

Establishing and Fostering Communities of Practice

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In 2009 a year long project to reform the University Library's file share was completed and the project team disbanded. The challenge was to ensure that the new structure of the file share was maintained. There were no additional resources available to ensure this. A community of practice was suggested as a way of maintaining the new structure and ensuring good practice in information management continued.

The University Library comprises four programs Collections, Scholarly Information, Information Management and the eScholarship Research Centre. Staff from Collections, parts of Scholarly Information and Information Management had worked together on the original project. To establish the community of practice Managers from these programs were asked to nominate a Local Information Management "Expert".

Fourteen individuals from the three programs were nominated. Four meetings were arranged and held in 2010. A variety of meeting styles and settings were trialled and evaluated. In 2011 the number of meetings was increased to six at the suggestion of the LIMEs themselves. In 2012 ten meetings a year will be held. The role of the LIMEs has been recognised in the Library operational plan and the group is developing a program of activities and professional development across the Library.

The paper reviews the literature on communities of practice. It surveys the development of community of practice theory from the 1990's to the present and explores what constitutes a community of practice and how members of the community create a shared meaning in workplaces.

It describes the lessons learned in the development of this community of practice and how those lessons have been applied to other groups in the Library. It outlines plans for the future and strategies being used to make communities of practice self supporting.