

Influential Journeys Through Dental Communities of Practice: A Phenomenological Based Enquiry Approach

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KEY WORDS

Community of Practice; Dental; Professional Journey;
Phenomenological.

ABBREVIATIONS

COP(s) – Community of Practice(s)

All authors made substantive intellectual contributions to this study by making substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and giving final approval of the version to be published.

Accepted for publication: September 30th 2017

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FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE: *The authors have indicated that they have no financial relationships relevant to this article to disclose.*

Funded by: University of Kent

What this paper adds:

Journeys within Communities of Practice (CoP) are both under explored or theorised. This study offers a new perspective to those wishing to share or renegotiate the power distribution, particularly within a professional CoP, through full and legitimate participation. Groups who may be underrepresented and have limited professional legitimacy might be particularly interested. By identifying the significant features of the journey from the periphery to central core participation in a dental CoP, the pathway may be illuminated for those who may wish to embark on a similar journey in a professional CoP elsewhere.

Abstract

Objective: To identify meaningful factors influencing the dental professional's transit within Communities of Practice (CoPs).

Methods: A phenomenological methodology approach was taken to conduct interviews with 7 dental elites (plus 1 pilot interview) identified through purposive sampling; all had held central positions of influence within dental CoPs; all had journeyed to those positions from the periphery of the Community of Practice (CoP). A semi-structured phenomenological based interview schedule was utilised for data collection and thematic analysis was employed for data analysis.

Results: Coding led to the identification of four progressive and interlinked emergent themes related to the meanings that the individual participants placed on their journeys undertaken from peripheral participation to the centre of CoP: Self Awareness; Social Awareness; Cultural Awareness and Transformatory Awareness.

Conclusions: The journeys undertaken by individuals navigating their own trajectory within a dental CoP require a significant undertaking of awareness development across a number of significant areas. Successful negotiation of those sites requires a preparedness for growth, adaption and evolution. The implications for practice and suggestions for other research are included.

Introduction: Communities of Practice (CoPs) have variously been defined by a number of theorists, academics and commentators, in particular in the seminal text by Lave and Wenger (1991). For this study CoPs were considered to be: a collection of individuals united by a mutual and related curiosity and inquisitiveness in a common subject area and an enthusiasm for advancing, appertaining to that subject area, through interaction, discourse, and dialogue. These elements present a forum, mutual situation, or circumstance in which a variety of viewpoints can be exchanged, concepts challenged and explored, and emerging themes advanced, relevant to common areas of interest. Through discourse and exchanges, perspectives can be shared and subject areas advanced.

CoPs have been the focus for previous research studies, many of which have explored participation. The concept and potential of CoPs, linked to Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural perspective on learning, was considered by Lave and Wenger (1991) who linked the principles of socio-cultural theories to practical application within a CoP. These theories gave insight into the potentially transformatory experiences of participation within a CoP, which affect the development of professional identity and professional progression. These experiences can be understood in terms of the individual or extrapolated to a whole professional group or set of groups, as is the case for dental care professionals who seek to operate within dental CoPs, which are often dominated by well-established hubs or cores on which professional status has long been conferred.

The socio-cultural position draws on the work of socio-cultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), linking the function of learning and development within a socially inspired context. The literature review identified that both newcomers or novices and established experts could pursue shared issues and concerns, and thus engage in activity that is mutually meaningful. Previous literature examined and considered the individual transformation process through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Daniel, 2005) within a community, which facilitates transformation of self and group identity through participation, shared knowledge, values, and practices (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave and Wenger, 1991). From the review of previous literature it was concluded that although individual learning is important, the personal is grounded in the collective (i.e, the influence of others) and knowledge is constructed under social constraints and restricted by those who seek to influence it (Stahl, 2000).

Much of the research emanates from previous studies which note that CoP participation offers a basis on which to explore professional groups that wish to evolve societal identity and status. It is recognised that societal status is centred and influenced by a group of elite individuals residing within the core of any particular community. These groups are self-

perpetuating and operate through mutual reliance. It has been necessary to review these themes in order to explore how individuals might gain access to increased professional progression through interaction with CoP activities. It is necessary to provide definitions and examine concepts in relation to continuous development of professional identity and social learning theory, to explore links that associate these concepts to social learning, and finally, to explore the participation and progression within a CoP of those seeking further meaning. In essence, the literature review illuminates the journey for those who are located on the periphery of a CoP and seek to journey forth within it to occupy a central position.

Theorists suggest that participation within a CoP facilitates individual construction or reconstruction of a sense of self, both personally and with respect to the group within (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Fuller *et al.*, 2005; Campbell, Verenikina and Herrington, 2009). It has been proposed that contribution and activity within a CoP both enhance an individual's sense of professional identity, and encourage professional practice through the interactions that take place, resulting in richer shared understanding and performance. Handley *et al.* (2006, p.648) argue for the "centrality of participation"; participation is the vehicle by which members of CoPs develop their identity. Therefore, the CoP supposes a mutual desire for transit and an aspiration for trajectory as a means of establishing and developing both identities and practice. As meaning and identity are believed to be gained from the process of participative interaction within CoPs, it is necessary to explore what is, and what is not, considered to be participation. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that the extent to which an individual participates, or is permitted to participate is determined relative to their position and status within a CoP. Lave and Wenger's (1991, p.57) depiction of a periphery and centre suggests an outer edge where the novice or newcomer with limited or "legitimate peripheral participation" is situated. Meanwhile, the inner hub and core aspects of the community are preserved for those conferred with professional mastery or "expert" standing. The identities of the latter have been developed through meaningful participation and progressive development of identity in accordance with the cultural values of the group (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.57-59).

