ABSTRACT

BOZARTH, JANE. The Usefulness of Wenger’s Framework in Understanding a Community of Practice. (Under the direction of Julia Storberg-Walker and Diane Chapman.)

Communities of practice (CoPs) are self-managed groups of individuals who share a common interest, often a work role, and interact with the intention of improving practice. As 21st-century American businesses face global expansion and the exodus of the Baby Boomer generation from the workforce, developing new knowledge management strategies, particularly those capable of capturing hard-to-document tacit knowledge, is a critical need. Extant literature deals heavily with the formation and attempted management of communities of practice, but is sparse on what actually takes place inside them; that is, how they “work,” information that could prove invaluable to business leaders.

Etienne Wenger (1998) is widely cited for his work on the topic of communities of practice. However, the framework he developed in his seminal book Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity is overlooked in the academic and popular business press, where the focus is most typically on managing a community of practice, rather than understanding their internal dynamics. Further, no study since the book was published has ever tested Wenger’s framework to see whether, or the degree to which, the framework is useful when applied to another context.

This instrumental case study is an attempt to fill this gap in the research literature. It tested the framework to determine the extent to which it was useful in understanding the internal dynamics of a community of practice. While the findings of this study
confirmed a generic adequacy of Wenger’s framework, the study suggests important enhancements to the Wenger framework for future researchers.

A refined framework for understanding the internal dynamics of a community of practice was generated in this study. This refined framework contributes to the existing knowledge of CoPs by extending the understanding of how a successful CoP “works,” informs new means for transmitting tacit knowledge, establishes new guidelines for future researchers, and paves the way for the eventual development of a fully operationalized theory of CoPs. Implications for practice may include consideration of the CoP not only as possessing knowledge which might be harnessed, but as a means of retaining high-performing staff by providing them a space in which they can excel. It is hoped that future research on communities of practice will be influenced by the refined framework generated by this study. Further, scholars and practitioners now have research findings that support a shift in focus from managing a community of practice, to nurturing and understanding the significant internal dynamics of learning, meaning, and identity.
The Usefulness of Wenger’s Framework in Understanding a Community of Practice

by
Jane Bozarth

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Adult and Higher Education

Raleigh, North Carolina

2008

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Colleen Wiessner
Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli

Dr. Julia Storberg-Walker
Co-Chair of Advisory Committee

Dr. Diane Chapman
Co-Chair of Advisory Committee
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Valerie-Lee Chapman (aka Valena, Warrior Princess), whose passion for teaching set a new standard for anyone involved in education, training and development, or any other endeavor in which one human being seeks to support the growth and development of another. Here is an excerpt from the farewell email she sent to members of her Reflective Practice class, me among them, shortly before her death from cancer at the age of 54. While I realize it’s an unusual thing to include, I think it needs to be shared with the world, and for those who didn’t know her it will explain both why she was so beloved and why so many of her students continue to feel we have no choice but to try and live up to her expectations of us.

"Dear Class,

I am a good adult learner, and I asked you to tell me what you learned in this course, so I should, ethically, tell you what I learned, too.

1. I learned that a group of uncomfortable, awkward, individually focused adults, most of whom were scared at some point about doctoral study and the hellish commitment they were making to give up at least five years of life, turned into a group that talks and engages with each other about their work, their life, their research, and their hopes and fears.

2. I’ve learned from your work that each of you is gifted, uncannily bright, and just top of the heap in your job field. I’ve learned some of you question your work, its meaning and
what you want from a practice with people and human interactions and theories and ideas.

3. I’ve learned that each of you has become deeply thoughtful about the way you work in the world and the interactions you have with people in your professional and personal lives.

4. I’ve learned some of you have children, some of you have Corgis, and one of you has a crockpot.

5. I’ve learned that each of you is going to do a brilliant and incisive and useful piece of research that other scholars are going to cite.

6. I’ve learned that when you allow yourselves to be in your words, you write like angels.

7. I’ve learned that each of you yearns for a learning community, and will found one.

8. I’ve learned that each of you can explain Reflective Practice and that each explanation will be different and right.

9. I’ve learnt that you don’t like to criticize Bambi; I’ve learnt that you hate Spivak but, my word, you learned a lot from her. I’ve learned that Parker Palmer has marked your hearts and souls, and whether you do qualitative or quantitative research it will have courage and heart enfolded within it.

10. I’ve learned that you can read Critical Personal Narratives like this one, and find them useful. And mostly I’ve learned an enormous amount from each of you, for each of you has contacted me personally offering help, dignity and courage and told me of your fears and hopes.
I am honoured to have been part of this first class in Reflective Practice and I have no hesitation in recommending any of you as a complete resource on the topic.

I wish you well on your journeys to doctorhood. I wish you hard work, challenge, frustration, exhilaration, tenacity, joy, courage, hope and dignity.

Dr. Valerie-Lee Chapman,

April 24, 2004”
BIOGRAPHY

Jane Bozarth has been a training practitioner since 1989. She holds a B.A. degree (English) from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a M.Ed. degree (Training and Development) from North Carolina State University. Her work on her capstone project for her M.Ed. degree was adapted and published in 2005 as *E-Learning Solutions on a Shoestring*. Since then she has published *Better than Bullet Points: Creating Engaging E-Learning with PowerPoint* and *From Analysis to Evaluation: Tools, Tips, and Techniques for Trainers* (all from John Wiley & Sons/Pfeiffer). She is passionate about training and in addition to her current job as E-Learning Coordinator for the state of North Carolina she is a frequent presenter at trade and academic conferences.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially appreciative of the work of my advisory committee, co-chair and sparring partner Dr. Julia Storberg-Walker, co-chair and referee Dr. Diane Chapman, Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli, and Dr. Colleen Aalsburg-Wiessner. The road this past year was much smoother for me than for most, and I appreciate that more than I can say.

I would also like to thank those faculty members who were so influential during my early years in the department and who have gone on to other pursuits, particularly Dr. Paula Berardinelli, Dr. Darryl McGraw, and Dr. Saundra Wall Williams.

I could not have done this without the support and patience of three managers across two jobs: Thom Wright, Ann Gillen Cobb, and Barbara Gibson. Thanks so much for the many accommodations.

I would not have seen this through without the ongoing support and empathy from my best school buddy Laura Lamonica, whose turn will come soon.

Many thanks to Kent Underwood, who has never known a time in our married life that hasn’t involved weekends lost while I worked on papers, piles of “literature” everywhere, and comments like, “You’re on your own for dinner every Tuesday until Christmas.” (Not to mention a memorable Caribbean vacation spent mostly looking for internet cafes so I could log in to WebCT.) He never once complained, although I certainly did.

Finally, I am grateful to the members of the pseudonymous TRAIN group for their many years of support culminating with their participation in this study. I look forward to seeing what TRAIN looks like in 2031.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................... xiii

Introductory Note to the Reader ..................................................................................... 1

Vignette One: Identity .................................................................................................... 2

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 4

The TRAIN Group ......................................................................................................... 4

Communities of Practice ............................................................................................. 7

Wenger’s Roots ............................................................................................................. 10

The Problem ................................................................................................................ 11

Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................... 15

Research Question ....................................................................................................... 15

Methodology Overview ............................................................................................... 16

Importance of the Study .............................................................................................. 17

My Story ....................................................................................................................... 19

Outline of the Dissertation ......................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................... 25

Situated Learning Theory ............................................................................................ 25

Lave .............................................................................................................................. 26

Brown, Collins, and Duguid ....................................................................................... 28
Instrumental Case Study Method ................................................................. 55
Overview of the Study ..................................................................................... 57
Data Sources ..................................................................................................... 57
Data Sources: Summary .................................................................................... 59
Research Setting ............................................................................................... 61
Data Collection and Analysis Methods ............................................................. 62
Meaning Aspect of Practice .............................................................................. 69
Community Aspect of Practice ....................................................................... 69
Learning Aspect of Practice .............................................................................. 70
Identity Aspect of Practice ................................................................................ 71
Data Collection: Interviews ............................................................................. 72
Data Collection: Observation .......................................................................... 76
Data Collection: Document Review ................................................................. 81
Data Analysis Process ...................................................................................... 82
Data Analysis: Interviews ................................................................................. 82
Data Analysis: Observations .......................................................................... 91
Data Analysis: Document Review ................................................................. 94
Credibility and Trustworthiness ...................................................................... 96
Researcher Biases and Beliefs ....................................................................... 97
Limitations of the Study .................................................................................. 102
Methodology Summary ..................................................................................... 104
REFERENCES ................................................................................................................267
APPENDICES .................................................................................................................281
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .......................................................................282
APPENDIX B: IRB APPLICATION ................................................................................284
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM ..............................................................291
APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION MEMO .........................................................................295
APPENDIX E: STUDY PROTOCOL ................................................................................296
APPENDIX F: CONFERENCE ATTENDEE COMMENTS ..............................................311
APPENDIX G: SPONTANEOUS CREATION OF METAPHOR ....................................317
APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY MAINTENANCE ACTIVITY ..................319
APPENDIX I: REQUEST FOR HELP ............................................................................320
APPENDIX J: GLOSSARY OF REPERTOIRE ..............................................................321
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1   Wenger’s Aspects and Analytic Components ...............................................  40
Table 3.1   Aspects, Analytic Components, and Markers................................................  64
Table 3.2   Interviewees and Time Periods for First Joining TRAIN................................73
Table 3.3 Coding Scheme ..................................................................................................83
Table 3.4 Grouping of Observation Data...........................................................................92
Table 4.1 Analytic Components and Markers for “Meaning” Aspect.............................110
Table 4.2 Wants and Needs of Clients Compared to New Hires.................................120
Table 4.3 Comparison of Interview Responses ...............................................................127
Table 4.4 Analytic Components and Markers for “Community” Aspect .......................128
Table 4.5 Analytic Components and Markers for “Identity” Aspect ................... 154
Table 4.6 Analytic Components and Markers for “Learning” Aspect ....................184
Table 4.7 TRAIN CoP Interests Across Time .................................................................200
Table 5.1 Meaning Aspect with Changes Noted .............................................................227
Table 5.2 Community Aspect with Changes Noted.......................................................234
Table 5.3 Identity Aspect with Changes Noted .............................................................241
Table 5.4 Learning Aspect with Changes Noted .............................................................248
Table 5.5 Revised CoP Framework Based on Key Findings........................................252
Table Appendix E.1. Wenger Framework and Markers ..................................................298
Table Appendix E.2 Examples of Data Expected from Observations............................307
Table Appendix E.3 Planned Schedule of Activities.......................................................310
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Key Principles chart from T101 Course circa 1992 .................................201
Figure 4.2 Key Principles charts created by T101 learners, 2007 .............................202
Figure Appendix F.1 Photo of conference attendee comments ..............................311
Figure Appendix G.1 Spontaneous creation of metaphor ........................................318
Figure Appendix I.1 Example of asking for help .....................................................320
Figure Appendix J.1. “Find your 20%” ..................................................................322
Figure Appendix J.2. Reified concepts appear across the TRAIN enterprise ..........323
Introductory Note to the Reader

