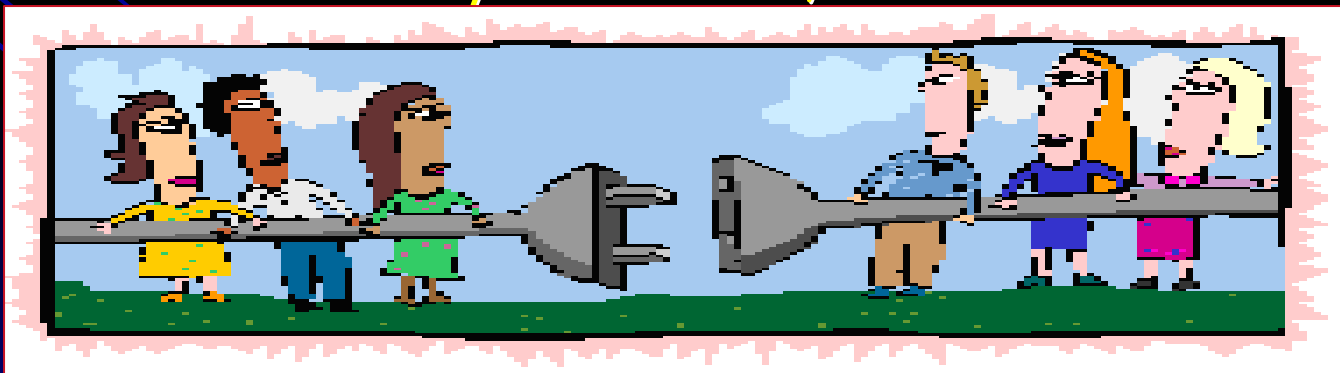


Communities of Practice in Health Professional Education: What they are, how they work and what they can do

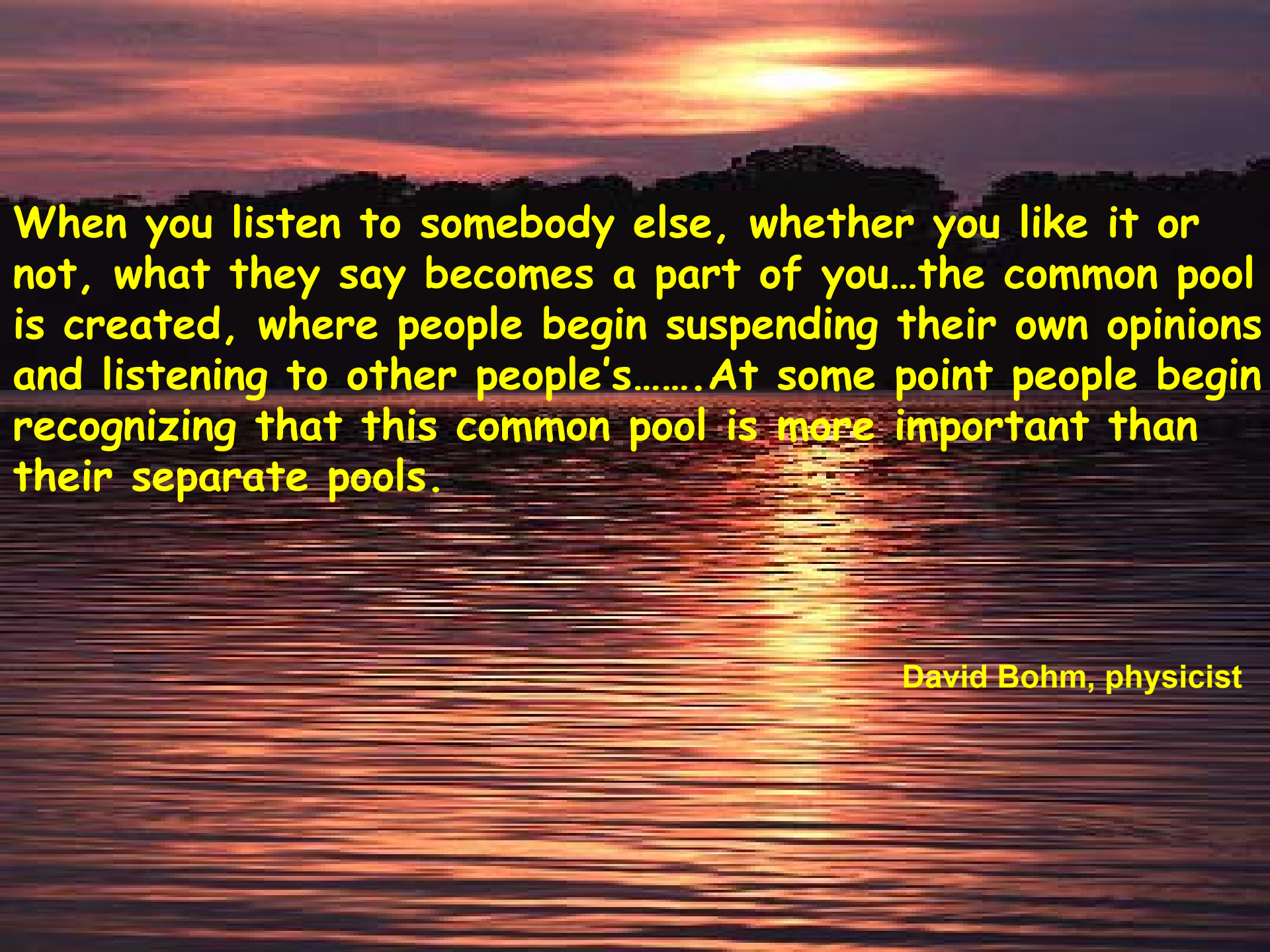
Ivan Silver MD MEd FRCP(C)
Vice-Dean Continuing Education and
Professional Development
Faculty of Medicine, U of T



