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## **A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES**

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A Community of Practice (CoP) is a new management structure appropriate for knowledge management in certain situations and organizations.<sup>1</sup> This paper discusses one potential purpose of a CoP, the development and stewardship of project management best practices.

CoPs are similar to Special Interest Groups (SIG) in professional organizations such as the Project Management Institute. The CoP is a voluntary association of practitioners. While it is chartered and championed by the parent organization it is managed and operated by the practitioners, not the organization's management. The difference between a CoP and a SIG is that the CoP purpose is closely tied to the business purpose of the parent organization while the purpose of a SIG is more general, usually spanning organizations

In a stable project management environment it would be useful for the project managers to review past projects to extract lessons learned, then use these lessons learned to develop a repository of best practices. These best practices are specific to the organizations's projects and business. Doing this at the project manager level educates and motivates the project managers. Most of the value resides in the experience of the after action analysis and extraction of lessons learned, some of the value resides in the stewardship of a best practice repository.

To illustrate - project managers could meet regularly to present the after-action results of projects to a group of their peers. As a group, the project managers then assess lessons learned: What worked? What did not work? Why? What should be done differently next time? Are there general principles that can be applied to future projects? The CoP then develops a categorized (browsable) hyperlinked (searchable) Dynamic Knowledge Repository to memorialize these lessons learned. This DKN becomes institutional memory for the organization.

Typically the CoP would be self managed. It would have a chairman and officers to perform whatever duties are appropriate. Participation is voluntary but limited to practitioners, in this case project managers. Senior management needs to encourage the CoP, provide appropriate support facilities, and approve the charter identifying purpose and boundaries. But, senior managers are not active participants in that this can inhibit free and open dialog among the practitioners.

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<sup>1</sup> Wenger, Etienne, et al, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, Harvard Business School, 2002.