Capturing the nuances of activities and communication within a community of practice is challenging. As modeled in the source text for this dissertation, Etienne Wenger’s 1998 *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, the provision of extended narrative examples can often better convey the spirit, energy, and dynamics of the community under study than can short excerpts culled from interviews or observation records. Throughout this paper there are several vignettes, extended fictionalized accounts of real events and conversations, offered in the hope of providing a richer view of the different of aspects of practice discussed. These vignettes appear in italicized font at several of the chapter breaks.
Vignette One: Identity

“I’d been attending NC TRAIN [North Carolina Training Improvement Network] meetings for maybe a year, and I loved the group’s energy and commitment to improvement. I especially loved the expertise people shared about how to make training more useful, engaging, and fun. People working on a new training program could toss the topic out to the group and get dozens of ideas for developing it, and usually find at least one person who’d already done something similar. I also loved that members were committed to improvement for its own sake: people came to meetings voluntarily and freely shared their ideas and experiences to help each other. I’d also made some friends in the group who worked one county over, and we were able to get together for lunch between meetings and talk about problems we were having and things we’d done to improve our training programs. It was wonderful just to be around others who understood what I did and who got it.

Unfortunately, I was working in a county government social services office with very high turnover. We were constantly delivering new hire training and program training, like welfare or food stamp eligibility determination. Most of the training was lecture-based, mostly just reading the eligibility manuals out loud and expecting trainees to memorize everything. I didn’t feel that anyone especially cared whether our trainees
actually learned anything -- we treated them like expendable warm bodies -
- and I didn’t feel that I really could do much in the way of applying the
games and activities and other ideas people shared at the TRAIN meetings.
I also felt I didn’t have much power to change the status quo. We had very
standard curricula and lesson plans, very established ways of doing things,
and I didn’t feel I had much authority to challenge anything. I was just a
program trainer.

But I had a huge moment of – what’s the word? Illumination? Clarity? –
at a TRAIN meeting in 1999 when the presenter, one of the founding
members who had once worked in a job similar to mine, said, “You have to
decide what you are, and then live up to that. Don’t let your organization,
or your boss, limit you with their definitions. Are you going to be “just a
food stamp trainer,” or “a trainer who happens to know a lot about food
stamps?” That hit me like a lightning bolt. It changed who I am.” (TRAIN
member since 1998, now Staff Development Director for a state government
agency with 3,800 employees.)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Communities of practice (CoPs) are self-managed organizations of individuals who through intentional mutual engagement work to create shared learning. Such communities are of interest to businesses which, facing both the demands of 21st century global enterprise and the anticipated departure of the Baby Boomer generation from the workplace, seek new strategies for knowledge management.

While much extant literature deals with the means of creating and controlling CoPs virtually none has sought to understand how they “work,” and there is thus not yet an operationalized theory of CoPs. Etienne Wenger, author of 1998’s *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, offers a detailed framework for analyzing the internal dynamics of a community of practice. The framework was extracted from Wenger’s study of a single community of practice and has never been tested back against an existing CoP. A study is therefore needed to assess the strengths and limitations of this framework to inform its future use as a tool for researchers and, possibly, to develop a refined or clarified framework. Additionally, this instrumental case study inquiry, as far as can be determined, is the first to attempt to explore ways of understanding, rather than controlling, a CoP.

The TRAIN Group

The Training Improvement Network (TRAIN) was founded in 1985 by a group of four trainers employed by the Guilford County, North Carolina, Department of Social Services, with the mission, “To stamp out bad training.” (Note: “TRAIN” is a pseudonym created
for this study to protect the identities of members.) Since inviting some like-minded training colleagues to that first meeting, the group has grown to a mailing list of 250 trainers, most from North Carolina (NC) state agencies, universities, and county and local government entities, and a few from the private sector, all involved in the development and/or delivery of employee training.

TRAIN meets quarterly for a day and holds an annual 2 1/2-day conference in late spring. Average meeting attendance is sixty members; each of the last 4 conferences have seen overflow registrations, requiring that some attendees be housed off-site. Group-wide communication takes place via e-mail, and occasionally smaller groups of members gather informally on their own for lunches and similar events. Phone calls between members are frequent. Some TRAIN members occasionally gather via virtual classroom technology, which helps to ensure inclusion for those located in remote areas (such as the lone trainer at Western Carolina University, in the farthest western corner of the state) or those who have limited access to travel funds.

TRAIN meeting agendas are explicitly designed to support the mission of “stamping out bad training.” Meetings are entirely member-presented: presentations may include sharing a new game or training activity, with subsequent discussion of how it might be adapted to different topics with which attendees may be working. Members developing a workshop on a new topic are encouraged to provide a “dress rehearsal” at a TRAIN meeting in order to get feedback and suggestions in a safe environment; a recent instance is a “generations in the workplace” program being developed by a county trainer
to supplement the organization’s diversity initiative. Again in support of improvement in practice and “stamping out bad training” presenters are, following every presentation, asked 2 questions: “What was the best thing you did, and why?”, and “If you did this again tomorrow, what would you do differently?” Other members are then given the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions. TRAIN additionally developed and regularly offers a train-the-trainer workshop hereafter referred to as the “T101,” for “Training 101,” course.

From these practices, TRAIN represents a remarkable and possibly unique example of a community of practice, and the group is used to expand our understanding of how CoPs really “work.” TRAIN itself is not the focus of the study; rather, Wenger’s (1998) framework of CoPs is the focus. By examining TRAIN through Wenger’s lens, we are likely to learn more about the strengths and limitations of the community of practice framework that has become popular in the business and management literature. Studying TRAIN in this manner is important because, despite its popularity, Wenger’s framework has never been put to the test in terms of empirical research (Storberg-Walker, 2008).

**TRAIN Membership**

“Membership” in TRAIN is loosely defined as having ever attended a meeting; there are no membership dues, application processes, or requirements for joining. The group is self-managed and operates independently of any organization, without any reporting structures or accountabilities. Historically TRAIN has had one person voluntarily handle group communications, and in its 23-year history 3 people have filled that role. This person, in addition to sending notices about meetings, solicits volunteers for working on meeting
agendas and securing meeting spaces and presenters. Three members have, within the last 8 years, retired from the government workforce but continue to participate in TRAIN; all 3 continue to work part-time as performance consultants and motivational speakers. 2 members on the mailing list have left government service for employment in the private sector, but continue to participate in TRAIN.

Few TRAIN members entered the workplace training field with any formal preparation. While some began their careers as elementary school teachers, most moved into training from another role in the same organization. Some have subsequently returned to graduate school for formal academic coursework, all enrolling in North Carolina State University’s program in Adult Education with a focus on Training and Development. Depending on the organization, members may be part of a unit employing other trainers; in the case of small state agencies, however, the trainer may be the only designated training professional in the entire organization, reporting to the agency’s Human Resources Director. Members hold job titles such as “Staff Development Specialist” or “Training Coordinator” and typically engage in several formal roles. Some, for example, also serve as the agency’s employee relations specialist or HR benefits representative. As no member works in an organization with a designated “instructional designer,” many members engage in tasks ranging from needs analysis to training design to delivery of training.

Communities of Practice

As introduced briefly above, the TRAIN group neatly fits the definition of a “Community of Practice” (CoP) as provided by preeminent CoP researcher Etienne
Wenger on his website (http://www.ewenger.com): “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.” Wenger (1998) outlines specific criteria that distinguish a CoP from other groups. The CoP is primarily a self-organizing system comprised of individuals who are informally bound by what they do and by what they have learned through mutual engagement in what they do. In further refining the definition Wenger is explicit in describing what a CoP is not: it is not just a group with a shared interest, such as a hobby, or a group formed as a geographical community. It is not a club or a network of colleagues or friends. It is not a gathering of people assigned to a particular group, such as a work team, nor is it a group working toward one particular final outcome, such as a task force. The purpose of the CoP is to create shared learning:

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope.

