Chapter 2
Social Learning in Higher Education: A Clash of Cultures?

Alice E. MacGillivray

Abstract Social learning is a natural part of being human. Wenger's theory of social learning is also the theoretical underpinning for communities of practice. Learning is a key outcome of higher education. Yet, my experience suggests that communities of practice are not thriving in higher education compared to some other fields and sectors. This conceptual chapter explores cultural elements that may be inhibiting the emergence, nurturing and effectiveness of communities of practice in higher education. The chapter focuses primarily on faculty work. Social learning inhibitors may include higher priorities, boundaries that divide groups with potentially common interests, the disciplinary nature of leaning norms and the potentially overwhelming nature of diversity. The chapter lists benefits of enhanced community of practice work and includes ideas for future research.

Keywords Community of practice · Higher education · Social learning · Culture · Boundaries · Epistemologies

2.1 Introduction

This book includes successful examples of social learning through communities of practice (CoP) in higher education. Each example illustrates benefits to individuals and groups. The book fills an important niche; there is no book like it. And yet is that not surprising? Several researchers estimate that 80 % of our learning is informal (Cross n.d.). We learn as we practice. We learn through dialogue with each other. We learn when we reflect and share our successes and especially our failures. We learn socially: not just with a psychological perspective on interactions as described by

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A.E. MacGillivray (✉)
Gabriola Island, BC, Canada
e-mail: Alice@4KM.net

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Bandura (Wenger 1998, p. 280) but through our practical and reflective experiences with each other, as described in subsequent theory development (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1999). And is education not the sector in which we care most about learning? In which we strive to deeply understand learning as a service to students, colleagues and communities? If we deeply value and understand learning, we can more effectively share important new findings from our research. And therefore, communities of practice should be thriving in all facets of higher education. This chapter explores this paradox: why aren't there more thriving communities of practice in higher education? Through this chapter, I hope to open a safe space for dialogue and learning about higher education cultures in relation to social learning.

Learning in higher education is associated with credentials. The validity and value of those credentials is determined within the higher education community through standardized tools such as credit hours, hierarchically organized degrees, criteria for quality within disciplines and methodologies, and double-blind peer-review processes. With regards to standards of excellence, higher education practitioners tend to be inward-focused.

Midgley's theory of boundary critique can help us explore this paradox and factors that may inhibit communities of practice in higher education. This theory is informed by the work of Churchman, Ulrich and others (Midgley 2000). A simplified version is presented in Fig. 2.1. It is "a normative theory (prescribing a course of action rather than simply describing an aspect of the world) about the need for reflection on boundaries during interventions" (Midgley 2000, p. 135). His work emphasizes that boundary judgments and values are interconnected, even if we are not consciously aware of that connection and related implications. The graphic uses boundaries to separates different groups; these are not necessarily barriers. Faculty are not staff, for example.

We can use this to consider formal education as having power and influence in the core (see Fig. 2.2). Non-formal and informal education, such as learning through communities of practice, is then situated in the margins. According to Midgley's theory, those in the core value or devalue groups and ideas in the

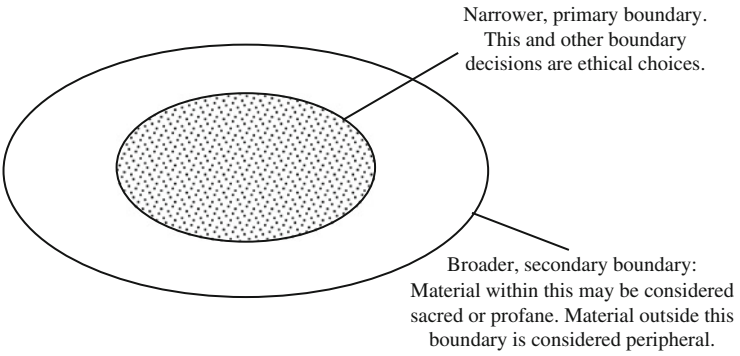

Fig. 2.1 Basic illustration of Midgley's theory of boundary critique. Adapted from Midgley (2005)

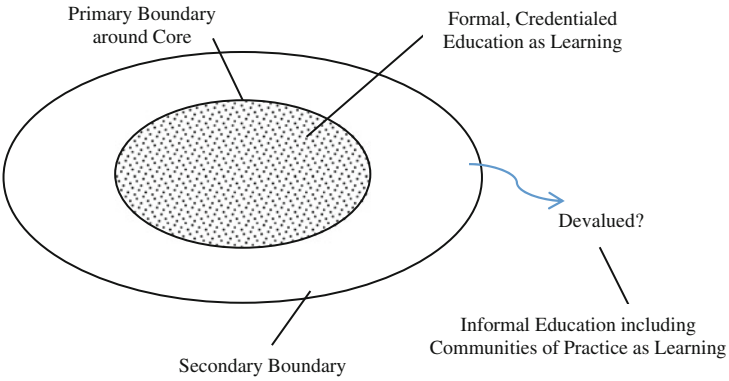

Fig. 2.2 Theory of boundary critique to illustrate the primacy of the formal education construct in higher education, with communities of practice in the margin. Adapted from Midgley's (2005)

margins. The success stories in this book illustrate situations where CoP work has been valued and boundaries become more permeable.