It is possible to visualise a CoP as having an outer edge and a middle mass leading to an inner core of expertise as shown in Figure 1 below (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Thus, a novice would commence at the outer edge of the CoP and transit to the core, depending on own desire and successful acceptance from fellow travellers. Progression would be dependent on the degrees of influence acquired through the significance placed on contribution to the group. Accumulating these acquired degrees of influence allows the individual to evolve status and gain influential roles,

progressively accelerating toward the orbit around that pivotal centre status role.

The research undertaken by both Fuller *et al.* (2005) and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) reveals that, with experience and legitimate participation, members of the CoP establish proficiency, aptness, and confidence, thus becoming less reliant on the affirmation of peers within the group for 'permission' to transit, thereby increasing their capacity to contribute to their own progression and inward trajectory. The overall transit is contingent on both participation and the value placed on accumulated technical knowledge and socio-cultural adaptation. However, Fuller *et al.* (2005) note that for some members of CoP, the notion of belonging and participating is more often espoused than real. The extent to which an individual's participation is full or marginal has been linked to an underlying ability to commit to the ideals and mutual goals of the group (Handley *et al.*, 2006; Lave and Wenger, 1991). This commitment, however, is inconsequential if the desire and intention of the individual is for a less active, more pedestrian association, which Wenger (1998, p. 164) terms "non participation".

The importance of CoPs within dentistry and the wider dental community is that CoPs, are recognised as each having varying levels of negotiated status, influence and power and the potential to facilitate professional growth. In order to play a meaningful part within the dental workforce, it would be helpful for dental professional groups to understand how their colleagues and those from other dental occupations, particularly long standing occupational groups such as dentists, have proceeded to the core of a CoP and held representative positions that have status within society. The CoP can be illustrated by the depiction of a hub and a periphery (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The literature focuses on how individuals appear on the periphery with a desire to transit to "complete participation" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 36), which the present project interprets as the hub of activities, the core of power, and the situation in which an individual is able to have the greatest influence on what occurs within that group.

Accepting that the hub (or core) of the CoP is the point of power from which influence emanates requires those wishing to share or renegotiate the power distribution, particularly within a professional CoP, to participate fully and legitimately. Thus, without integrating and having a presence at the CoP core (hub), some groups may be underrepresented and thereby denied professional legitimacy, without which the transformation of a profession may not be possible. Therefore, it is fundamental that all the dental professions understand how an individual might transit from the periphery to the central hub or core where the power is located. By identifying the significant features of that journey from the periphery to the central core the pathway is illuminated for those who may wish to

embark on the journey.

The Research Question: What factors significantly influence the journey within a dental professional CoP?

Utility for the Professions: It is hoped that this research has opened up the area of transiting a dental community of practice, from peripheral participation to position of influence, to further discussion and prompt further research across all CoPs with regards to the journeys individuals, as well as underrepresented groups, can expect to take in order to achieve a position of influence.

Methodology and Method:

Reflexive Statement: The primary researcher's (first author's) experience of dental Communities of Practice informed the project in a number of ways. As a registered dental care professional who has participated at a number of levels within a variety of dental CoPs, what had been previously noticed and questioned was the influence on the permitted extent of an individual's participation and the effect that had on their representation in areas of influence and significance.

The research adopted phenomenological methodological approach in order to elicit an understanding of the meaning those who had achieved key positions had given to the experience and how these experiences might compare across different CoP groups. The researcher was mindful that their own previous pre-formed ideas presented a risk of potential bias, therefore a continuous process of "bracketing" or "epoche" (Spinelli, 1989, p.17; Moustakas, 1994, p.22) was undertaken. From the outset a reflexive attitude was adopted which continued throughout the study process. In doing so at deliberate periodic opportunities there was time to consider if preconceived notions and ideas were being sufficiently acknowledged and set aside. In remaining conscious of potential bias and influence the risk was minimised, particularly during the interviews and immediately following in terms of the faithful and unprejudiced recall and analysis of data.

Participants: Seven participants participated in the final project. The participants were between 40 and 63 years of age and held an average 30 years' post qualification dental experience and were a mix of dental hygienists, dental nurses and dentists.

All the participants described their personal journeys and the meaning they gave to the different noticeable stages within that transition. Permission was granted by each participant for a brief narrative synopsis of their backgrounds and thus their recalled experiences of participation in CoPs. Ethics approval was granted.

Data Collection: A purposive sampling technique was adopted primarily to ensure that all participants met the selection criteria. Four of the participants were known to the primary researcher before the project. An email was sent to the participants to outline the purpose of the project and also the broad topic areas to be covered in the interviews. The email was followed up with a Participant Information Sheet giving further detail and this was followed up with a further brief immediately prior to the commencement of the interview. The participants all signed consent forms which included permission to audio record the interview. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, each respondent was given a code (P1-P7), which was used to identify the interview transcript and subsequent reporting of the data in the project analysis.

The semi-structured interview schedule aimed to gather rich data related to the meaning each participant gave to their unique experience, whilst remaining focused on the aims and research question. The interview schedule was piloted prior to the first interview and the semi structured interview schedule was amended as a result of the subsequent reflection and feedback. The interviews were conducted in locations convenient to the participants, including participants' offices and homes. One interview was conducted by telephone (with no difference in data). Research notes were taken throughout the interview and referred to during the analysis stage. The interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Previous interviews informed subsequent interviews in terms of evolving interview technique; increasing confidence with recording equipment and limiting environmental distractions to ensure a sustained participant focus. The interview questions were not adjusted between interviews. Those participants, previously unknown to the primary researcher, were equally as generous and candid in their responses, as those participants previously known to primary researcher. At the end of the interviews the subsequent stages were outlined and confirmed with all participants. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All transcriptions were returned to the participants for comments and confirmation of validity and faithful representation. No requests for amendment were made by participants, prior to analysis.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was chosen to ensure that, whilst the depth of richness of the participants' experience was captured, there was sufficient breadth, so that the meaning that the individual participants attributed to stages within their journey could be articulated.