(HTTP://WWW.EWENGER.COM/THEORY, RETRIEVED DECEMBER 11, 2007)

Wenger suggests that a CoP develops via activity across three elements. First are the domain, a shared interest to which members have committed, and in which they have
competence that sets them apart from other people; and the community, in which members engage in joint activity, share information, and build relationships. The final element is practice: members are practitioners who, through sustained interaction, together develop a shared repertoire of resources such as stories, artifacts, tools, and solutions (http://www.ewenger.com/theory, accessed December 11, 2007).

Seminal works by Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), working from a situated learning theory perspective, examined various CoPs (such as midwives, insurance claims processors, and apprentice tailors) to focus on the social interactive dimensions of situated learning. (Situated learning theory, discussed further in Chapter Two, holds that “knowledge,” rather than something that exists within the brain of an individual, or in the form of discrete pieces of data that might populate a database, is instead contingent upon social interaction within activity, context, and culture.) The CoP evolves over time, with membership changing as new members enter and older members leave. The position of members changes as some move from the periphery of the group toward the core, and others back from the core toward the periphery or even out of the CoP. For some, the CoP serves to support apprenticeship, as a novice moves toward expertise. A quality of the CoP missing from more traditional, cognitive approaches to learning is the CoP’s ability to transmit tacit knowledge, that which may otherwise never be found in manuals, guidelines, or similar documentation amassed by organizations. As defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) a critical aspect of the CoP is its emergent, self-managed nature, owned by individuals committed to improving their own practice: CoPs cannot
successfully be instituted by an organization, and membership and participation cannot be mandated. In Wenger’s (1998) view, within the CoP “practice” is comprised of four interrelated, symbiotic aspects, with accompanying analytic components, by which the internal dynamics of CoPs can be examined. The first of these aspects is meaning, which develops through participation, negotiation, and reification (in the TRAIN mission, for instance, the concept of “bad training” has become reified and is offered almost as a tangible, concrete object to be “stamped out”). Community is the source of coherence developed via mutual engagement, involvement in a joint enterprise, and a shared way of doing things. Learning involves the evolution of the community over time, with accompanying continuities and discontinuities, the development of long-term relationships, the amassing of stories, and the refinement of products and artifacts. The last aspect of practice is identity, “the negotiation of our experiences in a process of becoming, or not becoming, a certain person” (Wenger, 1998, p. 215). The vignette opening this chapter illustrates these aspects of a CoP, particularly that of identity: “It changed who I am.” According to Wenger these aspects, taken together, provide a way of understanding the dynamic operation of a community of practice, and of explaining “the complicated social processes of learning, meaning, and identity formation through practice” (Storberg-Walker, 2008. p. 563).

Wenger’s Roots

Etienne Wenger has written extensively on the subject of communities of practice (CoPs); recognition of his position as authority is evident in the scholarly literature (a
Google Scholar search for “Wenger: communities of practice” results in nearly 15,000 citations across many disciplines, from management to allied health sciences to education. His early work, begun in concert with Jean Lave (1991), examines issues of participation and peripherality, based on a theory that learning is a social phenomenon occurring not in the brain of an individual, or by the acquisition of data, but through a process of participation in practice and the accompanying access to expertise. Lave and Wenger’s work is extended in the primary text for this dissertation, Wenger’s 1998 *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, in which Wenger examined a community of insurance claims processors through the lens of his own version of a social learning theory. From the data gathered on the insurance claims processors Wenger extracted his framework of the aspects of practice as meaning, learning, community, and identity.

Wenger’s ideas of learning as social were first presented in his 1991 work with Jean Lave; their view of situated learning theory has its antecedents in the work of Dewey (1919) and Vygotsky (1962). In his 1998 work Wenger offers a short explanation of the “intellectual traditions” that helped to shape his thinking. While not explicit regarding authors, Wenger draws on theory from several literatures, including theories of learning and social constitution, theories of practice, theories of identity, and theories of situatedness.

The Problem

Empirical research on CoPs has addressed several areas of inquiry. Many studies have examined the ways in which communities fit Wenger’s definition of CoPs (Judge, Fryxell,
& Dooley, 1997), the formation and structure of CoPs (Lamontagne, 2005), member phenomena such as engagement (Au, 2002; Hammond, 1999) and motivation for participation (Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003; Wasko & Faraj, 2000).

Other studies examine results of management attempts to oversee, direct, or control CoPs, typically with the underlying goal of using the CoP as a knowledge management tool (Cross, Laseter, Parker, & Guillermo, 2006; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Pastoors, 2007; Thompson, 2005). Little attention has, however, been paid to further understanding the internal dynamics of CoPs; this study, as far as is known, is the first to attempt to explore ways of understanding, rather than controlling, a CoP.

Additionally, researchers are not using the model as a point of reference: the empirical literature shows virtually no attempt to assess the accuracy of the framework Wenger proposed for analyzing and understanding CoPs. Researchers do, however, use some of Wenger’s other constructs as the basis of research. In addition to the 4-aspect framework (meaning, practice, community, and identity) that supports the structure of his book, the 1998 Wenger text includes several concepts or rubrics that frequently appear in the subsequent literature on CoPs. These include his model of the three elements of a CoP (domain, community, and practice), his compilation of 14 characteristics for verifying the existence of a CoP (such as communication shortcuts, in-jokes, lack of preambles, and quick setup of a problem to be discussed: Thompson, 2005, p. 153 describes these as “how a CoP should appear to an outsider”), his thoughts on CoP development, and his idea of “dualities” (such as continuity v. discontinuity, and participation v. reification). The lack of
attention to his 4-aspect framework is interesting – perhaps even curious – as some of these constructs, such as Wenger’s comments on group development, occupy only a small place in his text, while the framework is so significant that it essentially provides the organizing structure of the book. Cox, in his 2005 review of what he describes as “seminal works” on CoPs, including Wenger’s 1998 text, does not even mention the framework – around which Wenger’s entire book, including the table of contents, is organized -- focusing instead on the definition of “community”. Thus, while the framework is explicit, it receives no found mention in any literature other than a conceptual article offered by Storberg-Walker (2008).

Of those studying the control or management of CoPs with Wenger as a primary reference, nearly all heavily cite both the Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) works. Pastoors (2007), in a study of organizational consultants directed to form and/or participate in a CoP, conducted semistructured interviews and document analysis, acknowledged Wenger’s influence on the study of CoPs, then interpreted data via her own perceptions of emerging themes related to culture, participation, control, and outcomes. Thompson (2005), while seeking to build “a relationship between structure and practice” (p. 153) drew upon Wenger’s list of characteristics in determining that the group under study was indeed a CoP, but then focused his attention on two specific concerns toward understanding CoPs: structural, in terms of a shared repertoire, and epistemic, in terms of mutual engagement. In studying CoPs as knowledge management tools Cross, Laseter, Parker, and Velasquez (2006) mention Wenger, then state that in approaching their work
will be using social network analysis as it can “provide an x-ray into the inner workings of these groups” (p. 33).

In other empirical studies Wasko & Faraj (2000), examining reasons for participation in CoPs, searched for emergent themes relative to motivation and barriers. Janson, Howard, and Schoenberger-Orgad (2004) examine the evolution of university Ph.D. students from group to CoP using as an analytical framework Wenger’s ideas on stages of CoP development (similar to traditional views of group development: potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship, and transforming).

Thus, while Wenger has a large presence in the literature, his ideas for conceptual analysis of CoPs remain largely ignored: they are not used as a theoretical or conceptual framework or interpretive tool. None of the researchers have applied Wenger’s model in seeking to understand the internal dynamics of a community of practice. This begs the question: why, given his presence and credibility in the literature, is Wenger’s framework absent from it? One possibility is that the framework is flawed, perhaps offering, in the view of researchers, an incomplete or inaccurate means of analysis, or is somehow otherwise perceived as not useful as a vehicle for interpreting data. Additionally, the Wenger text is dense, challenging to read, and fraught with abstraction, all challenges to a researcher seeking a way of making sense of data gathered. Another possibility is that the framework is perceived as so complex – with its four primary aspects and accompanying analytical components, many occurring not in a sequential, linear fashion but in parallel
and symbiosis-- that no researcher has sought to develop a strategy for using it to gather and create a coding scheme for data.

Additionally problematic is Wenger’s basis for the framework, extracted from ethnographic data gathered from the study of one intact work group of insurance claims processors. Like Pastoors (2007) and Wasko and Faraj (2000), in their studies of CoPs, Wenger used inductive methods to find emergent themes; his framework was pulled from his data on insurance claims processors. As best as can be determined, the framework has never been applied to the analysis of any other CoP.

Purpose of the Study

Wenger’s (1998) framework was extracted from data gathered in his ethnographic study of a group of insurance claims workers. This study seeks to explore the inverse: to what extent is the framework presented by Wenger (1998) useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing CoP (TRAIN)? Toward a greater purpose, it is hoped that results of the study will help to further an approach to analyzing and better understanding how a CoP “works” and, ultimately, will help scholarship move toward an operationalized theory of CoPs.