Although I suggest ideas for future research, this is a conceptual chapter, which draws primarily on my professional experiences with communities of practice, work with several universities and the intersection of the two. My observations may resonate with some, and not apply in other contexts. I am a lifelong learner in the formal and informal sense. I enrolled in my doctoral program in my 50s (which was typical for the Human and Organizational Development PhD at Fielding Graduate University). By then, I knew my interests as a mature researcher and practitioner. I have taught or worked on thesis and dissertation committees with six universities. In 2002, I was fortunate to be able to design and teach the first full credit course about communities of practice (CoP), collaborating with Etienne Wenger, John D. Smith and others for a Master of Arts degree in Knowledge Management (see MacGillivray 2007, 2014a for more detail). I have been a member of many communities of practice and have studied others. To me, the intersection of higher education and communities of practice could be extremely fertile ground, but remains an under-populated landscape.

This chapter explores factors that may inhibit the growth and health of communities of practice in higher education, with a primary focus on faculty work. These culturally embedded factors relate to priorities, four types of boundaries, the nature of learning, the downside of expert cultures and the overwhelm factor. The chapter ends with an exploration of indicators of the desire to connect, implications of communities thriving—or not—in higher education, and ideas for future research.

To briefly clarify terms in this chapter, I use *community of practice* as described by Wenger et al. (2002): groups of people who self-select and regularly connect to create and share knowledge. In other words, getting together at an annual conference is not regular connection, and co-authoring a paper is more of a project than ongoing social learning and CoP membership.

The concept of CoP emerged through Xerox PARC's Institute for Research on Learning. It was embedded in an integrative social learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger and subsequently articulated by Wenger (1999, pp. 13–15) in Communities of Practice: Learning Meaning and Identity. Hoadley and Kilner (2005) have extended this thinking based on their work with CoP, outlying four key practices all related to the community's purpose: connection, conversation, exploration of context, and documentation of content. I have seen online spaces where documents are posted for faculty called communities of practice, but if they lack connections and ongoing contextual conversations for learning, they are merely repositories.

CoP members are more strongly interconnected than in communities of interest (where people participate in order to be informed) and are held together by a passion for their shared domain. In higher education, domains vary extensively. They could include an area of applied research (e.g. industrial symbiosis) a focus within a discipline (such as Jungian psychotherapy) skills (e.g. working effectively with International students or getting grants for community development work) or a career struggle (how to make time for research in a teaching university).

In communities of practice, it is difficult to know who is in and who is out, and they emerge and end organically, based on needs and energy. Scholar and humorist (Dr. Rumizen 2002) described the community of practice as a platypus, because it is such a strange beast in comparison with other workplace groups such as project teams or departments.

Because Wenger's theory of social learning and the CoP concept co-evolved, I sometimes use social learning almost interchangeably with community of practice. Although it is possible to have social learning in other contexts, social learning is a co-requisite for a community of practice. I use this term as Wenger (1999) does: a perspective that places learning "in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world…and a fundamentally social phenomenon" (p. 3). We are talking about learning that is deeply integrated with practice, community, meaning and identity. Without a *willingness* to engage in—and value—social learning, communities of practice cannot emerge and thrive.

2.2 Social Learning Inhibitors

2.2.1 Priorities

Tenure-track professors are under pressure to publish: particularly in peer-reviewed journals and perhaps only in the "A journals," and this can be all-consuming. At conferences, I have heard many mourn the work they had hoped to accomplish in fields important to them—such as environmental sustainability—where communities of practice could enable important social learning. But service and applied work were on the backburner, at least until their A-journal-reputations were established.

Many faculty also have significant administrative responsibilities, keeping them from the research they love.

Sessional instructors or adjunct faculty may have huge teaching loads or multiple jobs in order to survive. They may be expected to take on additional responsibilities (such as internal committee work) with no pay. This and a sense of disconnection from the large university community makes it difficult or impossible for the growing numbers of adjunct faculty to be leading or active in communities of practice (AcademicaGroup 2015, #3).

Communities of practice may fall into the "important but not urgent" category, even if they seem appealing.