The process of data analysis was methodically undertaken with each interview being listened to three to four times, including prior to and during the transcription phase. As a result, the researcher was fully immersed in the meaning each participant gave to their journey through the data. The

data analysis process was undertaken in four phases. Firstly, through reduction, it was possible to consider all dimensions of the respondent's reflections without bias. The second phase was to identify what Moustakas (1994) terms "units of meaning", which are defined as common or reoccurring words or phrases from within all the data transcripts. The third phase was clustering to explicate common meaning and cluster the units. The final phase was grouping the clustered units and identifying general or common themes, which were overarching areas incorporating a number of clusters, as well as any differences or "polarization" (Smith, Flower, and Larkin, 2009, p. 97) that might contradict the common themes. Peer debriefing technique was used to review and assess the emergent themes (Janesick, 2007).

Findings: As a result of the phased analysis it was possible to derive four emergent areas which captured the strongest themes from the data

regarding the meaning that individuals gave to their individual journeys from peripheral to central participation in dental CoPs.

These themes, were termed "awareness's", and, in the context of the study, the decision was taken to form a definition of precisely what was meant by the term. As a result 'awareness' was defined as "a sensitive and perceptive understanding and familiarity". The four core themes were self-awareness, social awareness, cultural awareness, and transformational awareness. The findings from the analysis were returned to the participants for confirmation that their words and experiences had not been misinterpreted and misrepresented in the final presentation of the findings. Only one request was made to change the phrasing of the quote attributed to the participant. As the phrase was a verbatim reflection of the participant's original comment, it was removed rather than reworded.

The findings pertaining to each of the core themes are now presented.

Themes:

Theme 1 - Self-Awareness: Concepts of self-awareness relate to agency (that is the individual's ability to act in the Cop environment), the construct of professional identity, development, and meaningful occupation have emerged from the data collected on the transformatory journey. Self-descriptions of respondents' own sense of self emerged from the data, expressed in terms and phrases such as "aspiring", "striving", "effort" and "drive and ambition". Such terms link with factors such as the desire for professional meaning as a significant initiating factor for respondent activity within a CoP. One respondent expressed the following:

...so I always- always wanted to get on, not just be an ordinary dentist, be a different dentist. I never wanted to

become a specialist or a consultant, I wanted to stay within primary care, but I wanted to be different somehow ... (Respondent P2).

Another respondent, P6, made a similar point:

...I felt that my knowledge would be better used in helping other people gain the standard and the understanding of what they were doing rather than just being at chair-side. (Respondent P6)

A mixture of other significant factors was embedded within the data, which provided further illumination of the phenomenological concept of transit within a CoP and which appeared related to terms such as interest and curiosity used to interpret a professional role or for expansion (though personal research):

Sure, well I never quite went out of my way to participate in a community of practice, I went to solve a hypothesis and the hypothesis was quite simple... (Respondent P7)

Identified in the data was a further relationship between respondents and meaningful occupation, which Overell (2008, pp. 44-45) concluded as being “work that tells of experience feeling, fulfilment, personality, value and identity”. Respondents spoke about recognition in terms of self and others. In the previous literature, this relationship is expressed as a sense of empowerment and professional agency within an individual’s occupational role. Meanwhile, the data showed that respondents conveyed the relationship through the frequent use of the term “job satisfaction”. Examples in the data demonstrate the significance of meaningful work as a factor in transit:

Why did I want more? I just did, just for job satisfaction, making a difference; I just knew I wanted to do more.... (Respondent P1)

and

... I decided that part of my role should be to help shape the destiny [of other dental professionals].... (Respondent P4).

The interview responses appeared to link the idea of seeking satisfaction from meaningful work and the reconstruction of sense to the beginning of a journey within a CoP, which is consistent with Gubman (2004), who suggested a relationship between personal fulfilment and professional endeavour as a means of self expression and self motivation. Exploring these points further within the data, respondents typically described identity in the following terms:

...wanting to be different, wanting to make a difference; wanting to influence others. (Respondent P6)

The respondents’ reflections appear to reinforce a previous link by Kahn (1990), who provided a conceptual association between meaningfulness, engagement, and constructs of

self with social identity. This association was captured in the following respondent’s comment:

A desire to improve myself, something that’s lying there that’s kind of, I suppose because I didn’t want to be an ordinary dentist. (Respondent P2)

The terminology of other respondents, identified within the data, indicated distinguishable differences: firstly, those who participated with the intention to align their transit with knowledge capital gains, as identified previously by Gabby (in Le May, 2009); secondly, those who used terms such as “status”, “influence” and “sense of achievement, of helping other people along the way”, which aligned with Kahn’s (1990) notion suggesting that participation within a CoP was motivated by a desire for connection and interaction with others. The interview data showed that, for many respondents, a significant factor in the transformational journey was a strong desire to commence on a process of professional and personal evolutionary transformation, which was consistent with both Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1986) concept of the novice on a quest to mastery, as well as Eruat (1994) and Nonaka’s (1994) notion of the acquisition and application of tacit (hidden) and explicit (observable and obvious) competence.