Learning objectives

At the end of this presentation participants will be able to:

- define what a community of practice (COP) is
- describe what they can do
- reflect on how they may apply to palliative care teaching and education.



When you listen to somebody else, whether you like it or not, what they say becomes a part of you...the common pool is created, where people begin suspending their own opinions and listening to other people's.....At some point people begin recognizing that this common pool is more important than their separate pools.

David Bohm, physicist

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead



Knowledge is experience. Everything else is just information

Albert Einstein







Tell some stories

What drives Communities of Practice (COP)

- Most fields of expertise are now too complex for any one person to master, and thus collective intelligence must be brought to bear
- The growing recognition that the most valuable knowledge in an organization is tacit
- The need for people to share knowledge across organizations (globally)
- Such sharing depends on social relationships

What drives Communities of Practice (COP)

20% of the knowledge in an organization is explicitly recorded. The other 80% exists tacitly in the heads of employees. Communities of practice aims to capture this 80%.

Jonathan Spira, Basex Corp.

History of Communities of Practice

- coined by Wenger and Lave (1991)
- they were studying apprenticeship as a learning model
- discovered that a powerful learning tool was the community that acted as a living curriculum

Definition for Communities of Practice

A Community of Practice is a "group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic or domain and who deepen their understanding and knowledge by interacting on an on-going basis."

(Wenger, 1998)