2.2.2 Boundaries

Although cultural boundaries are gradually becoming more permeable in universities, they have strong roots. Boundaries can be vertical or horizontal; sometimes, they are fraught with ethical dilemmas. Some boundaries have created cultures referred to as: "Upstairs–Downstairs" (More Partnership and Richmond Associates 2014; PR Newswire 2014). The theory of boundary critique can again be used to illustrate four types of boundaries with potential to marginalize social learning and communities of practice.

2.2.2.1 Faculty/Student Boundaries

Faculty members—in the core—are expected to keep an aesthetic distance from students—in the margins—and maintain a higher status. For example, in one university, the term *learner* was used rather than *student*. This evolved because faculty members would comment that everyone in a course was a learner: the mid-career professional students collectively brought much more expertise into a class than a single faculty member could bring. For whatever reasons, the term *learner* is less common and is almost never used in public documentation now. At another university, a faculty member wanted a student—who did most of the research and analysis—to be the first author in a peer reviewed paper. A debate ensued because this did not fit with the long-term culture of faculty "deserving" first author status.

I have witnessed higher education environments where this boundary is permeable. I was fortunate to start undergraduate studies after a few years of work: at 20-something, I was technically a mature student. I had studied the natural history of the area and assumed that biology courses were essentially natural history courses. To my surprise, most professors knew little about natural history and I knew little about biology. I was regularly asked to contribute in the lecture hall and was invited into the faculty lounge. Not surprisingly, I eventually chose a doctoral program at Fielding Graduate University where the culture (influenced by Malcolm Knowles' work as a founding faculty member) was relatively egalitarian.

I remember the first faculty-student gathering I witnessed at Fielding. I was there in the role of a university administrator observing Fielding's model. It was at a summer session in Washington DC: much like a conference with optional attendance. Everyone present in the room was part of the first concentration offered in the doctoral program. The gathering was casual yet intense. People were sitting in a ragged, impromptu circle and leaning forward in their chairs. Much of the conversation that day revolved around how to research the phenomenon of multi-tasking with computers. Because of previous contact with the university, I happened to know which people in the room were faculty members. Otherwise, I would not have had a clue based on that gathering: faculty members and students were indistinguishable by age or by demeanor. It was during that session that I decided to sign up for the PhD that had not been in my life plan.

These atypical stories demonstrate the possibility of permeable boundaries between faculty and students in higher education. They also illustrate social learning—which binds faculty and students together through a common domain and sometimes a common practice. In the Fielding case, community of practice elements continued over time. For example, that particular conversation about multitasking led to research, publications and conference presentations by faculty and students, which were never pre-planned as anything resembling course assignments.

2.2.2.2 Faculty-Staff Boundaries

It is difficult to bridge the academic and administrative sides of universities, even though staff members have expertise that could help some faculty (group process skills as one example) and faculty have expertise that could help administration (leadership scholars might help with leadership challenges, for example). From a cultural perspective, faculty can be seen as in the core, and staff in the margins.

This artificial divide comes, in part, from our thinking of organizations in mechanical terms. We have *divisions* for example, and use terms such as *nuts and bolts* and *leveraging*. Accountability frameworks fragment groups. Collaborations across boundaries can be seen as optional and detracting from the core business of each fragment. Such fragmentation and specialization emulates efficient practices from the Industrial Era. Communities of practice across faculty-staff boundaries could be powerful. Consider an example from natural science. Where communities meet, there are often productive transition zones known as ecotones (Odum 1971). Their whole can be greater than the sum of their parts: one plus one plus one can equal more than three. Healthy estuaries are a magnificent example. Land, fresh water and salt water mix to create the most productive environments on the planet (NOAA). However, it is not easy to create these rich, estuary-like connections across the administration-academic divide.

One successful example of faculty/staff boundary blurring is the delivery of Instructional Skills Workshops (ISW). These workshops emerged in the late 1970s in British Columbia Canada to help faculty subject matter experts become more

effective instructors (Day 2005). These workshops have spread across Canada and to more than 10 countries. Facilitators are often university staff members, but in some universities, faculty members have been very active. When I lead ISW workshops for faculty and for new ISW facilitators, it is common for staff and faculty to work closely together. Facilitators form communities of interest (with CoP elements) spanning multiple institutions. However, based on how ISW members identify themselves (ISW 2015) the online conversations are almost all amongst staff.