Research Question

This study asks: Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice (CoP)?
Methodology Overview

To answer the research question, this study selected the instrumental case study method. The instrumental case study method is appropriate for this inquiry as it provides insight into an issue or informs revision of a generalization (Stake, 1994; Silverman, 2008). Unlike an intrinsic case study, which focuses on the case itself, in the instrumental case study “the case is of secondary interest and facilitates our understanding of something else” (Swanson & Holton, 1997); in this case, the “something else” is the usefulness of the Wenger framework. The instrumental case study approach also provides support in structuring data collection and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explain: “Because the critical issues are more likely to be known in advance… such a design can take greater advantage of already developed instruments and preconceived coding schemes” (p. 140-141). Essentially, this study took the Wenger framework as a template against which the TRAIN data was compared.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with volunteer interviewees recruited via an email to the 250-member group mailing list. As the TRAIN CoP was formed in 1985, and as group history is a significant element of the “learning” component of the Wenger framework, the researcher wished to obtain data spanning the whole life of the CoP. A purposeful sample was drawn from the TRAIN membership by soliciting interview volunteers who first joined the CoP in each of 3 historical time periods. Additional data was gathered through observations of a group gathering, the 2 ½ day annual conference, and review of artifacts (such as meeting agendas, presentation handouts, and lesson plans).
The data collection process was framed by Wenger’s (1998) aspects of practice (meaning, community, learning, and identity) supported by the analytic components identified by Wenger. Each analytic component is discussed by Wenger in his text; from this discussion additional markers, used as sensitizing constructs, have been extracted by the researcher. These were used in helping to frame the data collection process and, later, form the basis of a coding scheme for the data obtained. This is explained in more detail in Chapter Three: Methodology.

Importance of the Study

As organizations become increasingly global, and as the United States faces the exodus of Baby Boomers from the workplace with an accompanying decrease in available workers to replace them, knowledge management strategies have become a growing concern for both global and American businesses (Hildreth & Kimble, 2004; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Wenger, 2004). The idea of communities of practice as a vehicle for knowledge management is a “hot topic” in scholarly business and trade business literature. While much research has focused on identification, formation, structure and, particularly, control of CoPs (Pastoors, 2007, Thompson, 2005; Wasko & Faraj, 2007), little has been done to fully analyze and understand the internal workings, behaviors, and histories of CoPs. This study added to the extant literature by looking explicitly for ways to understand, rather than control, a CoP.

The study contributes to research and practice in eight ways. First, communities of practice are credited with the potential to encourage knowledge-sharing (Stewart, 1996),
foster innovation (Brown & Duguid, 1991), serve as the root of core competencies (Brown & Grey, 1995) and support transfer of best practices (Wenger & Snyder, 1999). Therefore, it is hoped that this study may help to provide business leaders and managers a more thorough understanding of the mechanics of a CoP, beyond only definitions and formation, and perhaps offering insight into ways the organization can capture the knowledge within a CoP. Second, for those undertaking study of CoPs, this study provides an approach to research, a coding scheme, and a revised framework that should prove useful in future study. Third, the study serves to inform additional, future refinement of the framework, which in turn will support operationalization of its elements, and, it is hoped, development of a theory of CoPs. Fourth, as this study focuses on a CoP concerned entirely with workplace training, it provides fodder for those working in fields such as training, human resource development, and adult education, particularly endeavors connected to development of training practitioners. Fifth, the findings of this study may be useful to those members of existing CoPs seeking to understand, strengthen, and enhance their own community. Sixth, members of the CoP will have access to the findings of this study and will be able to utilize the information as documented group history and a catalog of artifacts produced. Findings may also inform the members of ways to enhance, strengthen, and ensure continued existence of the group. Seventh, while many studies examine CoP definition and structure, member phenomena such as engagement, and efforts to exert control over the CoP, no study found has sought to examine the accuracy and usefulness of Wenger’s (1998) 4-aspect framework. This study of the TRAIN CoP is the first in
literature largely focused on issues of control to instead focus on understanding the CoP. And eighth, recent research (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; DeSanctis, Fayard, & Roach, 2003; Hara & Hew, 2007; Kimble & Hildreth, 2005; Lee and Cole, 2003; Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2002; Schlager, Fusco, & Schank, 2002) has focused on examination of virtual CoPs, anchored largely in new technologies such as online forums and wikis. These communities, by dint of employing technologies only recently developed, have had a short life span thus far. As the “learning” aspect of Wenger’s framework deals with history, defined largely as the mediation of time on the other aspects, and generational issues defined as both as member age and length of membership, the studies focused on virtual CoPs offer little opportunity to examine the framework fully. The CoP of interest in this study has existed for more than 20 years, providing the opportunity to examine historical and generational issues as well as offer longitudinal insight into trajectories of membership and aspects of participation over time.

My Story

I am a workplace training practitioner, having entered the field in the 1980s when, while struggling to remain employed as a new college graduate in the post-Reagan-era recession, I saw that the cover of *Working Woman* magazine was touting workplace training and development as a “hot field of the future” for women. As a retail manager and project coordinator I’d done some on-the-job training of new hires, and as a teenager had given music lessons, so recast that as “experience in training and development” on my resume. My first job as a workplace trainer was with a hospital in the state of North Carolina’s
Department of Health and Human Services, located in the country about 40 miles from Raleigh. Because of my undergraduate degree in English I was hired to provide in-house literacy training for the food service and direct care staff, but due to the resignation of another trainer was instead given her responsibility of providing supervisory and management training. My entire preparation for that job involved being given piles of participant materials – such as binders of handouts used for supervisory training – and told this was what I had to work with. There were no lesson plans on file and the Staff Development Department manager, a registered nurse, had never attended any sessions offered by my predecessor. I attended basic supervision courses offered by a sister institution, and went to two day-long programs offered by commercial workshop companies. My employer had some training reference materials stored in a closet, mostly books of activities for use in training, and had an office subscription to *Training Magazine*. As the other trainers at the hospital handled technical training—such as Standard First Aid and Physical Restraint Techniques, taught from carved-in-stone lesson plans – I really had no “peer” in the organization, or even anywhere in town.

My early “practice,” such as it was, consisted mostly of identifying the major themes covered in the supervisory programs (such as delegation and motivating staff) I’d attended or in the materials I inherited, and from that frame I was able to piece together a basic supervision course. From trial and error, and from reading issues of *Training*, I gradually became aware of concepts like “needs assessment” and “transfer of training,” and was increasingly looking for ways to make dry material more interesting and less lecture-based.
It turned out that I had a gift for public speaking, and for making training engaging, so the hospital managers increasingly asked me to present something “fun and motivational” at their staff meetings and retreats. I developed an assortment of workshops on topics such as stress management, time management, and communication skills. The process proved developmental in a symbiotic way: the more I was asked to do “fun” presentations, the more I wanted to learn about training. Subsequently my training got better, and I was asked to do more. Additionally, I really enjoyed both designing and delivering these programs, found it very fulfilling and energizing, and felt very early on that this was likely what I would do as my long-term career.

Some years after taking that first job I was sent in my manager’s stead to a training meeting in Raleigh. The topic was training on the state’s new drug-free workplace policy, to be delivered by agencies to all their staff. We were given scripted 90-minute lesson plans that involved, basically, reading the policy to audiences using word-for-word transcriptions on overhead transparencies. There were other state government trainers at that meeting, most of whom I’d never met, and there was a loud cry of complaint that, as usual, the state mandated training was not “training,” it was just “spray and pray” presentation (where enormous amounts of content are “sprayed” onto a captive audience, after which the organization “prays” it will be retained). It was clear that the other trainers and I felt an affinity for one another, and one of them invited me to an upcoming TRAIN meeting, a group to which they all belonged.
In the mid-1990s I attended my first TRAIN meeting and for lack of a better phrase I felt as if, for the first time, I was breathing cleaner air. Here was a group of people committed to, as they frequently said, “stamping out bad training,” attending day-long meetings entirely of their own will, some of them paying for their own travel from remote parts of the state. They talked about problems I was encountering at my own job, such as finding materials for low-literacy audiences and making dry topics more interesting. I was hooked and have remained an active member ever since, and continue to feel the sense of breathing cleaner air whenever I am with my TRAIN colleagues.

Eight years after attending my first meeting, some time after I’d moved on to a new job as Training Director for the NC Department of Justice, I was doing a good bit of business writing on the side. Training Magazine, which had been so helpful in my earlier days, contacted me and asked if I’d be interested in contributing to their new monthly book review column, a job I still hold. Among the early books the magazine sent was Wenger, McDermott & Snyder’s (2002) Cultivating Communities of Practice. The parallels to TRAIN were remarkable. The TRAIN founders, years before the phrase “community of practice” was coined by Lave & Wenger in 1991, had formed one exactly as Wenger et al described it: a self-organizing and self-managed group, with no oversight from anyone’s manager, created with the express purpose of improving practice, under no constraints from formal policies, rules, or “membership” structures. By Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder’s standards, the TRAIN founders got it exactly right.
The idea that TRAIN as a structure had a name—“community of practice”—surprised me, as did the realization that TRAIN was not a singular phenomenon. Other groups existed for the express purpose of improving “practice,” too. The idea that many other groups were self-managed and self-motivated was intriguing: I was, at the time, working for a manager who in searching to capture “best practices” was a proponent of organizationally mandated and managed focus groups and task forces even as he complained that they got few results. By the time the book from Wenger et al (2002) crossed my path, I had returned to graduate school and was nearing completion of my M.Ed. degree in Training and Development, and used my university library access to obtain Wenger’s earlier, more academic *Communities of Practice* (1998). My interest in CoPs, and TRAIN as a CoP, has remained strong ever since. Completion of my Master’s degree, with a focus on technology in training, led to my current position as the state’s E-Learning Coordinator. This allows me to bring a different perspective on traditional training to the TRAIN group.