A Community of Practice

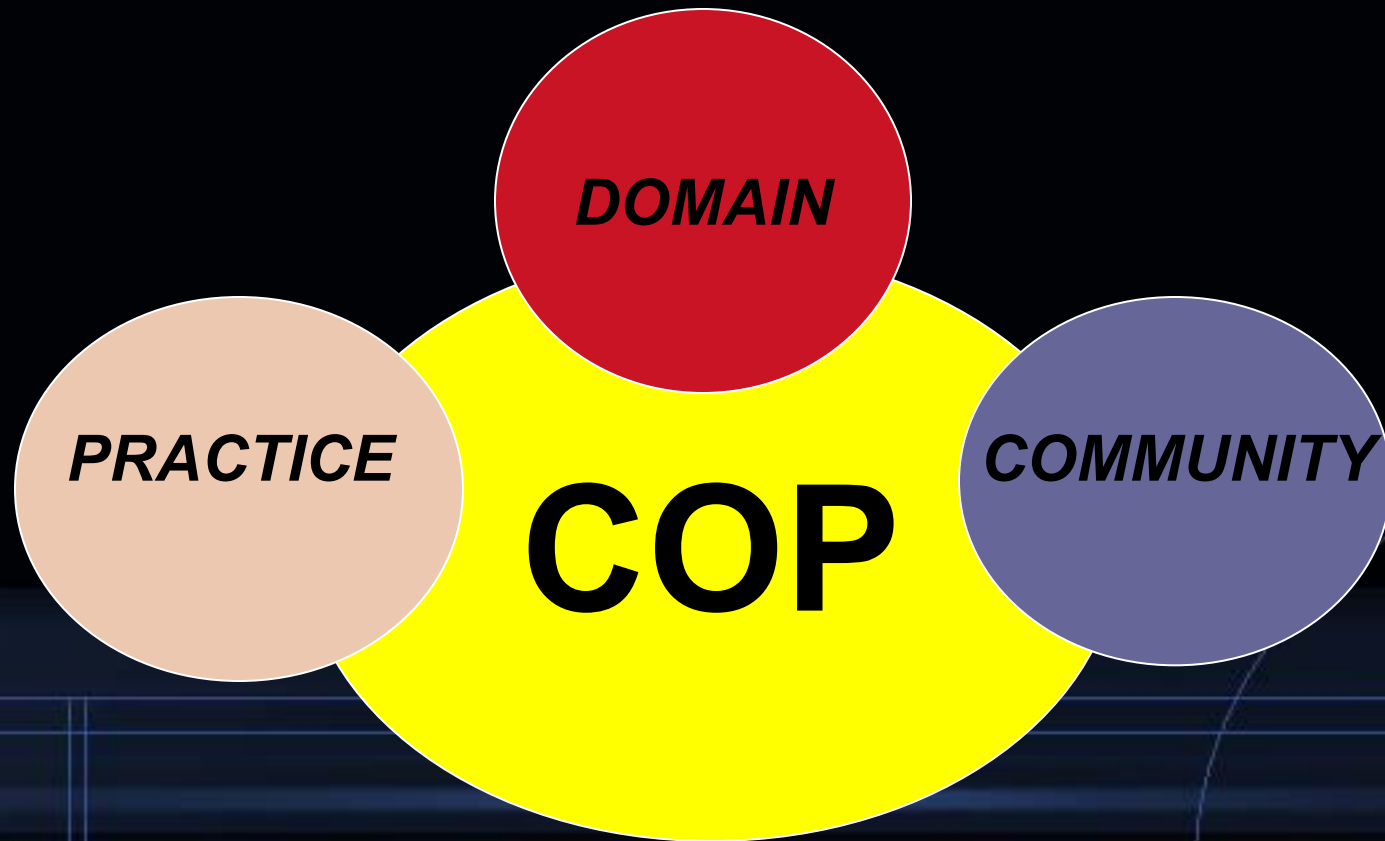
“Simply put, a Community of Practice is a group of people that share knowledge, learn together, and create common practices”

