Communities of Practice in an academic library: a run on the wild side?

Paper Presentation by Johann van Wyk at the 5th ICAHIS Conference held on 4-7 July 2005 at Onderstepoort, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Background: http://www.cheetahs-cats.com
Introduction
Knowledge

- Explicit knowledge
- Tacit knowledge
Overview

• Knowledge Management
• Learning Organisation
• Communities of Practice (CoPs)
• CoPs in an Academic Library: Case Study: Academic Information Service, University of Pretoria
Knowledge Management

• Definition:
  - Utilisation and exploitation of all knowledge assets of organisation
  - Including all its info and its unarticulated experience and expertise
  - Ensure sustainability and competitive advantage
KM Definition (Cont.)

- Utilises its culture, processes and infrastructure to
- Create, identify, capture, share, use & re-use knowledge
- Adding optimal value to client’s knowledge base
Learning organisation

• Definition:
  “An organisation that can identify, develop and utilize its tacit and explicit knowledge capabilities, enabling the organisation to expand its capacity to learn and grow, and to modify its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights, and in doing so to improve its performance and success”.
Communities of Practice (CoPs)

- **Background:**
  - Social groups: e.g. Drinking clubs, Roman Collegia, Guilds, Caste System in India, regiments, old-boy-networks, peer groups and gangs.
  - Academic groups: e.g. Royal Society, American Philosophical Society
  - Informal Academic Groups: Invisible Colleges
  - Xerox: Communities of Professionals
  - Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger
What is a Community of Practice?

“A Community of Practice is a network of people emerging spontaneously, and held together by informal relationships and common purpose, that share common knowledge or a specific domain, expertise and tools, and learn from one another”.
Capturing knowledge through CoPs

- Storytelling
- Role-play/simulations
Capturing knowledge through CoPs (Cont.)

- Knowledge Mapping
Case Study: Academic Information Service (AIS), University of Pretoria, South Africa

- Background
- Respondents
- Method: Literature study and Interviews
CoPs identified in the AIS
Cross Organisational CoPs

- AIS
- Government Department
- Other library
- Academic department at other University
- Academic Department
Knowledge Management Practitioners Group of Pretoria

• http://www.kmpg.org
GCATS (GAELIC Cataloguers)

Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (South Africa)

Cataloging and Technical Services Workgroup
Maritime Archaeology Group

Lecturer

Students

Maritime Archaeology

Researchers from Cape Town

Information Specialist
Virtual Group on Water Research

- Political Science
- Microbiology
- Agriculture
- Botany
- Plant Pathology
- Plant Production
- Soil Science
- Waterbiotechnology
- Law
- Landscape Architecture
- Hydraulic Engineering
- Hydrology
- Geology
- Geography
- Chemical Engineering
- Town- and Regional Planning
- Environmental Engineering
Virtual Group on Architecture
African Goats Group

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
ACADEMIC INFORMATION SERVICE
SERVICE UNIT: VETERINARY SCIENCE

African Goats
Information on goats and
goat production systems in Africa

- Bibliography on African Goats
- Conferences and Papers on Goats
- Links to Goat Websites
- Lists of African Expertise on Goats
  - State/Provincial Goat Research and Development Facilities
  - Parastatal and University goat Research and Development Facilities
  - Goat Research Centres / Departments

Start E-mail Internet Explorer MSN Messenger Outlook Today Search...
Internal CoPs in the AIS
Information Specialists Group

- Law
- Economic and Management Sciences
- Medical Sciences
- Theology & Sociological Sciences
- Natural & Agric. Sciences and Engineering
- Humanities
- Groenkloof (Education)
- Veterinary sciences
- General
Digital Repositories Group
Informal Network for E-Information Experts
Role of Management
Time to participate
Workload
Rewards or Incentives
Size of the CoP

• Ideal size: 15 – 20 members
Trust
Coordination or Facilitation role in the CoP
Formal v Informal

Knowledge Networks
Information Technology

- E-mail and Listservs
- Telephone and Teleconferencing
- Web Pages
- Virtual Workspaces on Portals, e.g. InfoPortal of UP
Conclusion

- Are Communities of Practice in Academic Libraries a run on the wild side?