The dissertation phase of my doctoral work coincided with a critical point in TRAIN’s history: founding members have begun to retire and, while they continue to come to meetings, their attendance is becoming increasingly sporadic. One founding member is approaching her mid-60s and her health has begun to deteriorate. Newer members have begun to move into more central roles, while still newer members have attended their first meetings. TRAIN is an established, mature CoP, ripe for study.
Outline of the Dissertation

In this chapter I have provided the rationale and purpose of the study, and have described the context within which Wenger’s framework of CoPs will be examined. Chapter Two offers a review of the important literature on CoPs and summarizes a good deal of Wenger’s 1998 text, particularly the framework he offers for analyzing the internal dynamics of a CoP. In Chapter Three I outline the methodology to be used in conducting this study. Chapter Four provides the findings from the study. Chapter Five offers interpretation of the findings, a discussion of implications for practice, and suggestions for possible future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the extant literature on communities of practice, few works provide the specificity and detail of Etienne Wenger’s 1998 *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, which offers analytical elements that might inform a future operationalized theory of CoPs. The framework, which Wenger developed from an ethnographic study of insurance claims processors, has never been tested back against an existing community of practice. Such testing would help to surface strengths and limitations of the framework; this, in turn, could inform future movement toward an applied theory of CoPs. As described in Chapter One, this instrumental case study of the TRAIN community of practice sought to answer the question, “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice (CoP)?”

This chapter provides a chronological review of situated learning theory, the theoretical base for communities of practice, and a description of Wenger’s framework and recap of his subsequent work. This is followed by an examination of criticisms regarding CoPs. The review of literature concludes with discussion of empirical literature which frames this study of the TRAIN group.

Situated Learning Theory

Situated learning theory emerged in contrast to existing psychological and cognitive theories of learning, partly in answer to criticism of traditional education as providing abstract content removed from its actual use. The roots of situated approaches to learning can be traced to ideas on activity theory – with a view of human activity as complex and socially situated –
situated learning theory suggests that learning environments should provide the learner opportunities to learn in context (in a “situated” way, via authentic activities) and exposure to and involvement in the authentic practices and culture of a discipline while using the tools of that discipline, all supported by extended opportunities for social interaction with other practitioners. Essentially, situated learning is focused on the culture of learning rather than the learning task. This section provides a chronological review of the major works of situated learning theorists and the ways in which each ties to Wenger’s 1998 work on communities of practice.

Lave

The genesis of situated learning theory itself is credited to social anthropologist Jean Lave. In the 1970s Lave, interested in informal learning, conducted the first of her several ethnographic studies by observing apprentice tailors in Liberia. She found that the tailors not only learned the skill of constructing garments, but also the ways of enacting the business of being a tailor: dealing with customers, negotiating with vendors, handling day-to-day situations and conflicts, and managing the politics of interactions and work life. In addition to skills associated with job tasks, the novice tailors developed the subtler skills and understanding of the social rules necessary for moving from apprentice tailor to expert performer. Lave’s presentation of learning in this holistic sense conflicted with the traditional “school-centric” (Lave, 1982, p. 181) view of education, in which discrete abstract concepts were taught out of context with the belief that they would then be transferred to real-life application. Lave’s findings of learning as an anthropological-sociocultural phenomenon was
in stark contrast to contemporary thought, which largely regarded learning as a cognitive phenomenon resulting from mental processes executed by the individual learner.

Lave’s interests expanded to research in problem-solving and learning not only within the context of apprenticeship but in everyday cognition. Asserting that all learning is contextual, Lave (1988) reported that students who had been provided extensive formal training in mathematics were unable to transfer this beyond the context of the classroom. Lave also reported another finding, one that would foreshadow the work of researchers to come: although unprepared by formal schooling to accomplish tasks in the “real world,” people often succeeded at performance via in-the-moment improvised solutions. Her anecdote of the dieter confronted with needing to measure out three-quarters of 2/3 of a cup of cottage cheese, accomplished entirely without arithmetical calculation, is among the frequently cited examples offered of learning-in-the-situation versus learning-at-school.

Situated learning theory rapidly advanced in the period 1989 through 1991 with the near-simultaneous publication of three seminal works: Brown, Collins and Duguid’s “Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning” (1989); Orr’s Talking About Machines (originally available in 1990 as an unpublished doctoral dissertation and available within the academic community at that time, and published for a broader audience in 1996) and Lave and Wenger’s Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation (1991). These will be discussed in turn, followed by an overview of additional theoretical thought culminating with the text of interest in this study, Wenger’s 1998 Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity.
Brown, Collins, and Duguid

Acknowledging a foundation created by Vygotsky and Dewey, and expressing an indebtedness (p. 41) to Jean Lave for providing the research base, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) developed the first proposed model for use of situated learning theory within the classroom. Their concern arose primarily from their perception of a disconnect between abstract school-based teaching and real world problem solving needs. Offering real examples of innovative approaches from mathematics education, they argued for the implementation of “cognitive apprenticeship,” using methods that “try to enculturate students into authentic practices through activity and social interaction in a way similar to that evident – and evidently successful – in cognitive apprenticeship” (p. 37). (One example is that of college math teacher Schoenfeld, who encourages students to bring problems to class which they will then investigate together, including them as collaborators in mathematical practice.) The authors also extended Lave’s (1982) view of apprenticeship by suggesting the use of strategies such as coaching, collaboration, reflection, articulation, and repeated practice. Brown et al. (1991) additionally emphasized the importance of learning within a social environment, asserting that learning is a process of enculturation “supported in part through social interaction and the circulation of narrative, groups of practitioners are particularly important, for it is only within groups that social interaction and conversation can take place” (p. 40). They proposed that school students would become enculturated via gradual involvement in authentic activities, moving, as they gained confidence and control, to a “more autonomous phase of collaborative learning, where they begin to participate consciously in the culture” (p. 39). In this discussion
Brown et al. introduced the phrase “community of practitioners” (emphasis added), and what may be the first, rudimentary description of what Lave and Wenger would later (1991) call a “community of practice.” Brown et al. delineated the salient features of such groups as including collective problem solving, displaying multiple roles, confronting ineffective strategies, and providing collaborative work skills (p. 40).

Orr

Orr’s *Talking About Machines* was first available in 1990 as an unpublished doctoral dissertation and in 1996 was published for a wider readership. An anthropologist similar to Lave, Orr embedded himself in a California-based community of photocopier repair technicians (which he refers to as an “occupational community” and “work community”). In addition to observing the technicians executing their daily job tasks, Orr also watched as the technicians, in the face of inadequate repair manuals and training, frequently gathered in an unstructured and unsupervised space to discuss particular repair problems and solutions. Often the technicians, even as they successfully repaired machines, operated at philosophical odds with management: while management wanted the repair technicians to closely follow manuals and troubleshooting documentation – even if it meant machines were not fixed – the technicians often circumvented the manuals and established protocols to achieve repair. A critical aspect of the technicians’ behaviors was what Orr describes as operating from the self-identity of heroic troubleshooter, a view of their work as undergoing something of a noble quest to find a solution and fix a machine in the face of constraints and bad information. This
is especially significant as so much of the later work in situated learning and communities of practice would address issues of identity as related to enacting practice.

Orr’s work has proven influential in the literature (subsequent authors have used Orr’s work as the basis for their further conceptual work, including Brown & Duguid, 1991; Brown, 1998; and Contu & Willmott, 2003). While Orr’s work is widely regarded as an exemplar of workplace ethnography, and influential for forthcoming research in situated learning, it is important to note that Orr did not set out to study “situated learning” or “communities.” His intent was descriptive: “to present the work of the technicians and to use it to suggest what may be learned from studies of work practice in contrast to more abstracted ways of writing about work” (Orr, 2006, p. 1816); his concern was not primarily with studying learning but with studying the context in which work occurs, what he called “situated practice” (1996, p. 10). The relationships within Orr’s technician group differed from Lave’s apprentices and their masters, where novice workers became more expert by interacting with and working alongside experts who were primarily interested in replicating or “passing along” existing knowledge. In contrast, the repair technicians existed largely as peers working together to develop and share new knowledge.

Orr’s (1990) study culminated in a richly detailed description of work. While his intent was different, his study connects to the work of situated learning researchers by providing evidence that knowledge and practice are tightly linked. In learning about work practice rather than writing in abstracted ways about work, Orr found that much of what we might call “learning” occurs through informal relationships and interactions; that management seems to have very
little understanding of the work it seeks to control, that worker view of the job (to fix machines) is frequently different from that of management (to fix machines using documentation), and that overreliance on notions of espoused practice can obscure management’s view of actual practice. He also reported that work is narrative: that is, that storytelling and relating anecdotes is a legitimate form of knowledge sharing and contributor to problem solving, and is a part of the work, not an addition to it; and as with the example of storytelling, much of work is tacit and situational, requiring improvisation. These findings will have influence on subsequent conceptual work on situated learning and the emerging interest in communities of practice. Ideas of informal relationships and interactions, storytelling and knowledge sharing, and the nature of tacit knowledge and improvisation will figure into Wenger’s 1998 work on communities of practice.