The data indicated that the respondents’ perceptions of their professional relationships and status within society were affected by their self-identity. This finding had some consistency with work by Hogg, Terry and White (1995) and Gubman (2004) around the concept of meaningful work and is illustrated by these comments:

...looking for some way of enhancing my ability and I guess, my status ‘cause I think that was, you know, that’s what the driving force was, probably more status than ability – though the ability bit occurred to as I went along.... (Respondent P2)

Finally, the data also identified that contact with others, which was actively sought by the respondents, was a stimulus for further progression and particular development activities, which respondent P4 expressed as:

... I began to realise that actually what one needs, is to interface with all sorts of different groups in order to move one’s profession and oneself forwards....

This data reflected the proposition by Vygotsky (1978) regarding the essential nature of interpersonal interaction required to breach the zones of proximal learning. The following was typical of the respondents’ remarks:

I realised that there is a need, you can’t do this [professionally progress] by yourself, you need to- to become a part of that community. (Respondent P2)

Theme 2 - Social Awareness: Recalled experiences that are attributed to or associated with social involvement and interaction during the individual’s transformatory journey within the CoP have been deemed “social awareness”. This

emerging theme correlated with Wenger's (1998) theories of the shared concerns, interests, and passion within a thematic CoP being associated with the understanding and explorations of other members. Respondent P5 particularly emphasised the need to understand others:

... you really must understand them [other people], because if you don't your chances of a successful collaboration are less. And in other areas they can be quite peripheral to what you're doing and they're not so important, but if you're going to have to collaborate and do a lot work with them you really do need to get an understanding of what their goals are and the personalities involved, I think there are no two ways about that.

The data suggested the significance of interaction with others; the opportunity to measure and benchmark themselves; comparing their professional knowledge, skills and achievements; and ranking their attributes within their professional peer group. This finding largely supports the findings of Turner, Brown and Tajfel (1979) who reported that an individual's identity is relative to the strength of affiliation with a particular group, which provides definition of the sense of self and meaning and value in the activities and contributions undertaken. This relationship is supported by the observations of a respondent reflecting on the experience of participation within a CoP:

I think you see what you think is worthwhile and what are good traits and you also learn hopefully from your mistakes and from other people's mistakes, which you can see being made. But, yes there has to be influence there I think, there's no doubt about it (pause) and of course background reading and researching around a group or a topic, that also helps you to understand and- and perhaps to be better accepted. Because clearly if you are able to make your points strong in a position of knowledge then that means you're more likely to be integrated easily into the group. (Respondent P5)

The data indicated that social interaction had a strong influence on respondents and is described in respect to the respondents revisiting previous professional values and the evolution related to that reflection. The following respondent's remark captures the essence of this influence: *So without a doubt, this belonging to the community was an important part of my progression because without it then I couldn't have progressed as I did and so these forgings of alliances if you like, which are subconscious in some ways, is an important way forward.* (Respondent P1)

Similar factors emerged from the data, presenting an opportunity to gain an insight into social interaction and to establish that social identity was significant to an individual's transit from the periphery of a CoP to the centre. The extent of social awareness was expressed by a respondent in the following way:

...having the correct connections meant that ability to articulate...to the appropriate people, of how I felt and what I wanted- not what I wanted to achieve, but what I could see I could make the difference. (Respondent P3)

Although parallels with previous studies (Campbell, Verenikina and Herrington, 2009) were recognised, regarding newcomers to a CoP, the respondents' ability to transit was appearing to be contingent on their adaptability and engagement in the socio-cultural learning process, which at times seemed to be influenced by their previous social and cultural biography, that is, a unique make up that each individual brought to the CoP. This finding supports Handley *et al.* (2006), whose study reveals the centrality of participation. The data of the present project indicates the respondents' perception that participation in a CoP and the associated social interactions had an effect on the evolution of professional identity. The CoP operates on the supposition that participants have a desire for transit as well as an aspiration for an inbound trajectory as a means of enhanced practice. This supposition was supported by the data; however, it was not surprising given the achievements of the sample group. The respondent data also indicated a socially inspired richness that was facilitated by interaction between a novice and the established members, which was described by respondent P2:

...we're talking about fifteen people, who are quite similar to me in some ways, you know, who had that- those same ambitions educationally, enjoyed immensely the- the concept of teaching young professionals, but also I think enjoyed their own company.

From the data, it was possible to link the issue of power with alliances and networks forged within CoP. Significantly, this issue was acknowledged by a number of the respondents and manifested as an awareness that social interaction and allegiances could accelerate or impede transit and achievement within the CoP, as one respondent acknowledged:

...it would not be accepted these days, no, but the community had that power, to do that and so as I say, there was never advertising- these jobs were never advertised, they were just given out. (Respondent P2)

Another respondent emphasised that *...personal interaction can be more important than the knowledge sometimes....* (Respondent P5)

In addition, the issue of status emerged from the data, appearing to indicate some contingency with key awards or credentials that were benchmarked qualifications socially validated by the CoP.

