

Time and permissions

Capacity to enact small gestures that nudge participation and engagement

Impact on engagement where no clear practical outcomes

Managing diversity of working arrangements and preferences for virtual/in person meetings

# Thematic analysis

## Critical success factors for CoPs

- Executive sponsorship.
- Alignment with strategic goals.
- Clarity of purpose and vision.
- Commitment to the reciprocity of peer learning.
- Intentional co-creation and nurturing of shared values e.g. inclusion & flexibility.
- Diverse membership.
- Use of appropriate forms of communications, tools, regular meetings and calls to action.

## Shared characteristics between CoPs & HPTs

- Self determination theory is evident in both CoPs and HPTs where you see autonomy, competence and connection which each play a crucial part in intrinsic motivation; this helps to clarify/challenge organisational 'consent driven' behaviour.

## Applied learning from CoPs

- Evidence shows that CoPs and hybrid practices work, especially when there is a shared purpose, flexibility and shared values; 1 in 3 respondents identified learning from CoPs to enhance culture.
- CoPs disrupt 'them and us' and hierarchical/power dynamics in organisational behaviour, through equity in voice and values of inclusion and participation.

## Distributed and situational leadership

- The importance of distributed leadership.
- The role of a CoP lead and a HPT leader can be very similar, holding the space so that it is safe to talk and share, holding the journey and not the outcome, enabling the sense of connection, and ensuring a sense of purpose and value for the CoP participants.

## Provision of hybrid practice and policy

- Most Universities in our study have adopted and developed their own practices for hybrid working although only 1 in 2 respondents had a formal policy in place.

# Learning around CoPs



**A CoP is not a training session; learning is through engagement**



**Value is very important; the benefits need to be well articulated and clear outcomes**



**Everyone is a leader; distributed and situational leadership is a key enabler of participation**



**A CoP must be a 'safe' space, enabling authenticity and openness and responsive to individual preferences around participation**



**Enabling and encouraging ownership enables participation**



**Online access has made participation easier**

# Summary points: putting the heart back in Higher Education

## **CoP enable the human centered approach:**

- Titles left at the door
- Diversity appreciated
- People can come together and be accepted and feel included
- Follow the energy, passion and need

## **Holding the space:**

- Meaningful gathering and purposeful work that benefits everyone in the room
- Listen, share and challenge each other

## **Re-connecting to the core of what academia is:**

- Generating and sharing knowledge
- Collaborating and participating in the learning process
- Sustainable and flexible approaches to engagement, organisational and societal growth

# ODHE Network Toolkit: Showcase



**Co-creating your communities of practice**

**Toolkit**

Communities of Practice in HE on behalf of ODHE Network August 2021

## Working definition

**A Community of Practice or CoP is:**

“a group of people who perform similar functions and share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”\*



[Watch Etienne Wenger \(2.47 mins\)](#)

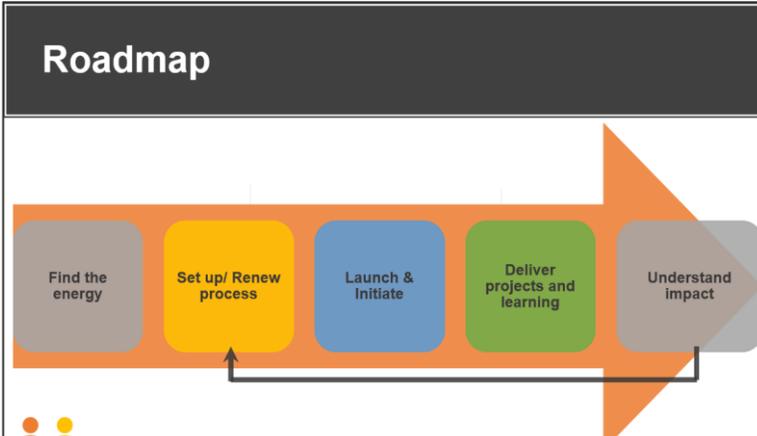
[Read an introduction](#)

