

Communities of Practice (CoP) Approach

OVERVIEW

Schools participate in a geographic network, which adopts a CoP approach to focus on local improvement opportunities. Networks are expected to meet at least once a term to facilitate continuous learning and improvement.

By adopting the CoP approach, networks create a compelling space for principals to learn together, focus collectively on investing in evidence-based strategies to implement the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), and share best practice to drive improved learning outcomes for students across their network and across the state.

Theory of change – Communities of Practice

If we work collaboratively with a common purpose across schools or other educational settings, learning with and from each other and take collective responsibility for all learners using a continuous cycle of inquiry to implement evidence-based interventions then we will be well-positioned to improve learner outcomes and reduce the variability of performance within and between schools and other educational settings.

EVIDENCE BASE

Farrar, M. (2015). *Learning together: The power of cluster-based school improvement*, Centre for Strategic Education Paper 246.

This article discusses the nature and relative merits of autonomous and accountable school-led systems; explores the benefits of cluster-based improvement; and uses examples from England and Australia to take a closer look at practice and to focus on peer review.

Last updated: 8 July 2019

Hargreaves, A., Halasz, G., and Pont, B. (2007). *School leadership for systemic improvement in Finland*, OECD Study Report.

This report is part of a larger Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study exploring school leadership policy issues. It aims to provide analysis on the particular Finnish approach to school leadership for systemic improvement that contributes to their educational success.

Fullan, M., and Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence – The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts and Systems*, Corwin.

This book focusses on schools, regions and systems using the right drivers for improvement using a Coherence Framework. The Coherence Framework has four components; focussing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning and securing accountability.

KEY LINKS

For information and resources on the Communities of Practice approach, including the self-assessment tool, see: [Communities of Practice](#).



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How will we know networks are operating as a CoP?

Baseline data is collected on the CoP self-assessment tool by Senior Education Improvement Leaders (SEILs) and Network Chairs/Executive teams using a common dashboard at half-yearly intervals.

The diversity of practice across networks in Victoria means that they may have started from very different places. Network maturity depends largely on the extent of collaborative work over the past three years and the amount of change in the new geographic networks. The supporting resources provided facilitate discussions that enable networks to grow and develop their CoP approaches at their point of need.

The WISE program for Network Chairs emphasises the facilitation and development of CoP approaches towards growing network maturity.

The SEIL and area based teams provide ongoing support for CoP approaches to deepen and flourish.

How are Network Chairs chosen? Are they appointed or selected?

The appointment of the Network Chair is managed through the network itself, supported by the network SEIL. The selection process is open and transparent, with expressions of interest sought, a panel convened if necessary and selection criteria used as appropriate.

Network Chair appointments are for a period of up to 12 months, after which the Network Chair steps down and nominations for the role are reopened. This enables willing and appropriately experienced principals to have the opportunity to perform the role. Succession planning strategies for the Network Chair role are supported by network SEILs. The current Network Chair may reapply for the role.

Network governance guidelines are available at:

[Leading Communities of Practice: Roles and Responsibilities.](#)

What is the difference between a network and a FISO group?

A geographic network is a group of approximately 25 schools that is organised to accommodate and benefit from the increased regional resources across the state. They are part of a broader group of geographic networks supported by an area based multi-disciplinary team.

FISO/Initiative groups are organised within and across geographic networks and focus on FISO initiatives.

Should CoPs have a consistent focus? Who determines this?

CoP is the approach networks take towards deeper collaboration. Each network's focus is determined by the network itself according to their common FISO priorities and selected initiatives. Networks are supported by the regional area-based teams throughout this process.

How do we encourage data sharing across networks through a CoP approach?

The sharing of data is undertaken as professional trust is established. This is occurring in many networks and is emerging as a critical practice in others. SEILs act as challenge partners to shift network practices and embed collaboration and trust. This is a critical part of the SEIL role. Through the WISE program, Network Chairs are supported to take a lead role in facilitating this development.

PROGRESS TO DATE

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|---|---------------------|
| Networks completed four CoP Maturity Assessments | Jul 2016 – May 2018 |
| Evaluation planning underway | Dec 2016 |
| Networks nominate two literacy leaders to be trained in the Leading Literacy Master Trainer F-6 course | Nov 2017 |
| Network roles and responsibilities guidelines published | Feb 2018 |
| Analysis of qualitative CoP program evaluation reports commenced | Mar 2018 |
| Network Chairs, SEILs and Network Executives work with Dr Helen Timperley to further develop network-leading capabilities | Mar 2018 |
| Induction workshop for new Network Chairs, SEILs and Network Executives | Apr 2018 |
| Network Chairs, SEILs and Network Executives work with Steve Munby on collaborative system leadership | May 2018 |
| Leading Literacy for Networks workshops concluded | Dec 2018 |
| CoP induction for new Network Chairs | Feb 2019 |
| Practice guides for leading a network released | Mar 2019 |
| CoP workshop 1 for Executive Class Principals | Mar 2019 |
| CoP workshop 2 for Executive Class Principals | Apr 2019 |
| On-demand coaching to networks | Ongoing |
| CoP evaluation period commences | Jun 2019 |

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES

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|---|----------|
| CoP workshop 3 for Executive Class Principals | Jul 2019 |
| WISE workshop for Network Chairs, SEILs and Network Executives with Dr Simon Breakspear | Jul 2019 |
| CoP workshop 4 for Executive Principals | Oct 2019 |
| CoP self-assessment maturity data collected | Nov 2019 |