McDermott/99

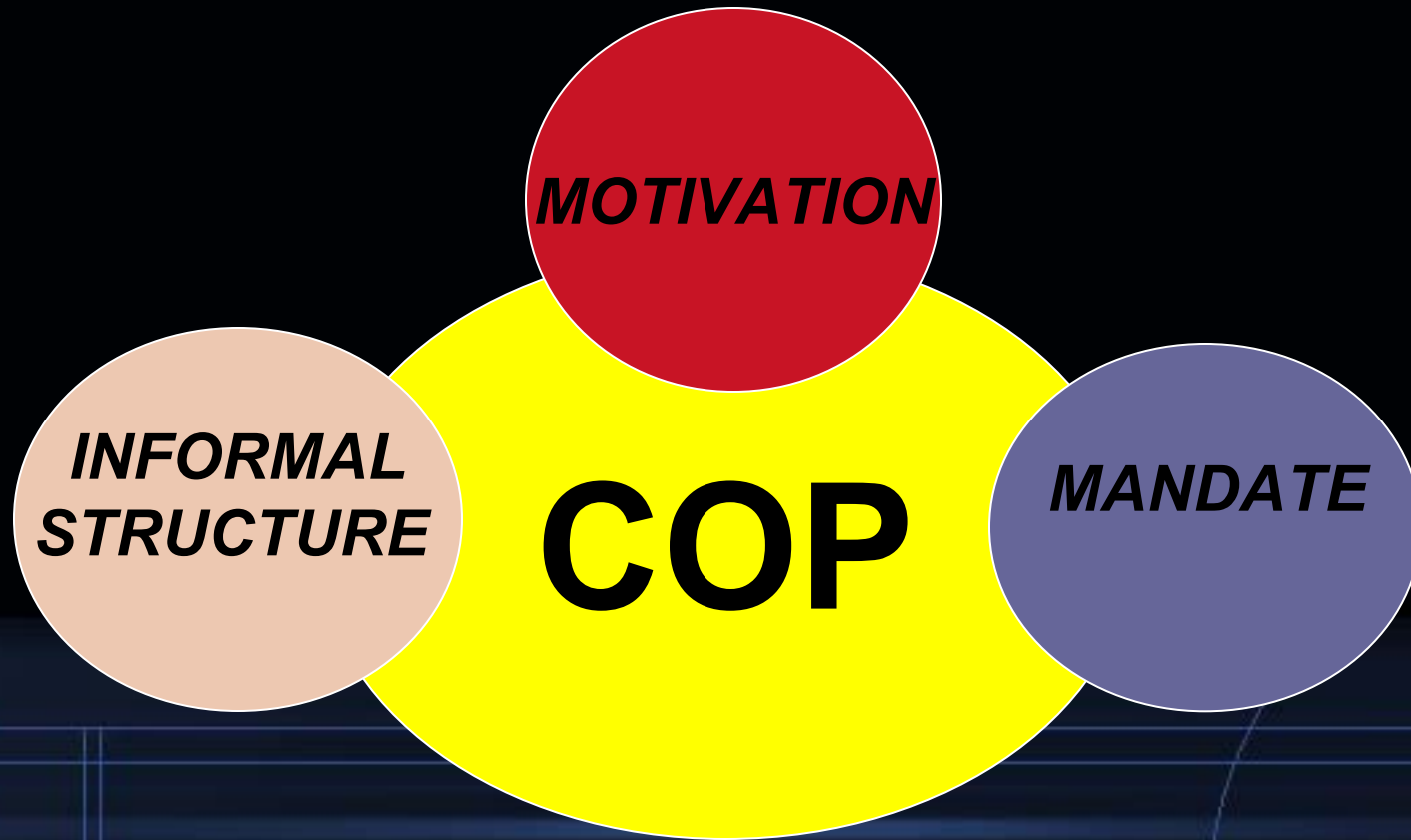
Three key characteristics of COP's

- **A domain of knowledge**
- **Functions as a community**
- **Share a practice**

