

**Title:** 'Ask the expert' webinars as a best practice model for engaging members in an online community of practice for developing e-learning practitioners

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Evaluate the benefits of an international community of practice for informal professional development in e-Learning
- Understand some principles of designing community activities that engage members
- Reflect on their experience of participating in a simulation of an online 'Ask the Expert' webinar

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

How do you engage members in an informal online community of practice? What enables participation? How can members from very different contexts learn effectively from each other? This session will explore the Best Practice Models community and run a simulation of an online activity that has been successful in engaging a wide range of participants.

The Best Practice Models Project at Staffordshire University has been coordinating an e-Learning online network for 3 years and is a successful example of a community of practice. The community is open to e-learning practitioners from the University and throughout the world and currently has over 740 members in a Moodle environment, with other members across a Ning group, Facebook group and Elgg. Members are actively engaged in sharing their experience of e-learning in a range of contexts and value the community as a place to develop their practice. The community now contains a wide range of models for e-learning design, case studies, wikis, relevant links, forums and reflections on practice by practitioners.

The session will discuss the structure and organisation of the community in relation to Wenger's 7 principles for cultivating communities of practice. In addition, 3 principles for designing effective online activities will be introduced that are derived from a number of other models including Salmon, Stephenson, Laurillard and Stiles.

The 'Ask the Expert' webinars run in the community have been an effective way to engage members with the community and facilitate sharing of practice. This session will include a simulation of an 'Ask the Expert' session to allow participants to explore its effectiveness and

consider how additional activities, based on the same principles, could be designed to engage members in other learning communities.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

5 mins – introduction to Best Practice Models for e-Learning Community

5 mins – overview of principles for designing online learning derived from theory

20 mins – face-to-face simulation of online 'Ask the Experts' activity:

- a) identification of an 'expert' in each group – a delegate who is willing to share an example of a teaching and learning activity that exemplifies the principles from above.
- b) the expert presents their example by talking for 2 minutes
- c) the group members reflect and prepare written questions
- d) the group members ask questions/engage in discussion about the case study and the underlying principles. Summary added to wall

10 mins – small group discussion – How effective is this activity in engaging members and facilitating sharing of expertise? What online tools and skills would be needed by members? What support would be required? What other activities could be designed using the same 3 principles?

5 mins – feedback to whole group

### **References**

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Roach MP & Stiles MJ (1998) "COSE - A Virtual Learning Environment founded on a Holistic Pedagogic Approach", CTI: Software for Engineering Education No 14. Available from Engineering Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy (<http://www.engsc.ac.uk/downloads/pdfs/news/nl14.pdf>)

Salmon (2004) *E-moderating: the key to teaching and learning online*, Routledge Falmer, London

Stephenson (2001) Online Learning: it is all about Dialogue, involvement, support and control in *Teaching and learning online: pedagogies for new technologies*, ed Stephenson, Kogan Page, London.

Wenger (2002), *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Mass.