

Community of Practice Norms - Working Document

March 2020

Norms are standards or patterns, especially of social behavior, that are typical or expected of a group (from Google). The norms of our CoP are meant to:

- create a consistent culture and guide interactions
- ensure a positive collaborative space
- facilitate a collaborative atmosphere
- help avoid unhelpful, limiting, or negative behaviors

Generally CoP members are expected to show respect, tolerance, openness, and a willingness to listen to other CoP members. Opportunities should be created for all members to participate. Ability to disagree and discuss ideas without making it personal should be promoted. Members should feel free to voice their opinions. Today's 'no' can be tomorrow's 'yes' but this will only happen if members listen to others and are not dismissive.

Objectivity is expected, especially on the part of the leadership, in dealing with conflicts. Establishing ground rules on content sharing, language use and respect for all and create equal opportunities for CoP members to be heard should be given the attention it deserves.

To ensure strong, helpful collaboration, CoP members can expect there would be a 'regular, ongoing Facilitator presence' monitoring the discussions to help members stay on topic or avoid being too personal: providing encouragement for those that are making genuine contributions to the discussion, addressing those that are trying to hog or dominate discussions, and tracking those not participating, and helping them to participate. Members should be encouraged to learn, unlearn and relearn.

The following are norms we will like to observe as a CoP around certain specifics

- **Norms On Decision Making Within The Cop**

We might need to agree on a media that outlines or summarizes what literacy covers and does not cover just to make sure we all have the same mind.

One critical decision would be how we would want to continue with the development of the tool we started working on as a group. We need to come up with more virtual projects such online awareness campaigns to create something everyone can participate in.

We need to start talking about how we intend to grow the community - both vertically and horizontally. Decisions will have to be made on what qualifies an organisation or individual to be a CoP member. We need to establish a point of entry for new members, basic requirements to get in, recurring requirements to remain an active member, which might be as simple as regularly sharing what they are doing on literacy and participating in at least 70% of all PL programs per annum.

Decisions on the above and many more should be made publicly and everyone should have an opportunity to read, analyse and raise questions (if any). When every member of the CoP is given the opportunity to contribute to issues then we can have a fruitful conclusion on matters that affect the entire group.

Leadership could always invite suggestions for a limited time, put it into a draft which is shared for comments and finalized. We may need to keep reviewing and improving as we go along. We may have to show who reviews what and when. Adequate time frame should be given in terms of voting or submitting feedback on issues to make it possible for all CoP members to contribute to issues. If needful decisions to be made could be subjected to polling for possibly anonymous voting.

- **Norms On Giving Feedback Within The Cop**

Feedback must be constructive and useful. Community members need to be 'critical friends'. We need to give each team member the opportunity to share concerns, accomplishments and ideas. There is the need to respect and appreciate each other's viewpoints. Counter ideas needs to be taken seriously to make members know that they have been heard. Facilitators must deal with issues that arise immediately from miscommunication/misunderstanding before moving on.

Channel for feedback and CoP communication in general need to be easy to use, quick and efficient. It must address the wider community and multitudes who may have internet challenges. Emails, WhatsApp and conference calls as well as public notices on official CoP spaces such as the CoP's Google Drive could be the initial agreed communication channels to adopt. Periodically CoP could review and agree on emerging appropriate communication channels/technology - for example software that allows for threaded discussions- and introduce (new) members to these.

- **Norms On Trust Building Within the CoP**

Trust isn't built overnight. It requires work, commitment and consistency. It will come as we stay consistent to the vision and lead by example, readily respond to questions with additional support and publicly acknowledge the efforts of CoP members. Our work needs to speak to the needs and challenges of the "wider community", and our suggestions/responses need to be feasible in their contexts.

We need to get to 'know' each other more. Sometimes you may not know how the other will take an 'innocent' comment.

Promoting open communication helps in building this trust and motivate contribution. We must be fully present and engaged in discussions: listen attentively and with an open mind. Don't interrupt, limit distractions and other work during online calls and turn on your video when possible, so you can put faces to voices.

- **Norms On Rewarding Each Other And Having Fun Within The CoP**

To reward each other we need to be quick to acknowledge and respond to contributions by others with comments that show that we have listened attentively with an open mind and are making informed comments: not just saying something because one is required to do so.

To have fun we need to come up with Signature relationship practices - kind of ice breakers. For instance CoP members could pair up and discuss matters of common interest related to literacy. Each pair can then introduce each other as well as share the results of the discussions with the larger group as part of online meetings. This way we will make stronger individual connections, learn more about the work and context in which we work, and build a better sense of community. We could also sharing memes centered on literacy to not only lighten the mood but spark conversations. CoP leadership could encourage such practices by joining these kinds of conversations, posing additional questions, answering those already asked, and having a laugh if need be.

- **Norms Regarding Additional Roles Within The CoP**

Shared leadership leading to a 'collective ownership' is best. Leadership Committee members are (and should be seen as) mere facilitators of an 'agreed process' in a point in time.

Members should work together on the 'task and maintenance' functions of the group. Decomposing a difficult larger task into parts and creating group roles saves time. Keep groups midsized. Small groups lack enough diversity. Large groups create 'freeloading' where not all members participate in community activities

Clear goals must be set for each shared task/online meeting. Leadership should encourage members to take up shared tasks. If that does not happen leadership should delegate. Possibly give pre-task/meeting preparation activities to ensure members prepare for activity and so contribute during the execution of the activity.

As we grow as CoP and expand if there is a need to create more permanent additional roles then we could call for discussions on the specific roles in question and take a decision per laid down norms on decision taking.