Chapter 8
Using Communities of Practice to Identify Competencies

Mambo G. Mupepi
Grand Valley State University, USA

ABSTRACT

While there is currently a significant amount of work being done to promote competency-based education (CBE), many efforts are focused on the design, development, administration, and technology of CBE programs. Yet CBE programs will be successful only if they begin with an accurate and comprehensive identification of required competencies and the key performance indicators (KPI) necessary for effective instructional planning and assessment. This continues to be an area of ongoing debate in competency-based education, particularly in regard to the identification of 21st century competencies and those that reflect higher-order thinking skills. This article suggests that communities of practice (COP) can be integral partners in the effort to identify competencies, establish levels of proficiency that support common divisions of labor within industries, and distinguish the novice from the expert.

INTRODUCTION

Competency-based education (CBE) is a popular innovation being explored and implemented by many institutions of higher education throughout the United States. A majority of the work currently being done is focused on strategies for developing and implementing CBE courses and programs. Primary areas of effort currently include development of new administrative and technical infrastructures required for CBE, including separating administrative functions away from the traditional credit-hour system; unbundling of the faculty role; and development of next-generation learning management systems. Yet relatively less effort has been paid to the identification of the competencies *as a field*. While many articles and case studies discuss the identification of competencies, many describe this step in general or vague terms using language such as, "the CBE development team worked with industry experts" to

identify competencies, but detail as to actual techniques is lacking. This chapter identifies *communities of practice* (COP) as a particularly effective resource for colleges and universities to use in their work identifying competencies.

Communities of practice (COP) are internal organizational or industry-specific groups created explicitly to explore ways to boost productivity and improve organizational capacity. Mupepi, Mupepi, and Motiwan (2015) identify a community of practice as a collaborative forum that can be enacted to create diffuse and distributed explicit knowledge and expertise within a specific topical area. Communities of practice may be relatively small, located within a single organization or they may be larger, focusing on an industry and encompassing multiple companies and experts. In general, COP focus on continuous performance improvement and the development of organizational capacity within their respective industries of focus and, therefore, have the expertise necessary to identify the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and technology required for optimum organizational effectiveness (Figure 1). The collaborative nature of COP can give rise to a shared awareness among constituencies of the understanding, skill sets, and abilities that must be translated into competencies that incumbents must be able to demonstrate in the workforce and CBE students must demonstrate mastery of as part of their programs.

Furthermore, such shared awareness can potentially contribute to the issues of transferability and articulation of CBE courses that continue to be an area of ongoing concern for institutions of higher education in the development of their programs.

The chapter is organized into three parts. The first part offers an overview of 'competency' in terms of both its definition and in terms of the importance of competency validation for education and evaluation purposes. The second part presents 'communities of practice' (COP) as a collaborative forum for identifying competencies relevant to an organization or industry. This section also proposes a framework, including strategies and techniques, for use within the COP. Finally, the chapter will consider ways that colleges and universities can work with a COP to identify competencies needed by graduates now and in the future.

Figure 1. The focus of the COP is building effective organizational capacity
(Mupepi, 2010)
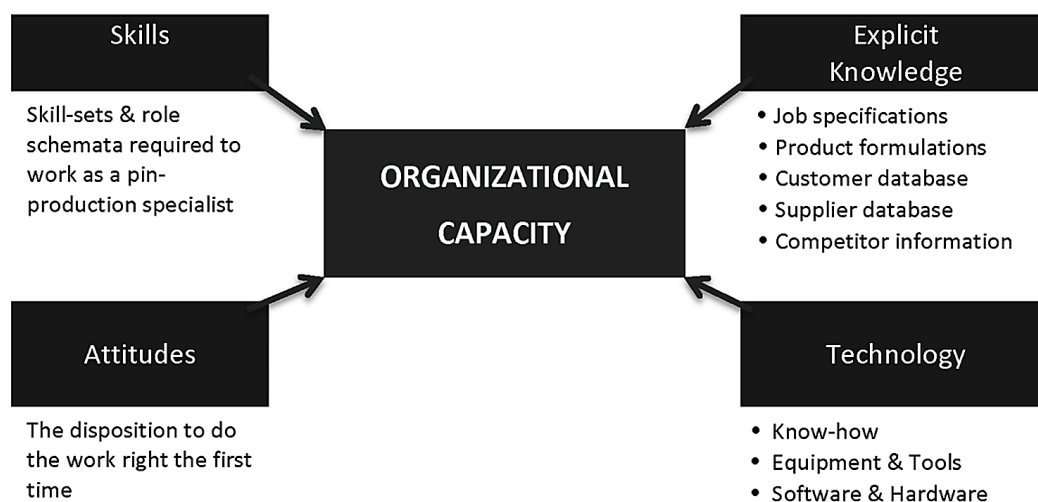
9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/using-communities-of-practice-to-identify-competencies/167901

Related Content

Digitalization of Higher Education in the Digital Age: The World's Current Digital Transformation and Its Goals
Gamze Mercanand Pnar Köseolu (2023). *Global Perspectives on the Internationalization of Higher Education (pp. 278-299).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digitalization-of-higher-education-in-the-digital-age/319491

Dynamic Leadership: Moving HBCUs Toward New Ontologies of Organizational Development
Myron Devere White (2016). *Administrative Challenges and Organizational Leadership in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (pp. 58-71).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/dynamic-leadership/156853

Taking Advantage of a Changing Market: Technology and the HBCU
Bryan Kent Wallaceand Adenike Marie Davidson (2016). *Setting a New Agenda for Student Engagement and Retention in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (pp. 172-185).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/taking-advantage-of-a-changing-market/157930

Incorporating Spirituality in the Classroom: Effects on Teaching Quality Perception
Matthew A. Hiatt, Jeffrey S. Reber, Alan L. Wilkinsand Jillian Ferrell (2021). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/article/incorporating-spirituality-in-the-classroom/273132

"The Fact That the Author Was Male Instead of Female Provided for an Objective Opinion": Implicit Bias in the Classroom
Julia Ferrara Waity, Jennifer Vandermindenand Kristin Robeson (2020). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (pp. 44-60).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-fact-that-the-author-was-male-instead-of-female-provided-for-an-objective-opinion/265506