\*https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

## How responsibilities can be shared across different roles

	Sponsor	Community Lead/s	Project/Activity Lead/s	Members (active or occasional)	OD Team
<b>Purpose</b>	Tie the CoP and the benefits to the University's strategic objectives	Lead CoP and enable CoP organisation, communication and information sharing	Lead projects/ activities (objectives) to enhance practice around priorities identified by members	Participate and share knowledge and experiences. Contribute to prioritisation of projects/activities	Enable CoP set up, find the energy, identify the sponsor, facilitate workshops, support launch
<b>Delivering objectives</b>	Work with CoP Lead/s to support Project/Activity Lead/s and any other roles identified	Support Project Leads and members in delivering objectives	Enable team approach to delivery of objectives through members and other colleagues	Contribute to problem solving and ideas generation	Facilitate CoP connections intra/inter University
<b>Celebrating impact</b>	Advocate acceptance and recognition for the community – promote success!	Manage links with Sponsor & OD Team, on behalf of the CoP	Lead and promote impact and continuous improvement in CoP	Promote and contribute to continuous improvement in the CoP	Provide ongoing support to CoP in running and renewal
<b>Reviewing and renewing</b>	Measure and evaluate the community's contributions to University objectives	Support evaluation of CoP and renewal	Support evaluation of projects/activities and contribute to CoP evaluation and renewal	Identify ways to enhance CoP effectiveness e.g. ways of working, promotion.	Measure and evaluate the community's contributions to University objectives
<b>Resourcing</b>	Allocate budget and resources for the community				Allocate budget and resources for the community

## Roadmap



- Find the energy
- Set up/ Renew process
- Launch & Initiate
- Deliver projects and learning
- Understand impact

## Be creative with different tools and techniques



**Use polls to:**

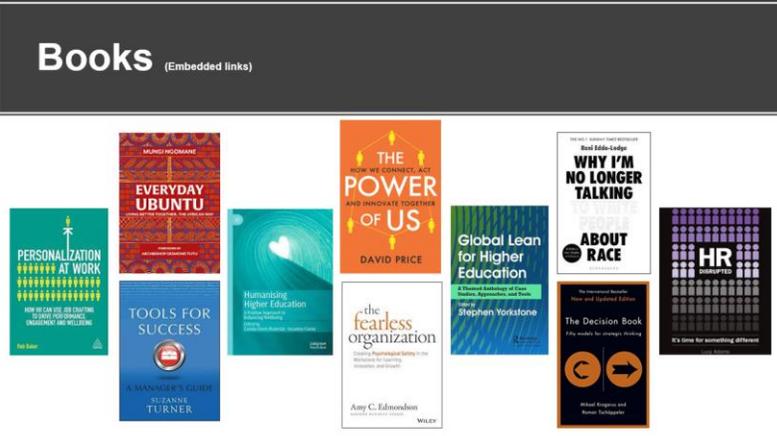
- Enable and model participation
- Enable open and honest contributions
- Surface diversity of thoughts and ideas
- Build consensus
- Nudge thoughts and ideas into new areas
- Build the story



**Use story-telling to:**

- Build and foster a collective identity
- Align and 'live' values
- Create a compelling case for 'Why'
- Enable participation and ownership
- Celebrate community impact

## Books (Embedded links)

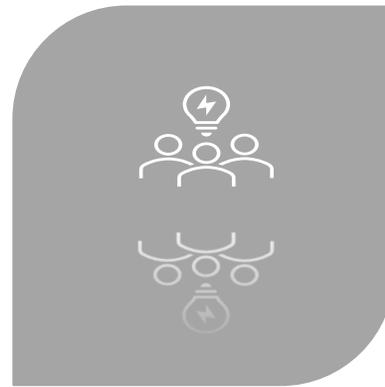


# Join us: Communities of Practice in HE

(Embedded links)



[Communities of Practice in HE](#)



[Bimonthly practice workshop](#)



[Virtual collaboration](#)