Lave and Wenger

The period of rapid advancement in situated learning theory culminated in 1991 with the publication of Lave and Wenger’s *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. In that work, Lave and Wenger “drew together the threads of earlier ideas into a more sustained conceptualization of situated learning” within communities of practice (as cited in Contu & Willmott, 2002, p. 283). Lave and Wenger’s focus built on Lave’s earlier work on apprenticeship, and was grounded in the concept of learning as a result of what they called “legitimate peripheral participation”: as a newcomer learns from others, he or she gradually achieves the competence necessary to participate as a full member of the community. A critical distinction Lave and Wenger make is that learning is not “situated” “…as if it were
some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere” (p. 35), nor is it just a matter of “learning by doing,” rather, it is an “integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” (p.35). Essentially, they asserted that novices learn not from talk but to talk competently about practice (Lave & Wenger, p. 108) as they share in the diffusion and transmission of ideas, interact with those with expertise, and contribute to the development of community artifacts. Within a CoP, knowledge is not simply acquired or transmitted; rather, as learning occurs, identity changes and one learns about practice while becoming a practitioner.

In keeping with Lave’s earlier study, Lave and Wenger (1991) focus on craft apprentices (such as meatcutters and midwives), seeking to understand the ways in which community members learn the skills, language, and norms – the culture – of a practice. Lave and Wenger caution that use of the word “community” is not to suggest that all is harmonious. Conflicts and disharmony will occur, the very idea of apprenticeship brings with it the implication of the power of expert over novice, and the concept that some participation is “legitimate” suggests that some is not. There is also the possibility that power issues will influence who is included in and excluded from the community. (Concerns about power issues will subject the construct of communities of practice to its most frequent criticism; this is discussed further in the “criticism of communities of practice” section in this chapter).

Wenger would publish his seminal Communities of Practice: Meaning, Learning, and Identity seven years after the publication of his work with Lave. In the intervening time, conceptual works from Brown and Duguid (1991) and Greeno (1997) would offer additional
thinking on situated learning that would foreshadow Wenger’s forthcoming analytical approach to communities of practice.

*Brown and Duguid*

Using the ethnography by Orr (1990) as a base, Brown and Duguid (1991) focus on the disconnect between the formalized management view of how work is done and the non-canonical/worker view of how work is accomplished. Like Orr (1990), Brown and Duguid focus on new or improvised learning in an egalitarian community rather than the handing down of existing knowledge from master to novice, the primary concern of Lave & Wenger, (1991). Brown and Duguid contribute to the developing theory of situated learning two ideas that appear to have influenced Wenger’s future work, even to the very language Wenger would use. First, they concur with Orr that narrative and storytelling are a critical component of knowledge sharing. They additionally state that CoPs emerge among individuals who are mutually engaged in a joint practice around which they share a common repertoire. Both these ideas will figure prominently in Wenger’s coming work on communities of practice, and he will use the phrases “mutual engagement,” “joint enterprise,” and “repertoire” in developing the analytic components of his framework.

*Greeno*

Educator James Greeno has written extensively on the subject of situated learning, including 1997’s “On Claims that Answer the Wrong Questions,” a comparison of situative and cognitive perspectives, and 1998’s “The Situativity of Knowing, Learning, and Research.” Greeno advocates for learning that is “more personally and socially meaningful and [allows]
students to foresee their participation in activities that matter beyond school” (1997, p. 7).

Among his contributions to situated learning theory that would precede Wenger’s analytic view of CoPs was the suggestion that that all socially situated instruction needn’t be in a group or social setting. Participation in social practice does not necessarily include only face-to-face interactions; rather, the individual is acting within the context of a social practice to which he or she belongs even when acting apart from the group (Greeno, 1997). (Greeno offered the example of the student studying alone with a textbook, who is nonetheless operating in a social context by participating in the practices of his particular classroom community.) This concept – that participation can occur even when one is not with the group -- figures significantly in Wenger’s future work. Greeno additionally offered the view of the student not as a discrete learner but as an individual within a system, contributing to the shift of the theoretical focus of situated learning more firmly toward the collective rather than the individual. This idea would also play a substantial role in Wenger’s future conception of the community of practice.

Wenger

As previously discussed, the development of situated learning theory, particularly as it appears to have influenced Wenger, can be traced from the early activity theorists Dewey (1916) and Vygotsky (1962), to Jean Lave’s (1982) work with craft apprenticeship. Then seminal, near-simultaneous work in the early 1990s saw the beginnings of thought about what is now termed “communities of practice.” These works included Orr’s 1990 ethnography of the photocopier repair technicians, Brown et al.’s (1989) introduction of a model for applying situated learning strategies to traditional classroom approaches, and Lave and Wenger’s (1991)
work on the idea of legitimate peripheral participation. Brown and Duguid (1991), using Orr’s work as a conceptual base, offered new thought on engagement and repertoire within the CoP, and Greeno (1997) contributed the notion of participation to mean an individual acting within the context of social practice, not necessarily in a social setting.

These earlier works appear to have contributed to Wenger’s evolving thought on communities of practice and situated learning. In his 1998 *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, the source text for this research study, he moved from discussion of apprenticeship and the term “legitimate peripheral participation,” both constructs that are associated with the individual, and turned his attention to CoP itself as the unit of analysis. Based on his experiences in studying an intact work group of insurance claims processors, Wenger introduced the idea that learning is not merely something that occurs for the individual, but also for the community as it enhances its practice and develops new generations, and for the organization, which, through the interrelations of CoPs, can become more effective by “knowing what it knows” (p.8). In *Communities of Practice* he refined the existing definitions of communities of practice, describing them in the analytic components of his framework (in terms echoing Brown & Duguid, 1991) as a group connected through *mutual engagement in a joint enterprise* with a common *repertoire*.

Extending the ideas first developed with Lave (1991), Wenger (1998) offered a revised learning theory that holds at its center the idea of participation. Participation “shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4), that is, the creation and refinement of practice as well as the construction of identity. Evolving
practice and identity then converge, via the CoP, as the individual learns not about practice but how to be a practitioner. Asserting that learning is a “fundamentally social phenomenon” (p.3), Wenger believes that it is through social participation that learning occurs, and specifies:

Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities…Such participation shapes not only what we do, but who we are and how we interpret what we do. (p. 4)

Wenger Framework

From his study of insurance claims processors, Wenger extracted a 4–aspect framework (meaning, community, identity, and learning) and analytic components. This is the framework on which this TRAIN study is based, and is discussed in depth below.

**Wenger Framework: Meaning Aspect**

In Wenger’s (1998) view, meaning rests in the interplay of participation and reification, the symbiosis that results from taking part in communication, activities, and events, and making ideas and concepts less abstract and more real. Wenger asserted that participation cannot exist without reification, and vice versa, offering the explanation that “Explicit knowledge is … not freed from the tacit” (p. 67). It is through the act of participating that we negotiate meaning and make the shared experience real, and it is through the act of reification that we make concepts and ideas real. In the Wenger framework, the aspect of practice called meaning is supported by the analytic components participation, reification, and, as they work in concert to provide
meaning, the *duality* of those two components. Wenger offers an explanation of the duality of participation and reification: Too much participation may generate little material to “anchor specifications of coordination…This is why lawyers always want everything in writing” (p. 65). Conversely, in the event of too much reification, “then there may not be enough overlap in participation to recover a coordinated, relevant, or generative meaning. This helps to explain why putting everything in writing does not seem to solve all our problems” (p.65).

Participation and reification are therefore not independent, or opposite constructs, but symbiotic elements working together to capture the explicit and tacit to construct meaning.

*Wenger Framework: Community Aspect*

Wenger (1998) describes the “community” aspect of practice as having three components that bind the CoP and give it coherence. These include: *joint enterprise*, a sense of mutual accountability, interpretations, and rhythms; *mutual engagement*, the act of doing things together, developing relationships, and working to maintain the community; and *shared repertoire*, the community’s accumulated stories, artifacts, historical events, or concepts. As with the elements of meaning, the components of community are interrelated. Mutual engagement (being involved in ways that matter, and contributing to the intentional maintenance of the group), supports the empowerment of joint enterprise, which in turn engenders a sense of mutual accountability. This refers to not only being part of the group and being mutually engaged in activities, but also “being personable, treating information and resources as something to be shared, and being responsible to others by not making life harder for others” (p.81).
**Wenger Framework: Learning Aspect**

The critical difference with the *learning* aspect from the others is that it specifically deals with the other aspects mediated over time: “Communities of practice may be thought of as shared histories of learning” (Wenger, 1998, p.86). Over the life span of the CoP there is a great deal of “remembering and forgetting” (p.89) as products are developed, discarded, and replaced; new terms are created as others are discarded; stories and events are told and retold; members leave, making room for new members. Community discourse may include references to generations of people or activities. Over prolonged engagement in the community, subtleties in relationships are understood: who knows what, who helps who. Part of the learning aspect includes members tuning and refining their enterprise. As Wenger describes it, practice is not handed down but is an ongoing social and interactional process.

Wenger’s (1998) *learning* aspect of a CoP is challenging to differentiate from other elements of the framework. This may be partly attributed to Wenger’s word choice, which is somewhat repetitive with his descriptions of the “community” aspect. His analytic components are *evolving forms* of mutual engagement, as opposed to the earlier phrase, “mutual engagement” and *understanding and tuning* the enterprise, was earlier phrased as “joint enterprise.” Wenger’s remaining aspects, *learning* and *identity*, deal more directly with practice. He is clear, though, that this is not a matter of sequence (that *meaning* and *community* are first), rather, they provide the “fertile ground” (p. 214) so that learning may occur.