The strength of influence within the relationship between the novices and those who were more established appeared to

support the previous literature (Pratt, Rockman and Kaufman, 2006), which recognised the potential influence of those who might have significance as mentors or role models. The data acknowledged the apparent effect that such relationships and social interaction had on individual participation within CoPs. A typical example is given in this comment:

...I thought was a great role model for me, I admired a lot of what she did, I felt disappointed when she stopped. (Respondent P3)

The experiences of the respondents brought to mind the format of an “apprenticeship”, discussed by others in the context of CoPs (Fuller *et al.*, 2005; Wenger, 1998). However, none of the respondents indicated a link to that process and the following respondent’s remarks appear to dismiss the suggestion entirely:

It doesn’t feel, it never felt like an apprenticeship, it didn’t.... (Respondent P2)

However, the data disclosed the recognition of tensions and dysfunctional behaviours within CoPs, which were acknowledged in the previous literature (Hughes, Jewson and Unwin, 2007; Pemberton, Mavin and Stalker, 2007; Roberts, 2006; Fuller *et al.*, 2005; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004). The respondents’ data presented evidence of rivalry and its effects within the CoP. Respondent P4 expressed social awareness in the following terms:

...I also realised that some people who were like minded, who were forward thinkers, were also afraid of the potential competition.

Others termed the tensions as the “obstruction of others” and “a lot of empire building”. Again, this response indicated the influence of well-established members within the CoP and their power over the transformational journeys of novice participants. The project data also showed that the respondents had gained an appreciation of operating within more than one CoP. Respondents placed significance on importing knowledge into a CoP and the advantages to be gained. However, respondent P2 reflections recognised that it is not always well received:

...there’s probably some (pause) rivalry between those communities and yet there is a total community without a doubt. And so we may not all have the same objectives, but certainly we use each other.

Finally, the data did not allow exploration beyond a superficial understanding of the extent of the transitory journey. It was not possible to determine whether the alterations were subtle and superficial or if the transformation was more robust and had permeated the

professional boundaries contributing to a growth in personal maturity already in process.

Theme 3 - Cultural Awareness: The CoP culture is inextricably linked to the routine social interactions previously outlined and the process experienced by those transiting from peripheral to core participation within a CoP. The respondents indicated an implicit understanding of cultural values in terms such as “fitting in [to the CoP]”, “respecting other people’s views” and “listening to the opinion of others”. As an emerging theme, cultural awareness is related to the concept of respect and values. Day’s (2006) definition of culture relates the concept to previous process of professional socialisation, which involves constructing a professional self with selected knowledge, skills, attitudes, interests, and values. According to one respondent:

I think my view of fitting in is respecting other people’s opinions, so I, I think that a lot of people who don’t say, fit in, probably one of the underlying issues is that they, they’re not open to other people’s views so I think that’s the problem, the barrier were because I know I am open to other people’s views then I can see the other side. (Respondent P1)

The interview data also showed that culture within a CoP was transmitted by a dominant group comprising the established members. The significance of this point is illustrated by respondent P4:

I think you’ve got to recognise the culture, I think you’ve got to know the culture first, you- if you know the culture, you can then- you then know what the position of each person in that group is and that’s when you start to move your social- you social areas forward, to move processes forward.

This point is consistent with previous literature (Handley *et al.*, 2006), which suggests that the trajectory or pathway from peripheral to core participation is reliant on a culture determined and derived from those established within the core of the CoP. However, despite the previous respondent’s concern, what emerged generally from the respondent data is that the nature of the underlying culture is not necessarily immediately obvious to new participants within the CoP. The respondents appeared to consider that the extent or depth of the culture emerges or becomes apparent over a period time. This point was supported further by another respondent who concluded:

...although you must have some awareness of the culture of the group from the very beginning, but I think it becomes much more apparent, what it really is, after you’ve been working with the group for a time. (Respondent P5)

The concept of culture that emerges from the data, reveals issues that relate to the construction and development of

professional identity supporting previous work that links a newcomer's ability to transit within a CoP to their understanding and observance of culture (Campbell, Verenikina and Herrington, 2009). The data showed that respondents considered participation central to their transit within the CoP, and the more expert-like an individual's practice becomes the more their self-identity is entwined with the community membership. The expectations of the individual regarding their contribution, coupled with the value system and encouraged by the established core community, appear inextricably bound to the individual's sense of alignment and belonging, captured in the following comments:

...But that movement within the community has to come with status. (Respondent P2)

Recognition of an accelerated transition route within a CoP, a route which appeared to be possible for those who were proficient within the operant culture emerged from the data. This concept, was previously recognised by Fuller *et al.* (2005), who observed that when individuals operate proficiently within a culture, they become progressively less reliant on the affirmation of peers within the CoP for 'permissions' to transit, thereby increasing their capacity to contribute toward their own audibility and progress on the inward trajectory from the periphery (of the community) to the core. However, at times acceleration within the transformational journey was conferred unexpectedly, as indicated by one respondent:

Now the interesting thing and I was never quite sure why they selected me, I was- there was no selection process, there was no- somebody approached me and said would I be willing to do this. (Respondent P2)

Well, I was approached as a- told I was going to be one of the movers-and-shakers.... (Respondent P6)

Acceleration links with the issue of mutual reliance, which is based on the acceptance of a process in which the established core transmits the culture to a waiting group who are willing to fit in by receiving and complying with the transmission. However, the data suggested that not all individual participants considered themselves passive recipients of the transmitted culture and the associated constraints. One respondent provided the illustration of a typical event that prompted a challenge to culture:

I very nearly resigned straight away, because the team around the table- I actually had the temerity to speak at the first council meeting that I went to. And everybody round the table – I'm- not a word of a lie – turned and looked at me, almost with a- with a, you know, who on earth does he think he is to actually speak at this first meeting? Because we sat around a table in almost order of seniority, those who'd been on the council longest sat at the top end and the new people

sat in a little group at the bottom and in retrospect I was not surprised that several people did leave the council after their first term of office, because they never actually broke into it. And what really irritated me, and I can't remember what the question was or what I said, but everybody looked at me, listened to me and then turned back again and sort of carried on with their conversation. And about ten minutes later somebody else at the top of the table said exactly what I had said and the message was "Oh that's a good idea, let's go along and do that," and I thought, "Right you so-and-so's, I'm going to be part of this group and I'm actually going to influence it in the way in which I think it should go. (Respondent P4)