I asked Sylvia Currie, long time steward of the SCoPE community about the ratio of staff and faculty in her conversations. Despite being a very attentive facilitator, she had no idea (Pers. comm. 2015). This suggests a healthy blurring of lines, probably encouraged by the inclusive welcome, which introduces the platform:

> SCoPE brings together individuals who share an interest in educational research and practice, and offers opportunities for dialogue across disciplines, geographical borders, professions, levels of expertise, and education sectors. Our activities are facilitated by volunteers in the community, and membership is free and open to everyone (SCoPE 2014).

2.2.2.3 Faculty/University-Alumni Boundaries

In a typical, large, undergraduate lecture hall, the divide between faculty and students (before and after graduation) is typically huge. But what happens in graduate programs focused on lifelong learning for adults? Where terms such as andragogy and learning community are often used and where terms such as professor rarely are? Where the universities have egalitarian and inclusive cultures? Where students are accomplished professionals—often in their 40s–60s—and may be working on a second MA or PhD. What might social learning relationships look like amongst those alumni and faculty?

In this section, I share personal communication from two people who have worked—with uneven success—to enhance social learning in such contexts between alumni and universities. One is Victor Chears; whom I will cite as "1." He has been an active alumni member with various leadership roles in two universities. The other is Paul Corns; I will cite him as "2." One of his roles was as an Associate Vice-President of Community Relations and Advancement in a university. In both cases I have permission to share personal communication (2015). Both Chears and Corns spoke about how collaborative learning relationships are often severed once people graduate:

> Alumni are often the outliers in the discussion of constituencies within higher education. Once they reach the status of no longer being students there can be a disconnect with regard to their ongoing role as a member of the academic community. This is especially true for graduates who choose not to formally join the Academy. Presumably, if one has gone through the rigor of classes, researching, reading, completing coursework, being critiqued, rising to new levels of critical thinking, drafting and defending a serious academic treatise (aka dissertation), and a myriad other occasions of discourse, one would have earned a

> recognizable and laudable place in the realm of consideration as a critical component of the organization's culture. This is not necessarily so. Rather the graduate, now alumnus, while having achieved the goal that they entered the institution to obtain, is relegated to a functional role that often severs the intellectual alliance to which they had become accustomed (1).

Several systems issues contribute to this disconnect: standard university software platforms are not designed for inclusion of alumni; expenses associated with library access are not in the budget, and so on. There are structural considerations as well. Most universities shift the relationship with those who have graduated to the administrative side of the house, where emphasis may be on financial contributions, so "little attention is paid to whether the former student now alumnus has other ideas and desires for ongoing connection and contribution" (1). Those ideas and desires may relate to the recent academic accomplishments and identities of the alumnae. They may crave scholarly conversations and collaborative research and publishing opportunities, for example. Promoting the university may be woven into those activities, but promotion and fundraising will rarely be primary motivators for alumni. Some administrative leaders have taken other approaches:

> Typically universities ask the question "How best to reconnect with alumni?" Our plan flipped that question, asking "How best to not disconnect from our learners?" The [inclusive and blended] learning model already created this seamless flow between face-to-face and online experience, generating a kind of technical fluency and positive dependency for the learning community. The university could not make this transition. Some of the reasons, both operational and cultural, are referenced in this chapter particularly with regard to faculty-staff boundaries and the time limited contracts imposed on professors…The establishment of strong communities of practice requires a commitment to releasing control and the adoption of a less formulaic approach to relationship and information management (2).

Over the years, I have heard promoters of social learning in higher education use terms such as "strategic partners," and "practitioners of progressive change." Is loss of control a key inhibitor? Rumizen's metaphor of the community of practice as a platypus is mentioned elsewhere: an oddity requiring a very different kind of management. Wenger et al. (2002) write:

> The spread of communities of practice throughout an organization is usually not a conventional pilot-rollout process by which a successful template is applied programmatically. Rather, it is an organic diffusion that expands as people get the idea, see its potential, and develop new aspirations. The process gains momentum through various combinations of top-down directives and encouragement and bottom-up initiative and responsiveness (p. 201).

This separation and disconnection can be magnified for alumni who choose not to enter the formal academy. At this time in our history, "the scholar/practitioner is not held in the same level of regard as the scholar/educator similar to how lawyers not admitted to a bar are viewed against those who are" (1).

How might university-alumni boundaries be blurred, at least for graduate programs where mid-career alumni bring advanced academic credentials and considerable applied academic experience?

1. Recognition of the issues. Along the path to becoming an alumnus there must be a means for level setting expectations about what lies ahead in the ongoing relationship with the institution (1).
2. Willingness to consider all forms of diversity. What are the benefits for all parties as the roles shift? The scholar/practitioner brings a diversity of thought, undergirded by the academic experience, which the scholar/educator may not have, but is useful to the overall fabric building of the institution (1).
3. Openness to non-traditional Communities of Practice (CoP). Alumni bring unique and worthy perspectives that are more outward-focused yet critical to how higher education is perceived and framed (1).
4. Recognition of the strengths of hierarchies as different than the strengths of more organic communities of practice, where there are new opportunities to connect teaching, research and service to the increasingly complex problems so evident in our world (2).