**Wenger Framework: Identity Aspect**

The final interlocking aspect of practice is identity. According to Wenger (1998),
participation in the CoP transforms “who we are and what we can do…It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming or avoiding becoming a certain person” (p. 215). Identity evolves by the ways we participate and reify ourselves; by the trajectories of our memberships and our learning; by reconciling our membership in a number of communities into one identity; and by negotiating “local ways of belonging to broader constellations” (p. 149). In these ways, Wenger sees identity and practice as “mirror images” (p. 149) so that one “inherits the texture” of the other (p. 162). This notion of identity is defined just as much by the practices in which we engage (participation) as in the practices in which we do not engage (nonparticipation).

Wenger offers five analytic components of identity: First is negotiated experience, the act of defining who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation as well as the way we and others reify ourselves. Second is community membership, where we define who we are by the familiar and the unfamiliar, the subtleties of relationships and interactions with others, being accountable to the enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire through our personal set of references to it. Third, as trajectory, in terms of continual evolution of identity via type of participation, intention to participate, and spanning boundaries and linking communities. Fourth, as nexus of multimembership, where we define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of identity into one identity; and fifth, the relation between the local and the global where we define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and manifesting broader styles and discourses. As Wenger (1998, p. 149) argues, “There is a profound connection between identity and practice. Developing a
practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants.”

Wenger Framework: Summary

Table 2.1, adapted from Storberg-Walker (2008), outlines Wenger’s (1998) ideas on aspects and the analytic components. This frames this study, and was used in developing plans for data collection, data analysis, and reporting findings.

Table 2.1.

*Wenger’s Framework of Aspects and Analytic Components*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect of practice</th>
<th>Brief description of analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Participation: living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, mutuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Reification: forms, points of focus, documents, monuments, instruments, projection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Duality: interplay of participation and reification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Joint Enterprise: negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Mutual Engagement: engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Shared Repertoire: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Negotiated Experience: Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151). Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151) as we give meaning to participation and reification (above). Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Membership: “…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Learning Trajectory  “not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154). There are five types of trajectories: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, outbound trajectories, and boundary trajectories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Nexus of Multimembership “we all belong to many communities of practice…some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities” (p. 158). Identity entails the experience of multimembership and the “work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (p. 158).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally  “In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community” (p. 162).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1 continued

| Learning | Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement: (p. 95) : how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95). |
| Learning | Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise (p.95) aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95) |
| Learning | Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses: “renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts, representations; recording and recalling events; inventing new terms and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines,” (p. 95) |

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder

In 2002, Wenger again shifted his attention, this time away from theory and analysis of CoP to strategies for creating and nurturing communities. In work that might be best described as practitioner-based, Cultivating Communities of Practice provided guidelines for the organization seeking to implement and support CoPs as a mechanism for organizational knowledge management.

This work is important to the literature, and is included here because it shows some shift in Wenger’s thinking, particularly in regard to the organization’s relationship to the CoP. Wenger suggested that the organization may be able to have some “control” over the CoP, and the CoP may have value as a tool for innovation rather than just routine work. This was the last
of his major works to date. Again, it is considerably different from his earlier works as it is written as a handbook, neither theoretical nor empirical, and is inclusive even of a change in discourse to a much more colloquial, business-reader style of writing. As noted in Chapter One, it is also the work that first captured the researcher’s attention in regard to CoPs: It was the researcher’s first exposure to the idea of communities of practice; as a member of the active TRAIN group she had not realized other such groups exist. She was additionally surprised by Wenger et al.’s model for creating a new community, published in 2002, as it was precisely the approach employed by the founding TRAIN members in 1985.

Criticism of Communities of Practice

Critics offer various points of view on both CoPs in general and Wenger’s approach to them in particular. Criticism is largely aimed at concerns about the limitations of CoPs, the connotation of the word “community,” and matters of power and trust. Additionally, some critics question whether all “practice” is competent.

Some critics (Pemberton, Mavin & Stalker, 2007; Roberts, 2006) raise concerns about the connotation of the word “community” as a construct representing happy, positive interactions and outcomes. (Pemberton, et al., p. 63, use the phrase “rose-tinted.”) However, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) do not present a view of CoPs as harmonious and tight-knit. In fact, the analytic components of Wenger’s framework specifically reference disagreements and tensions within the CoP. It is curious that so many conceptual authors level this criticism when so much of Wenger’s framework is based on the importance of negotiation, the very concept of which implies lack of full agreement.
Contu and Willmott (2003) and Roberts (2006) were particularly interested in issues of power. The concept of legitimacy implies a social order that excludes the “illegitimate,” promoting or denying access to members and practices. Alvesson, 2000, warned that the positive identity cultivated by members of the CoP could lead to a sense of exclusiveness toward those who are not part of the CoP. Contu et al. (2005) expressed concern that there has been too much emphasis on “community” rather than on “practice,” with Contu and Willmott suggesting that this in itself leads to the power issues in terms of management control, as the concept of “community” is viewed by management as similar to that of “organization.” Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) and Pemberton, et al. (2007) take issue with connotations as well as power, asserting that not all learning is desirable, and not all practice is good. The potential for unethical or poor practice and bad habits to be replicated and disseminated within the CoP exists.

Despite criticism regarding aspects of CoPs, the value of CoPs is, for the most part, recognized in the literature, even by critics (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Roberts, 2006). As researchers continue to look for ways to support the genesis and development of CoPs, as teachers and managers investigate ways of utilizing virtual tools for locating a community, and as organizations seek to find ways of capturing the knowledge of CoPs without, in the act of that capture, destroying them, it is important to remember that CoPs were originally conceptualized primarily as a vehicle for situated learning. This study seeks to better understand the internal dynamics of an existing CoP by applying the Wenger framework and then, where indicated, further refining or extending that framework.
Empirical Literature

While there is a large body of conceptual literature about or relevant to communities of practice, much of it takes as its research base the earlier empirical studies of Lave (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and Orr (1990). Some empirical literature focuses on groups described as “CoPs” which differ significantly from Wenger’s definition. For instance, Barab, Barnett, and Squire (2005) focused on a group of student teachers involved in a heavily managed mentoring program. Thus, from the pool of additional empirical work, this paper will review CoP studies that, like the TRAIN group, more closely fit the Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) view of CoPs (individuals who share a common interest and join together to share knowledge and improve their practice) and that in some way has a relationship to or helped to form thinking about approaching the problem addressed by this research study.

Thompson

Thompson (2005) sought to understand whether organizations could provide what he describes as “helpful support” (p. 151) to CoPs. His qualitative study included semistructured interviews and observations to examine one CoP, the organization’s internal website agency, a group of 40 web designers later grown to 180. Thompson chose to base his study on one element of Wenger’s 1998 work, a list Wenger offered of 14 characteristics of a CoP. These characteristics as listed by Wenger include items such as, “very quick setup of a problem to be discussed,” and “absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process” (Wenger, 1998, p.125-126). From examination of a CoP’s structural components (infrastructure, schedules, etc.) and epistemic components
(communicative interactions), Thompson sought to determine the effects of the organization attempting to exert increasing control over an internal CoP. He found that while the organization willing to provide “loose” (Thompson, 2005, p. 151) direction and structure for the CoP might be able to support it, the attempt to exert too much control would lead to the CoP’s demise.

Thompson’s work is important for two reasons. First, it addresses the conundrum facing many industries seeking to leverage the knowledge contained within the CoP: indentifying ways to achieve that goal without in the process destroying the CoP. Second, his use of detailed member comments and reactions regarding their experience of the CoP in reporting his findings is an approach that would be utilized in this study and proved helpful in framing thinking about research design.

Pastoors

Pastoors (2007), in a 4-year exploration of an organization’s internal consultants, sought to understand the experiences of those in an institutionalized top-down CoP versus those involved with “underground” or “bootlegged” CoPs. While acknowledging Wenger’s 1998 work, Pastoors’ conceptual framework was taken from Wenger, McDermott and Snyder’s (2002) “five degrees of acceptance” of CoPs by organizations:

1. The CoP is _invisible_, unrecognized even by its own members.
2. The CoP is _bootlegged_, informally emergent and loosely structured, and known only to members and those close to the CoP who know about it.
3. The CoP is _visible but unsanctioned_.

""
4. The CoP is *visible and supported* by the organization.

5. The CoP is *institutionalized*, and given high status and support.

Pastoors used semistructured interviews and document analysis, interpreted via emerging themes, to examine the experiences of 10 consultants. Some of these consultants were assigned to a CoP by the organization, which also dictated procedures and even topics. The organization’s need to exert control over the CoP calls to mind Contu and Willmott’s (2003) and Duguid’s (2005) concerns that organizations focus too much on the idea of *community* at the expense of *practice*. Pastoors found that motivation to participate in bootlegged CoPs was high, that the bootlegged CoPs allowed for sharing of tacit knowledge and provided a welcome arena for those who shared common interests and “passions” (p. 29), and that those involved in bootlegged CoPs were willing to expend time and energy in its activities. The institutionalized CoP was, by contrast, viewed as the organization’s means of imposing additional workload and expecting work outside of regular working hours. Strict communication plans and procedures were viewed as inhibiting effective activity. By their own report, members felt no ownership of the institutionalized CoP.