The significance of culture appeared to warrant explicit consideration in terms of the potential personal compromise necessary to fit into a CoP. One respondent offered that: *I think they [novices] have to accept, either that this is a culture that I can live with, which isn't an ideal situation or this is a culture which I positively enjoy, which is a positive thing. But if it's the first thing that I suggested, that they really can't see that they are going to be at all happy in that culture, then they're better off not getting any involvement or stopping their involvement.* (Respondent P5)

However, the data also indicates that cultures are themselves transient and change depending on the incumbent core within the centre of the CoP. According to Respondent P5:

And of course it's [the culture] not always a constant thing, because people may move in and out of the group and if you're not seeing them a lot of times ... that can affect the culture.

Theme 4 - Transformatory Awareness: Transformatory Awareness is defined as an integrated awareness that combines aspects and factors related to the construction of an expert self with socio-cultural elements that are commensurate with influential social positioning through achieving a socially acknowledged and respected level of "mastery"; acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitude and authoritative influence. One respondent made the following comments:

...being credentialed in front of colleagues, to be able to be said to be a very important person, you know.... (Respondent P7)

Being 'credentialed' links to Billet's (1996) application of the word, in terms of an individual's capacity to bring about a suggestion of, or movement towards, maximising personal effectiveness. Respondents also described the importance to them of 'capability': the potential to be personally effective. Respondents' individual reflections on capacity and capability seemed to place a strong emphasis on the concepts of "knowledge", 'experience', 'exposure' and being

'credentialed'. An emerging theme relates to concepts of resistance and support. For example, as one respondent emphasised,

...so having a supportive, likeminded group around, I think is very important for moving me and the process forward. (Respondent P1)

The replies from the respondents appear to link with a number of studies outlined in the literature review that used key terms such as participation, contribution, and influence. Some respondents spoke about the "the greater good" of the CoP and the use of "position" within the CoP to enhance the profession rather than for self-aggrandisement, which was typified by this respondent's comments:

for the greater good you will do something that you may not have really have wanted to do but you feel obliged.... (Respondent P1)

This sentiment was reiterated by others and indicated an accumulation of meaningful factors beyond those of self. The following comments exemplify the belief in this area:

So I believe that if you're in it for personal gain, you're in it for the wrong reasons, it should be about what you're striving for in the bigger picture.... (Respondent P3)

I allowed others to take credit; I credentialed others that was very important. (Respondent P7)

The interview data showed that transiting within a CoP appeared to be affected by an individual's sense of professional self and identity and the extent to which individual aspirations were coupled with the espoused values of the CoP to which the individual belonged. The matter of the value apportioned to each individual contribution appears largely influenced by those within the "core element" of the CoP because their influence permeated the transmitted culture. This influence has a pervasive effect on validated behaviours and contributions, thereby permitting the transit of those who aligned themselves with the culture of the CoP. Participants who observed the subtlety of cultural expectations were rewarded accordingly through broadcasted acknowledgement within the CoP. This finding is supported by Roberts (2006,) who suggested that those who "have a greater role [within a CoP] therefore are likely to wield more power in the negotiation of meaning within the group, which might be merely a reflection of the dominant source of power" (p. 627). The significance of this point is illustrated by the following comment:

So it was almost like, everyone respected me as long as I didn't go across that unspoken barrier about dental nurses and degrees, you know, that certainly was, you know- there's a lot of unspoken barriers in dentistry, it's about, you

know, one should remember one's place.... (Respondent P3)

The data demonstrated recognition of the necessity to foster an atmosphere of respect within a CoP and appeared to be a significant factor during the transit of a participant who was proceeding toward the core. Accommodating differing perspectives and treating diversity and variance as opportunities to debate and deepen understanding had significance for some interviewees.

Meanwhile, other interviewees placed significance on what some described as "a journey" that required a sense of honour, passion, and pride, all of which was viewed as part of the transitory journey towards gaining insider status and improved roles within the CoP. Another striking theme was that, whilst financial remuneration was acknowledged by a number of the interviewees, it did not appear to be given undue significance as a factor in the transit from periphery to core within a CoP. However, there appeared to be a robust correlation between meaningful engagement and continuous participation, as the following respondent in the data expressed by the sample group, the theoretical significance of meaningfulness for this project, and the challenges suggested by Gabby (in le May, 2009), it was nevertheless necessary to note the importance of "political factors" for some interviewees. An alternative underlying the undercurrent of the whole dynamic between core and peripheral participants was captured by the candid comments of one interviewee:

I am quite politically astute, I understand politics and I understand- I have been referred to as manipulative in the past, but that's part of my intuitive self, I mean manipulative again is quite pejorative in some ways, but I always have a secret pleasure in manipulating situations, so yes I am political..(Respondent P2)

Finally, the most striking significant factor and apparently without exception in the data was a healthy and reasoned understanding of the realities and challenges of what was required by the CoP at the "core level" and a willingness of the individuals, when appropriate, to explore the full spectrum of their own dispositions to meet this requirement. The attitude supports Brown and Duguid's (1991) description of the purpose of CoP to develop individual professional practice, which is by definition evolutionary, self-evaluating, adaptive, and progressive.

Discussion: The study suggested the factors which significantly influenced the transformational journeys within a dental professional CoP. In considering the application of each of the emergent core themes for those who might participate in transformational journeys in the future, it was first deemed necessary to consider previous depictions of CoPs, in which, according to literature review, the individual

is depicted as peripheral to the forms that make up the CoP. However, analysis of the data in this study implies an inversion of this notion, in which the individual becomes central rather than peripheral to the CoP.