Essential Features



Essential Features - Hidden

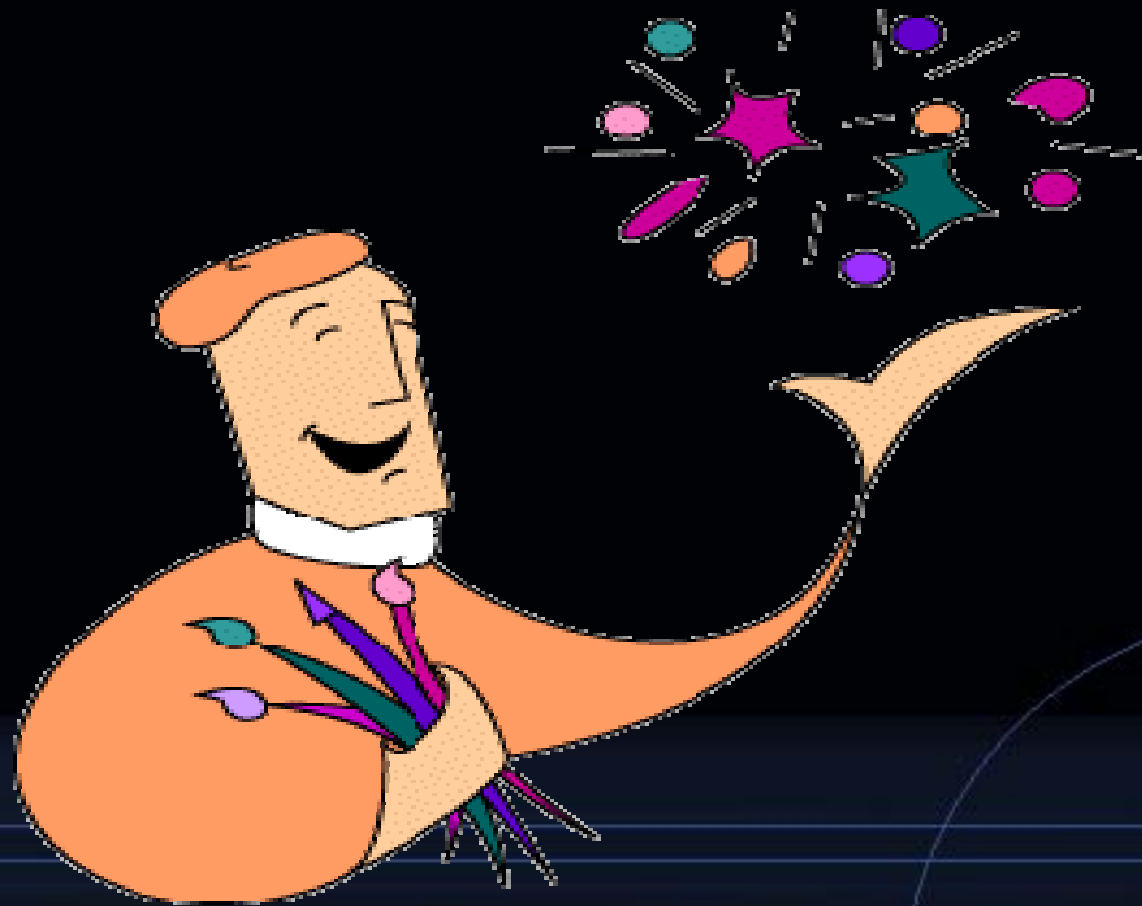


Different Types of Cooperating Groups

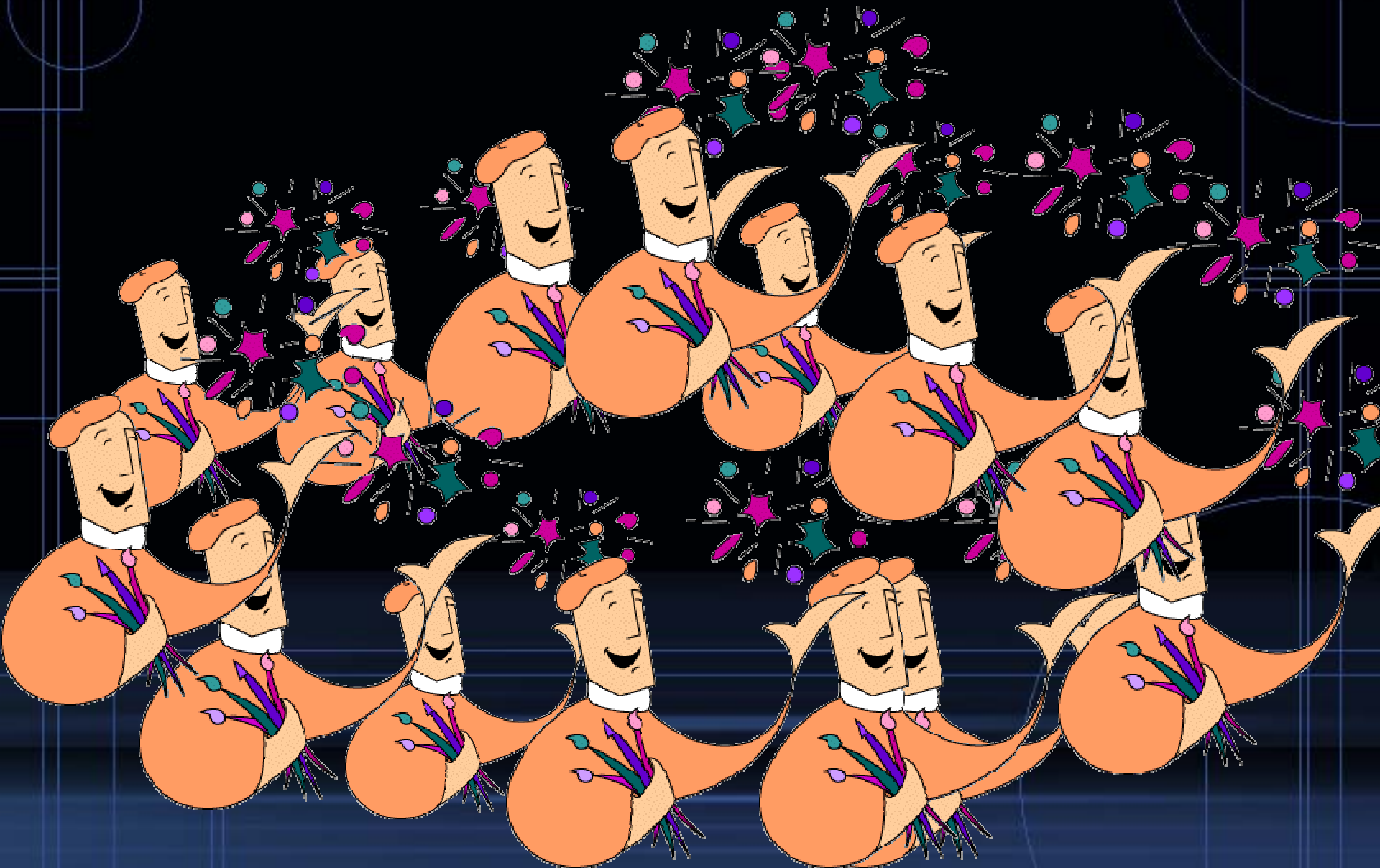
- Working Group/Task Force
- Info-Network
- Interest Group