2.2.2.4 Faculty Rank Boundaries

Other boundaries in most universities separate faculty by rank. There are many layers in a typical university and terms vary from nation to nation. I will limit reference here to tenured faculty, tenure track faculty and contracted faculty.

Tenure gives a large degree of freedom and job security. It often comes with the privilege of doing more research and less teaching. Tenured professors have published in the A journals: the most prestigious journals in their field. Tenure track faculty members must prove their expertise over long periods of time before they might gain tenure status.

Contracted faculty members are typically part-time instructors. *Adjunct faculty* and *sessional instructor* are among terms used for these positions. Although these individuals may have PhDs and experience applying knowledge from their discipline to the "real world," they often have low status and pay. Contracted instructors are increasingly common and can carry two thirds of a university's teaching load (CBCRadio 2015; The Adjunct Project 2015) and the percentage may be higher in some institutions.

These differences in status can impact the potential for social learning across ranks. Again, we can use the theory of boundary critique to examine this relationship. Although there are exceptions—research is typically considered high-status work in the core and teaching is devalued in the margins. This dynamic has developed in part because research can be a major source of revenue and can boost a university's reputation.

Tenured faculty members generally have very strong records publishing in journals with high impact factors and may teach very few courses. Tenure track faculty members strive for this depth of publishing experience. Contracted faculty may or may not make the effort to publish in peer-reviewed journals. Some tenured professors treat more junior faculty and staff as assistants. They may not even

consider working with contracted faculty. As a matter of fact, they may have no exposure to contracted faculty, even in their field. If full time professors wanted to collaborate, the funding system might not allow contracted faculty to be paid. When contracted faculty members publish independently in journals, it is often without any financial support (time, research grants, travel expenses and so on) from their institutions.

Although some contracted faculty members are well paid, respected and given significant responsibilities, others feel stressed by workload and low pay. Data from the Adjunct Project (2015) show that fees for a three-credit course can be as low as $450 USD. Even with higher fees, income may be equivalent minimum wage, depending on the university's learning and teaching models. Contracted faculty members are typically responsible for their own expenses (information technology, Internet access, office equipment and so on). In the Adjunct Project, one PhD describes her work with universities as a community service; she needs to rely on other sources of income, adding: "If for any reason I miss a class meeting—whether it's sickness, delivering a baby, a dead battery, or a volcanic eruption—my pay is docked for that day" (The Adjunct Project 2014 post). Contracted faculty may be hesitant to add social learning activities and voluntary membership in communities of practice to their schedules.

Ironically, such pressures have pushed adjuncts towards what might be called short-term communities of practice. For several months, #adjunctchat on twitter brought contracted faculty together to brainstorm topics such as "Innovative ways to include the collective adjunct voice in the national higher education conversation" (AdjunctChat 2014, #4). Recently in Canada, instructors connected across the country (University of Toronto, the University of Northern BC and York University) to go on strike (Pathe 2015). And National Adjunct walk out day (NAWD 2015) was promoted through Facebook. Given the increasing reliance on contracted instructors, these indicators may signal significant challenges in the future.

Why do boundaries of rank and status matter? As one example, consider research as an important university function: a source of presumably accurate, insightful and unbiased knowledge about things that matter in the world. What if that knowledge were systemically diversified, deepened and enriched by more collaboration across boundaries of rank and status? When I worked as a program director in higher education I found it interesting to reflect on these concepts. Some of the contracted faculty I hired charged more for a day's consulting in the business world than some full time faculty made in a month. But status shifts with context. I was not successful in developing opportunities for contracted faculty to bring their deep, real-world experience to collaborations with core faculty with deep scholarly expertise.

In another setting, a colleague started a grant program at a major funding institution. He proposed a structure in which proponents must outline plans for collaborations between communities and universities. Initially, academics were not supportive because the science would be tainted or diluted by non-experts. So my colleague and others proposed a formal experiment in which the proposal would be

tested and evaluated. Everyone, including deep experts, was surprised and impressed by the quality of the results. The program ran for several years, and the research groups did have community of practice elements as they worked through challenges, and learned from each other's contexts.

2.2.2.5 Disciplinary Boundaries

These are prominent in most institutions of higher education. A tenured professor who works within a discipline (microbiology, clinical psychology, art history, and so on) may be one of few in his or her institution. It is unlikely that they will be encouraged to collaborate with peers in other schools or programs within the university. That is an understandable stance for researchers working at the leading edges of their disciplines, yet their deep expertise is probably relevant in other fields. Faculty work is sometimes described as lonely. Experts undoubtedly relate to others in their field, but those experts may be in other parts of the world.