Themes of awareness emerged from the data, which comprised clusters of factors that were significant in the transformational journey within the CoP, as experienced and recalled by the respondents. It is important to note that the areas as awarenesses did not have distinct and lined boundaries, but were intermeshed, each with a degree of permeability. Each awareness was omnipresent, but depending on the phase of transit, the awareness appeared to become more or less sensitised and relevant. Eventually, the awarenesses were absorbed into one form, a non-delineated single dimension. The boundaries are indicated by the theme titles denoting when specific awarenesses were clustered into a theme, which dominated other clusters or themes in a particular aspect of the journey. It was necessary to separate the themes in order to represent what otherwise would have been a complex explanation of theme interdependence.

As a result of the data analysis, an inversion of the previous depiction of transit within a CoP was proposed. Previously, the notion was of an outer boundary where newcomers wait for admittance to commence their journey within the CoP. However, by inverting the previous depictions of the CoP, it was possible to think about the individual's participation within CoP slightly differently and consider the individual's transit—the transformational journey—by placing the individual in the centre of activity, and project pathways or trajectories as non-direct routes (Image 1).

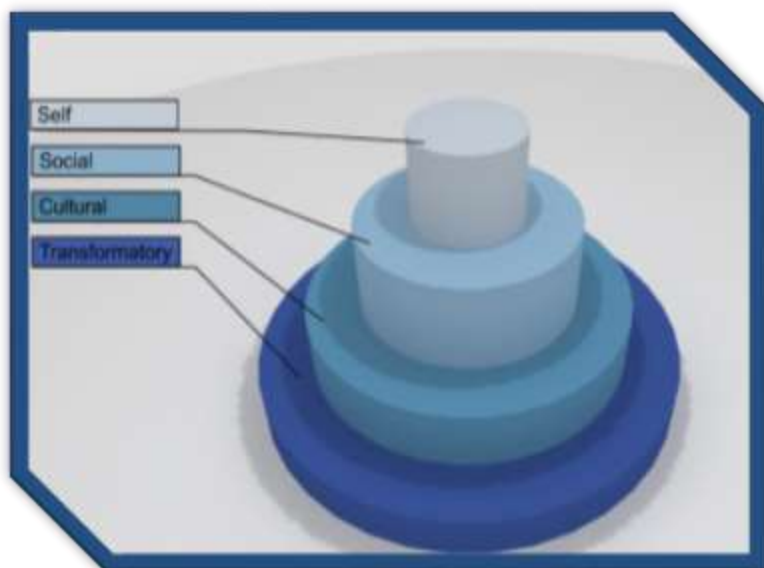


Image 1: Depiction of the Relationship of Awareness Themes

With regard to the transitory journey, because the individual is at the centre of the activity, he or she can accumulate awarenesses, which have significance for transit through the

CoP, in order, eventually, to achieve full participation by achieving a fully rounded transformatory awareness.

The following narrative now fully describes the related activity within each clustered awareness theme.

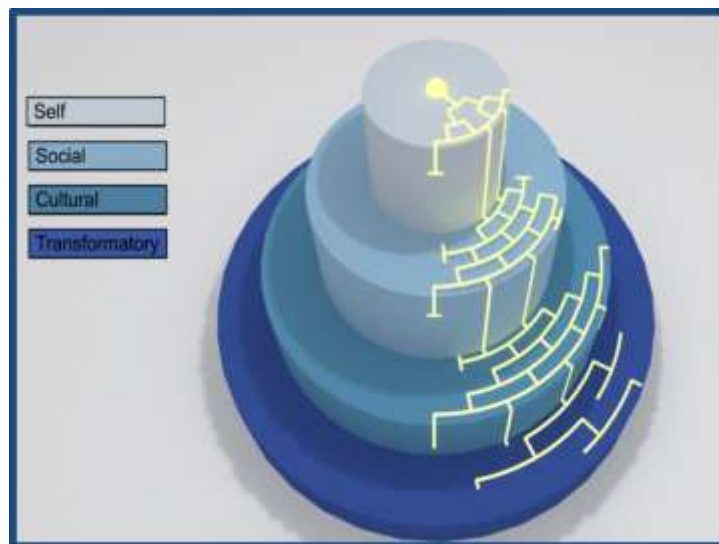


Image 2: Illustration of Potential Journeys Within Community of Practices

Self at Centre – Self Awareness: The individual commences in the middle of his or her own personal world, manoeuvring within an orbit that has personal significance, with little understanding of the extent to which others within the CoP are relevant. The individual becomes increasingly sensitised to a personal sense of self and needs. Gradually, awareness of “other” emerges or becomes apparent and the individual identifies with the necessity of social interaction, which links to the transit and development of the individual's own sense of self and professional identity within the CoP. Therefore, with this dawning awareness, the individual starts to build an understanding of others and their roles or of potential effects on his or her particular pathway within the CoP (Image 2).

Social Awareness: Social awareness confronts the individual transitor with comparisons and benchmarking, causing a further examination of self, challenging previous “certainties” or constructs surrounding self-identity: who am I, what do I do, and is that right, is that enough? The individual starts to build alliances with others. These social interactions become sufficient for the individual to begin to notice and detect patterns in the interactions between those participating within the CoP, allowing recognition of the rewards conferred as a result of particular contributions, protocols, systems, and value loaded practices. The individual becomes more perceptive regarding the

underlying culture, power structure and hierarchy of the influential members in the wider CoP.

