Fostering engagement with academic communities of practice: a new role for librarians

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Research study

Case study for Masters thesis in Information Management (RMIT) conducted in October 2014

Key Questions:

- How do mathematics academics engage with information available about teaching?
- What are their information needs?

Approach

Interviews with 13 academics in Australian universities

- Background
- Experience and training in teaching
- Information sources used
- Information needs

Findings

- Workplace culture
- Teaching is 'sink or swim'
- Big challenges in teaching
- Pressure to adapt teaching
- Traditional teacher centric approaches

Findings

Sources of information

- Colleagues and peers
- Presentations listening
- Accidental discovery & referral

Information needs

- A starting point
- Access to practical and reliable information
- Accessible/not time consuming

Emergent communities of practice?

Academics valued...

- Learning from people
- Participation
- Experience
- Shared practices
- Practical solutions to problems

A Community of Practice is...

- Learning is social
- Participation
- Shared expertise
- Shared practices
- Problem solving

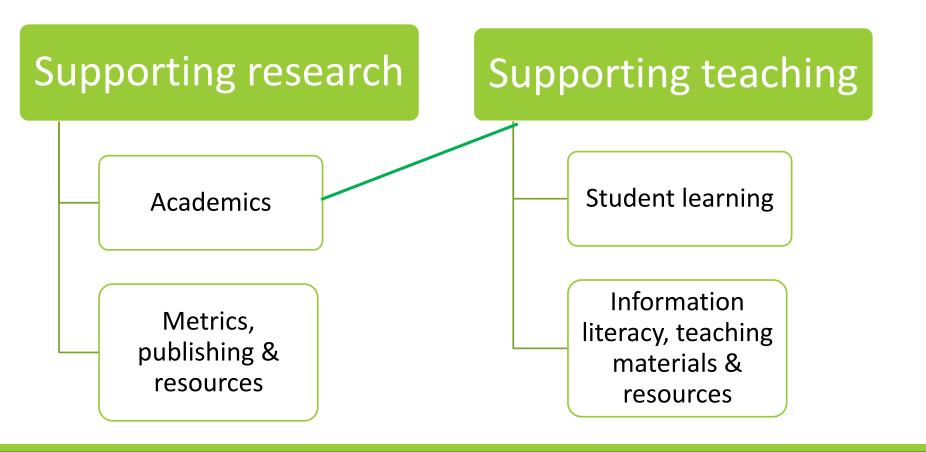
Communities of Practice in universities

Some success but not widespread

 Effective for professional development and multi-disciplinary collaboration

 Need a facilitator to establish and support

How does this fit with academic libraries?



Skills

LIBRARIANS

- Information provider
- Curator
- Liaison
- Researcher
- Trainer
- Organiser

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FACILITATOR

- Information provider
- Enabler
- Champion
- Researcher
- Facilitator
- Organiser

Examples

- ✓ Communities of practice can be effective in universities
- ✓ Librarians are active within their own communities of practice
- ✓ Librarians are actively supporting teaching practice in universities
- ✓ Liaison and embedded librarians already support information needs of groups of academics

Conclusions

Unmet need exists for information and support in teaching



Information seeking behaviors mimicked communities of practice



Communities of practice need a facilitator



Librarians have skills, knowledge and relationships to facilitate communities

Mechanisms

- Extend current liaison librarian services
- > Partner with L&T units
- Participate in Faculty L&T committees
- Identify receptive departments and working groups
- > Learning and teaching grant recipients

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