How do Learning Theories inform COP's?

Personal Constructivism



Social Constructivism



Where are Communities of Practice?

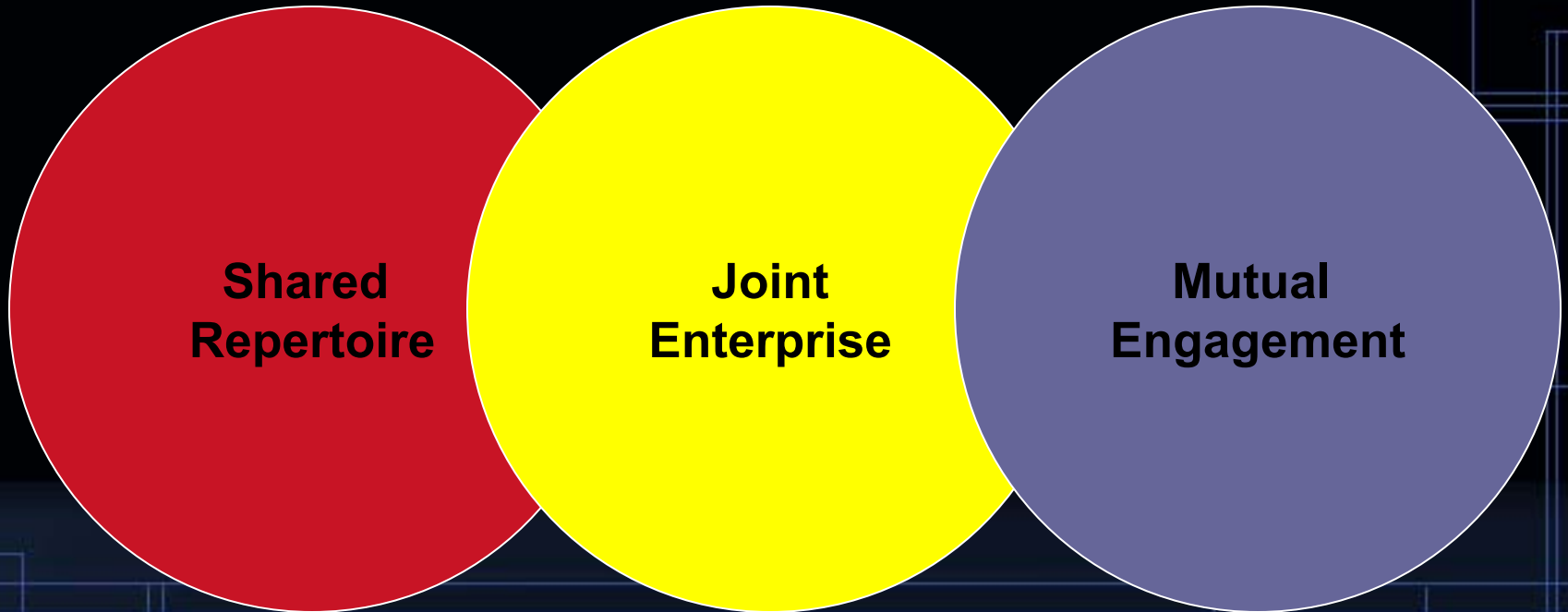
- They are everywhere
- At home, work, school, in our hobbies
- We move in and out of them throughout our lives