Cultural Awareness: Cultural awareness evolves with the rate of participation. There is a period of adjustment for the individual who realizes the transmitted “illuminated truth” and decides whether to embrace or tolerate the culture. The culture is confirmed to be underpinned by mutually agreed value systems, beliefs, goals, and philosophy. The culture moulds attitudes and behaviours and gives meaning to the interaction in the context of the CoP. An astute individual, committed to his or her transformational journey within the CoP, interacts, gathers, and even manufactures opportunities to increase understanding and functionality that is significant, aligned with, and recognised in the cultural values. In doing so, the individual expands his or her ability, bringing new depth and an added dimension to the CoP through recognition by the powerful core. Meanwhile, concurrent with the growing awareness’s, are increased technical knowledge and skill. Audibility and voice develop; the further along the individual is in transit from the periphery to the centre, the more the individual becomes aware of what is happening and of other members. The more audible the individual becomes, the more visible he or she becomes. The individual seeks the affirmation of others. They start to be aware of not only the culture, but also the need to move towards the core, so that they become more audible and powerful in relation to outside groups. External interactions add to the individual’s credibility and credentials and bestow respect enhancing the level and scope of audibility both internally and externally.

Thus, capacity and transformation is built out of exposure across a number of dimensions. By the accumulation of awareness, an individual is incorporated within the whole—the CoP.

Transformational Awareness: In this phase, transformation, mastery, or expertise is attributed at the core of the influence and power. Knowledge, skills, and experience are not sufficient in themselves. Capacity (Billet, 1996) enables an individual to become a fully-fledged member of the CoP who is capable of achieving a representative status position at the core of the group.

Interactions and Conclusion: From the outset of involvement with the community of practice, an individual starts to form clusters with other like-minded people. There is a move from independence to dependence and thence to interdependence; interlinked cogs mutually dependant for their individual momentum. Within the CoP, clusters start to form and interact through points of shared interest. The overlap is critical at times when elements of external expertise hold the key to progression, thus the interaction is imperative (Image 3).

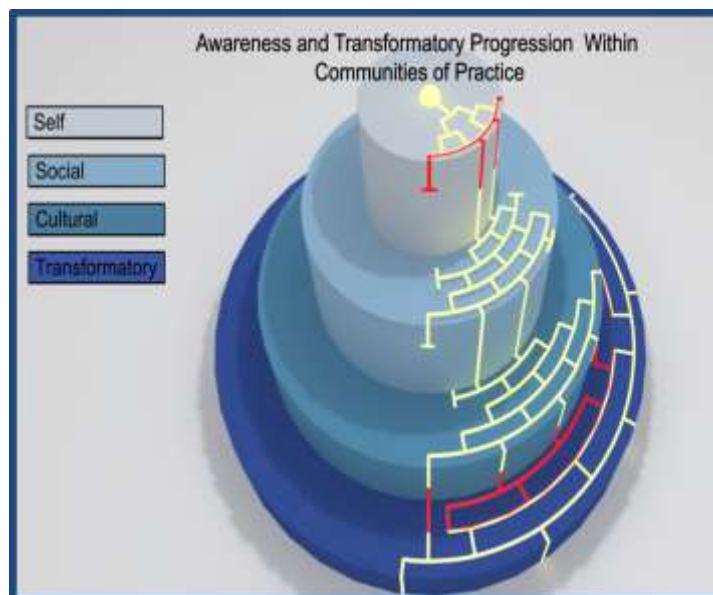


Image 3: Illustration of the Relevance of Interaction within Communities of Practice

The forum for interaction is essential for maintaining and facilitating progression, and building deeper understanding beyond superficial or peripheral issues. Equally important are external interactions; whether the whole CoP interacts with other CoPs or the interaction is on an individual level, they are essential for building strength in the whole community (Image 4).



Image 4: Illustration of Interactions External to and Between Communities of Practice

Limitations: The study was not intended to provide generalizable findings but rather to capture the unique journeys a small number of individuals have made, and the

meaning they gave, when participating within particular dental communities of practice. Nevertheless, despite the small numbers, the research findings are offered for consideration, as the opening of a discourse with possible transferability, both within dentistry and beyond. Some of the participants were known to the primary researcher which warranted consideration of the Insider/Outsider dichotomy (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The insider influence, however, could be deemed as being particularly critical for accessing and establishing rapport, as well as being trusted with the personal nature of journeys from a group which may, otherwise, have been 'closed', not easily accessed by those located outside the profession's boundaries. Finally the occupational range and age ranges of the participants were accepted as a reflection of the "statured" nature of the group. However, as a consequence, it is possible that the sample's experiences and perspectives may not necessarily be representative of the whole dental workforce experience. It is plausible that, in providing perspectives of those who have experienced transiting within CoPs over a particular period of time, the findings may have limited relevance for some members of the current workforce when these experiences are translated into contemporary practices.

Implications for Practice: As journeys within CoPs are both under explored or theorised, this study offers a new perspective to those wishing to share or renegotiate the power distribution, particularly within a professional CoP, either through full and legitimate participation. Those who might be interested in this work are groups and occupations who may be underrepresented and have limited professional legitimacy, those still who are professionalising. By identifying the significant features of the transition from the periphery to central core participation in a dental CoP, the conclusions may be illuminatory for those who may wish to embark on a similar journey in a professional CoP elsewhere.

Acknowledgements: Grateful thanks must be conveyed to participants who, without exception, welcomed the intrusion into their professional journeys and gave freely, ever willing to extend their already significant contribution in the name of advancing the dental professions.

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