Some faculty members take initiative. Decades ago, I attended a fascinating panel session on climate change organized by Dr. Eric Higgs at the University of Victoria. The surprising thing was that all panelists came from different humanities disciplines rather than from the sciences.

When I present at conferences (with a range of disciplines) I ask participants about how they connect and learn from each other. Not surprisingly, they all say conferences. And they almost always mention the conversations between sessions as where the real learning takes place. Conferences can become micro, time-bound communities of practice, largely through social learning in the corridors. But they lack the element of regular connection mentioned earlier. When I ask people if they are involved with online forums or communities to connect and learn between conferences, the answer is almost always no (information technology and e-learning conferences being notable exceptions). At these conferences, a few of us with positive online community experiences find each other between sessions, and talk about unrealized potential. But it rarely goes farther.

Universities are being pressured to provide relevant education. Sometimes this means involving the public in dialogue or decisions. Peter Levesque describes a transition he has watched: Scientists have acknowledged they are in a special, privileged group where they sometimes make or influence important decisions. He has heard scientists hesitate to work with lay people who "don't know what we are doing." But then he goes on to muse: "What if we could teach them? What if we let people teach people? That's what the Danish have done. They said, Yes: we need a level of democratic involvement in science policy. So we're going to hold consensus conferences" (MacGillivray 2009, p. 135).

We are seeing many examples of citizen science projects, which are essentially disciplinary boundary-blurring activities. These projects can be catalysts for communities of practice where citizens and scientists from universities learn together. One Canadian example is the volunteer program helping to conserve the Greater Kejimkujik Ecosystem in Nova Scotia. Over 10,000 volunteer hours per year have

been logged. Scientists orient and train citizens to actively participate in scientific research and conservation efforts. Citizens bring expertise from their disciplines. Citizens and scientists get to know each other. Many come to Kejimkujik National Park year after year to reconnect with fellow citizen scientists, share ideas, make a difference to species such as the endangered Blanding's turtles. People are pulled together by a passion for specific conservation efforts, they develop a community in which they improve their practice, and the scientific body of knowledge grows through social learning as well as the scientific method.

2.2.3 Nature of Learning

The concept of discipline is important in higher education and professors tend to work within the communities and cultural norms of their discipline. These norms include specific ideas about what constitutes high quality research and learning. Once in a while, scholars break through disciplinary barriers. For example, complexity theory draws from ecology, chemistry and other disciplines, and communities of practice have grown up around such trans-disciplinary concepts. Similarly, there are tools and practices that span boundaries (social and organizational network analysis, for example). Scholars passionate about these topics may regularly connect with each other to share ideas and publish, even—or perhaps especially—if their backgrounds are diverse.

As one example, Cross et al. have published as a trio (e.g. 2001) and in other configurations. Cross holds degrees from the University of Virginia and Boston University School of Management in business administration, organizational behavior and information technology. Parker has degrees from Northeastern University, the London School of Economics and from Stanford in sociology. Borgatti's degrees are from Cornell in anthropology and University of California in mathematical social science. Collectively, this covers a lot of territory both geographically and conceptually, but they connected through different ways of approaching social networks. However, many faculty members do not realize they are working with similar interests and problems at different scales or in different contexts.

Disciplines have had embedded ontologies, epistemologies and cultures, which may be almost invisible to members. Anthropologist Matt Hamabata has come to believe that ethnography is the most empirical of the research methodologies because you are immersed in the actual experience of a culture (pers. comm.). Yet a biologist might say that such experience is not valid knowledge because it cannot be tested and measured. In that biologist's eyes, ethnography is not empirical. Concepts such as social learning and constructivism do not drop equally well into

different disciplines. Furthermore, some disciplines and fields—such as high-energy physics—are intrinsically more collaborative than others—such as microbiology (Knorr-Cetina 1999).

2.2.4 The Downside of Expert Culture

Academics spend their careers developing deep expertise. Confidence around expertise may be central to their identities. In some cases, this could inhibit their willingness to open up to new forms of learning or admit how little they know about some things that might be valuable. In today's academic world, there may be a digital divide: not in terms of bandwidth but in terms of comfort. For example, a senior professor may have published books and dozens of peer-reviewed papers, but may be misinformed about the value and potential of social media, CoP platforms, the potential for meaningful relationships through online interactions, and online leadership. If scholars in a field are spread around the globe, there will be gaps in conversations and collaborations without the use of technologies. The individuals may not even be aware of potentially valuable colleagues until they discover and search on platforms such as academia.edu.