Features of a Community of Practice

- Problem solving
- Effective grapevines
- Sharing “war stories”
- Requesting information
- Seeking experience
- Collaboration and coordination
- Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps
- Shared evolving language and viewpoint

Communities of Practice

How to spot one and how to tell if you have succeeded in starting up one



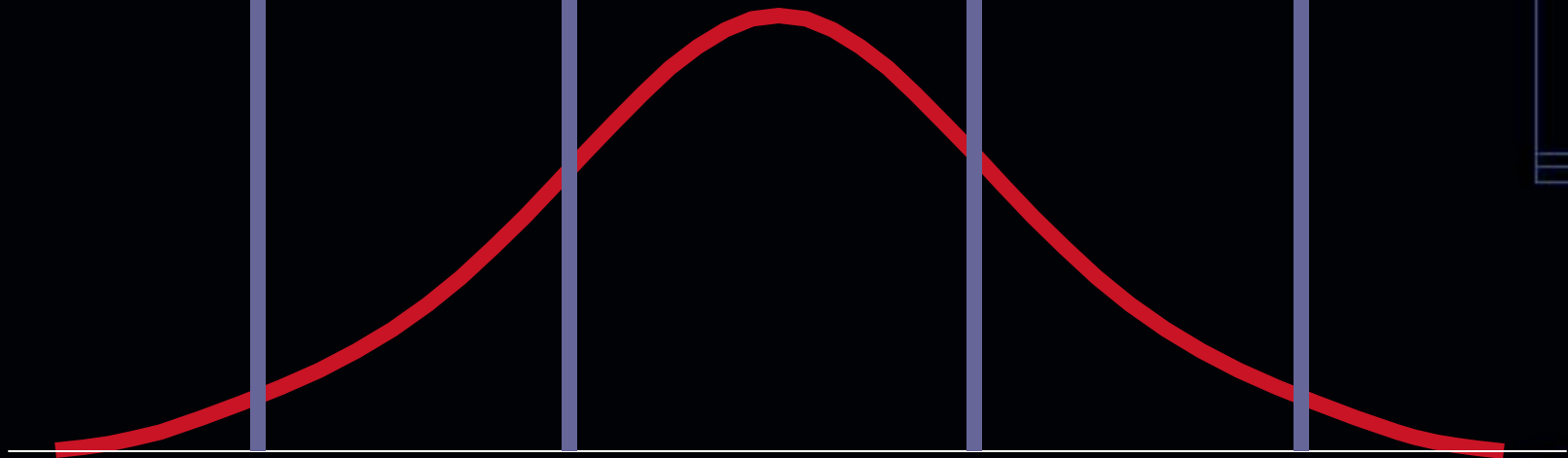
Committing

Starting up

Operating

Winding down

Shutting down



COP – Stages of Development

THE COP LIFE CYCLE

Types of COPS

- **Within organizations**
- **Between organizations (online, video conferenced)**
- **Combinations**

Within organizations

Types:

- **Self-organizing**
- **Sponsored**

Start-up guide for COP's within organizations

- Educate within the organization
- Support from management i.e. technology
- Encourage a few pilots to emerge – distributed leadership
- Value the work of communities

Challenges within organizations

“The formal organization must have processes to include these communities while honoring their root in personal passion and engagement”

Expected outcomes

- **stimulating interaction**
- **fostering learning**
- **creating new knowledge**
- **socializing new members**
- **identifying and sharing best practices**

Evidence for efficacy of COP's

Remarkably little in literature!

→ Case Studies (online COP's)

Online COP's

What have we learned so far?

- COP's can exist with web-based technology
- A virtual community does not guarantee that a COP will arise
- Technical support and education is essential
- Challenges include withdrawing, cultural differences, superficial discussion and lack of urgency in responding
- Is face-to-face essential?

More Examples of COP's

- The story of the Education Scholars
- New faculty COP

What are your stories of COP's?

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