It is rare to see someone shift from no knowledge or interest to intense interest in information technologies, but I have witnessed this transformation a few times. One memorable event many years ago was from the K-12 education field. There had been a large bulk purchase of computers for classrooms with little uptake in use. People noticed and female teachers were less likely than males to experiment with the computers. I was working for an education ministry in Canada at the time, and co-facilitated a process to design workshops for female classroom teachers. We had a diverse design team of women from many backgrounds, with varying degrees of computer expertise. Some without this expertise joined hesitantly, nor sure whether they were interested or what they might contribute. At one point, my colleague Susan opened a website from a well-known university listing *Great Canadian Scientists*. A woman with a trades and technology background asked: "Why don't they have any women?" Susan replied: "Why don't you ask?" The woman's body literally slumped as she said—more quietly—"yes, I should get around to sending them a note." Susan countered: "No—you can do it right here. Let me show you." Instantly re-energized, she crafted a query to the university. At our next planning meeting, we opened the reply, which essentially said: 'because there aren't any.' At that meeting we happened to have a guest who had recently researched 100 female Canadian scientists and we fed highlights of her research into our reply to the university. By the time we had our next meeting, there were women included on the website. This simple experience infused the group with even more energy for the workshop design. Yes, this was a project, but it would not surprise me at all if some of the contacts made through that project led to expanded networks, social learning and perhaps communities of practice related to women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

2.2.5 The Overwhelming Nature of Diversity

Faculty members are busy people, balancing tasks such as applying for grants, research, course design, teaching, thesis supervision, committee work, administrative duties, crafting of recommendations for alumni in the workforce, and community service. Compounding this, we live in an era of increased boundary blurring. Some universities are adopting business models similar to those in the private sector. Some are offering more applied courses. Disciplines themselves are losing their hard edges. Innovators experiment with new topics such as organizational ethnography and scholars adopt methodologies from other fields. For example, historians may be using anthropological methods and "a psychologist may be studying emotions in on-line environments using e-mail as data" with such shifts echoing larger questions about the nature of knowledge and Harding's *epistemological crisis of the West* (Bentz and Jeremy 1998, p. 2). Closed and elite are becoming open and egalitarian. This boundary blurring can be unsettling to some.

Social learning through communities of practice can initially amplify this diversity of perspectives. For some, exposure to diversity (different epistemologies, for example) could add to the overwhelm factor. Without a foundation of positive community of practice experiences, the concept may have little appeal.

2.3 Indicators, Implications and Future Research

2.3.1 Indicators

Are there indicators that faculty want to connect more or in new ways? Other chapters in this book provide examples. And social media platforms give us others.

Consider the microblogging tool *twitter* as just one option for sharing online. There are many higher education-related hashtags (i.e. keywords) in use for filtering. These include #HigherEd, #elearn, #edtech, #PhDchat, #research and #MOOC. Hoadley and Kilner (2005) suggest that connecting is a key initial step in the development of communities of practice. Hashtags enable people with similar interests to find each other amidst all the noise in social media platforms. The hashtag #ScholarSunday is intended precisely for that purpose: to introduce your twitter followers to scholars you recommend following.

People also host chats on twitter. These are regularly scheduled online conversations with a name that reflections the general domain (e.g. #HigherEdchat #AdmissionsLive) and with predetermined topics for each chat. However, many of these chats are staff-centered rather than faculty-centered.

Two recent stories illustrate the social—rather than the technical—side of scholars wanting to connect more. The first was a sad story for many of us who followed scientist @BoraZ on twitter and frequently shared his posts. Here is

context from James (2013), Staff Scientist at Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory:

> Over the course of a few days in mid-October, it emerged that Bora Zivkovic (@BoraZ on Twitter), a trusted and beloved leader of the ScienceOnline community and the blog editor at Scientific American, had sexually harassed at least three women. The science blogosphere and Twitterverse erupted. Expressions of shock, anger, and sadness flowed forth onto the Internet at a rate that left even the most seasoned Twitterers—myself included—feeling overwhelmed.

James created a #ripplesofdoubt hashtag, and thousands of tweets flowed in from people concerned about sexual harassment and its implications. Many interchanges were community of practice-like, sharing resources, experiences and tips. The domain was not a discipline, but it was one that resonated for many people building careers in the sciences and as scholars.

At the time of this publication, there is another interesting hashtag phenomenon that suggests scholars would like to be better connected. Glen Wright conducts research at the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations. A year ago he had not used twitter much. Despite that, he bet a friend that: "he could get 10,000 people to follow a twitter account dedicated to the amusing side of academe" (Kolowich 2015). His friend claimed no one would ever read his posts, but he launched the idea and now has over 16,000 followers. They play with hashtags such as #BadAdviceForYoungAcademics, suggesting tongue-in-cheek that young academics write their theses in comic sans, take lots of adjunct jobs, and tie all research to cancer because that's where the money is. This may seem like nothing but cathartic silliness, but some of Wright's strange hashtags quickly became powerful attractors. They show a desire to connect and interact, even if it is not [yet] focused on expected community of practice domains.

2.3.2 Implications

If the higher education landscape is under-populated with communities of practice, there are significant implications. There are many reasons why more high quality, nurtured communities of practice could be valuable for faculty, staff, students and society as a whole. They include the potential to:

1. Catalyze innovation and progress within disciplines across geographic and cultural boundaries;
2. Engage and empower students as quickly as possible by spanning faculty-student boundaries, so they can work to address the important challenges facing the world today;
3. Enrich learning by sweeping in new perspectives as encouraged by systems scholar C. West Churchman (Midgley 2000). There may be rich intersections across the faculty/staff boundary, such as better use of social media for conversations about research and dissemination of findings;

4. Help promising new faculty feel part of a community with emergent mentorship rather than climbing a ladder towards recognition;
5. Better connect scholar-practitioners (often adjuncts) with career academics to enrich research and move it into more applied settings;
6. Make space for faculty to enjoy time together outside of the pressures of work in institutions. Members tell us that experiences in communities of practice can be "energizing, healing, or comforting environments in which they could feel appreciated, at home and where they could speak their own specialist language" (MacGillivray 2009, p. 146).
7. Address complex problems in higher education. Some community members in other fields see CoP work as "ways of solving problems considered intractable in vertical structures, or as ways of being more effective with service to customers, clients, and citizens" (MacGillivray 2009, p. 146).

2.3.3 Further Research

This book may—in itself—encourage scholars to think more about social learning and further research presented here. Areas for further research include:

1. [How] do disciplines influence the perceptions of value of communities of practice? Karen Knorr Cetina's work is a promising foundation. Are there certain disciplines in higher education—such as her example of microbiology—where collaboration is relatively rare and social learning or constructivism might not be particularly valued?
2. Why might more social learning be attractive to faculty? Do faculty feel isolated from [potential] colleagues? Do they have learning needs unrelated to their disciplines? Are they interested in branching into more inter- or trans-disciplinary work?
3. If safe research spaces were set up for dialogue about interesting higher education topics—with names and roles (student, staff, adjunct, dean…) withheld—would participants accurately guess roles? Might they be surprised by the depth and value of contributions by people in "unlikely" roles?
4. What are the current social networks at play? These could be mapped over time with action research interventions.
5. Where are there innovations in higher education encouraging sustained action research and social learning across boundaries described in this chapter? What could we learn from these experiences?
6. Where are the innovations in higher education where students are supported in the formation of networks and communities integral to their research? What can we learn from them?
7. Who has tried hard to encourage communities of practice in higher education and has failed? What could we learn from these experiences?

2.4 A Cultural Shift?

When I saw the call for chapters and thought about what I might contribute to this book, an old publication kept coming to mind. Its title was Education for Judgment. It, too, was an edited book, with each chapter written by a faculty member. At the time Harvard Business School was strongly encouraging discussion (social learning of a sort) in its lecture halls. They were pioneering a shift from teacher-centered to active-learning approaches. In the book, the editors emphasize that in all levels of formal education, as much as 80 % of class periods are spent in teacher-centered mode with interactions limited largely to question and answers between individual students and instructors. "And why not?" they write. "If the goals are information transfer and the accumulation of knowledge, the process is practical, efficient, and well-understood" (Christensen et al. 1991, p. 3).

Education for Judgment drew me in for two reasons. It felt like a privilege to witness the struggles of faculty members as they made sense of this new, dynamic and inclusive habitat. I was also intrigued by how different their stories and their voices were. As I read it, I sensed that the authors had tapped deeply into their own values and dreams as well as into the more intellectual aspects of the shift.

This book came to mind because it, too, was exploring a paradox. Here were professors in a world renowned business school, who would not be there if they did not have subject matter expertise and some skills with lecturing. And yet hidden under the surface of that excellence, many were craving something different. Harvard administrators handed them the opportunity to explore new learning approaches and new ways of thinking about what they could bring to a classroom.

Is that so very different than the intersection of communities of practice and higher education? In my experience, most faculty members are working long hours, feel the pressure to do more, and wish they had more time to follow their passions. Communities of practice could become more common and accessible venues in which those passions could thrive and fuel academic reform.

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