Pastoors’ work is particularly relevant to the study at hand as it is the only empirical work found that examines a bootlegged CoP; that is, an emergent and largely unstructured one that exists beyond the reach of the organization’s interest and control. Of all the known empirical literature this look at bootlegged CoPs, one of several types of CoPs Pastoors examined, most closely resembles TRAIN, the CoP that forms the unit of interest in this study.
Lesser and Storck (2001) undertook the study of CoPs within seven different companies, designed to represent CoPs in different stages of development and in different industries. CoPs were chosen because they were acknowledged by the companies as “creating value.” The purpose of the study was to examine the CoP as an “engine” for development of social capital, ultimately creating organizational value. For each company participating, Lesser and Storck interviewed between five and 10 CoP members regarding their perceptions of value at individual and organizational levels, then used the data to create categories for the values. Their findings touched on factors related to internal dynamics, and in particular confirm phenomena offered by Wenger (1998) with regard to the “community” aspect of the CoP: the CoP engenders connections between people who may or may not be co-located, relationships that build a sense of trust and mutual obligation, and a common language and context that is shared by community members.

The Lesser and Storck study is especially noteworthy for documenting positive outcomes to the organization traced directly to the CoP. They found that the CoP encouraged innovative thinking and helped to create and preserve organizational memory. Specific organizational areas ultimately identified as seeing positive outcomes from CoPs included a shorter learning curve for new hires, a reduction in paperwork and “reinventing the wheel,” responding more quickly to customer needs, and generating new ideas for products and services. Lesser and Storck argue that it is through the social capital developed via communities that behavior
change -- what others, including Wenger, might call “learning” -- occurs, which in turn has an impact on the organization.

Lesser and Storck’s (2001) regard for the CoP as a “hidden asset, appearing neither on an organization chart nor on a balance sheet” (p.833) is particularly germane to the TRAIN CoP, which exists entirely beyond the reach of any particular employing entity. While they used as their framework the dimensions of social capital, many findings bear similarity to what Wenger (1988) would describe as the “community” aspect of a CoP. These ranged from specifics regarding the CoP activities to specific phenomena reported by Wenger, such as employment of a repertoire and the role of the CoP in providing ready access to help for members. The content and structure of the Lesser and Storck study, as well as their approach to surfacing evidence of the value-producing aspects of the CoP, helped to inform the planning of this study of the TRAIN CoP.

Wasko and Faraj

A great deal of literature, both empirical and conceptual, approaches the study of CoPs from the perspective of the organization, such as how the organization can support or control the CoP, assess its value, “harness” its knowledge, and create or sustain the CoP. In looking at three online technical communities, Wasko and Faraj (2000) explore the questions of why people participate in a CoP and, especially, why they help others. This last question is especially relevant to the researcher dealing with the Wenger (1998) framework, as the issue of helping others is a critical component of his “community” aspect of practice. In the virtual CoPs under study, Wasko and Faraj found that people participate because they feel knowledge
is a public good and should be shared out of a sense of moral obligation and community, rather than self-interest. This is positioned in contrast to the organizational view that knowledge is a private good owned by the organization or individual members. Wasko and Faraj interpret their findings to indicate that self-interest (to include organizational control or institutionalized CoPs such as those in Pastoors’ study) “denigrates” (p. 171) the CoP. The feelings of doing the right thing and engaging in intellectual exchange for its own sake is in stark contrast to the experience of those consultants in Pastoors’ study who were subjected to the rules and expectations of the institutionalized CoP.

The perspective offered by Wasko and Faraj (2000) is important to the TRAIN study in two ways. First, the study explicitly sought to understand why individuals not only participate in CoPs but also why they are willing to help others, a critical element of the “community” aspect of Wenger’s 1998 framework. Their work here helped to frame thinking of ways to approach this issue in the TRAIN study. Additionally, Wasko and Faraj, although working from the viewpoint of the individual, confirm Wenger’s conception of the CoP as a matter of the collective. That is, Wasko and Faraj found that CoP members act out of community interest, not self interest, and concluded that knowledge is owned and maintained neither by the organization nor by the individual, but by the community itself.

Conclusion

The theoretical stream of literature on situated learning merged ideas related to apprenticeship (Lave, 1988) with the concept of communities of work (Orr, 1990), resulting in the introduction of extended work on the idea of community of practice by Lave and Wenger
in 1991. Additional theoretical contributions from Brown, et al. (1989) included the introduction of the cognitive apprenticeship approach to traditional education, extending the idea of apprenticeship to include additional strategies such as coaching and reflection. Brown and Duguid (1991), building from Orr’s empirical work, helped to shift the view of learning in a community from a master-apprentice relationship designed to pass along existing knowledge, to a more egalitarian view of peers working together to develop and share new, improvised knowledge. Greeno (1997) provided additional insight on the nature of participation as not necessarily defined by face-to-face interaction, but participation in a practice, an idea that would figure significantly in Wenger’s thinking regarding participation and engagement.

Wenger (1998), to borrow a phrase from Contu and Willmott (2003) “tied the threads” (p. 283) of theoretical thought together by refining his own earlier work with Lave (1991) and extending ideas introduced by Brown and Duguid (1991) and Greeno (1997), produced what may be considered the definitive work on communities of practice. In *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Wenger defined the CoP not in terms of its members but in terms of an entity unto itself, a product of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise, with its own dynamics and capacity for learning.

The empirical literature stream, while not employing Wenger’s framework, has for the most part (intentionally or not) touched on various aspects of that framework. Thompson (2005), in framing his study with Wenger’s (1998) list of 14 characteristics of a CoP, worked with ideas primarily relevant to Wenger’s aspects of *community* and *learning*. Pastoors (2007) likewise
dealt with *community*, framing her work from Wenger, et al.’s *degrees of acceptance*. Lesser and Storck (2001) offered a view of the CoP as a value-producing entity, an idea most closely tied to Wenger’s *learning* aspect. Wasko and Faraj (2000) offered insight into the Wenger’s *community* and *learning* aspects, particularly with regard to ideas on helping others and knowledge as a commodity held and maintained by the community itself.

While there is a large body of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature related to communities of practice, little has been done to fully analyze and understand their internal workings, behaviors, and histories. Such understandings may serve to more fully answer the issues with which CoP researchers, and organizations, continue to wrestle: how the knowledge held within the CoP can be accessed by a broader audience; how to assess the CoP as value-producing, and by what mechanisms value-generating behavior might be encouraged and assessed; and the ways of supporting, sustaining, and nurturing the CoP without causing it harm.

Wenger (1998) has provided a tool for this analysis of the internal workings of the CoP, his four-aspect framework supplemented by accompanying analytic components, which is yet untested by any other researcher. Employing the framework to analyze an existing community of practice provides a new contribution to the literature base on communities of practice, and has resulted in refinement to the existing framework for use by future researchers. The following chapter outlines the methodology used in employing the Wenger framework to analyze the TRAIN CoP.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The research question for this study was, “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in helping to understand the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice (CoP)?”

The CoP of interest in this instrumental case study was the 23-year-old NC TRAIN (Training and Improvement Network) community of practice. The Wenger framework includes the four aspects of practice (meaning, community, identity and learning) and accompanying analytic components (such as “mutual engagement” and “reification”). These, with the addition of markers from the Wenger text used as sensitizing constructs, were used to frame the research approach, interview questions, and the strategies used for data collection, coding, and analysis for this study of the TRAIN CoP.

Qualitative Approach

This study sought to examine the usefulness of Wenger’s (1998) framework in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice. In developing a research design that would address this problem while meeting what Patton (2002) describes as “methodological appropriateness”, the researcher dealt with several considerations.

First, even if it were desired, attempting to replicate Wenger’s work would not be feasible. It was not written up in the manner of traditional research: we do not have the details of his methodology, specifics regarding his techniques, or his protocols for conducting, for instance, interviews and observations. Second, even if those items were available, this study did not just seek to replicate Wenger’s work by producing a
descriptive “case” of the TRAIN group, nor to look, as Wenger did, for emerging themes. Rather, this study sought a view of the case (the TRAIN group) specifically as it does or does not relate to the Wenger framework. In short, the issue in this study was not so much the case itself but the bigger concern of the usefulness of the framework, and the approach chosen would need to be appropriate for that.

Additionally, while the researcher was not attempting to replicate Wenger’s work, in order to compare TRAIN data to his framework she did need to obtain data of the types similar to that with which Wenger had worked. His qualitative approach, intended to help him describe social phenomena and shared learning within a community of practice, allowed him to collect first-person accounts of experience, anecdotes, observation of interactions, and artifacts. The need for an approach that would allow comparison of the TRAIN “case” to the Wenger framework, while also providing the means to collect data similar to that available to Wenger, pointed toward an overall qualitative approach.

While the study does in a sense “test” the Wenger (1998) framework, a term typically associated with quantitative inquiry, the qualitative approach is appropriate for several reasons. Overall is the study’s purpose to examine whether the framework is “useful” at helping us to “understand” the “internal dynamics” of a community of practice. These are qualitative terms: there is no measurement, no search for causality, and no experimentation, for instance, no isolation and manipulation of a variable.

Additionally, as discussed above, while the researcher was not attempting to replicate Wenger’s (1998) work, she did need to obtain data of the types similar to that
with which Wenger had worked in order to enable comparison of the TRAIN data to his framework: first-person accounts, stories, anecdotes, notes from observations, and reviews of artifacts. Wenger’s approach was decidedly qualitative; this study would likewise take a qualitative approach.

Even removing considerations of Wenger’s own approach points, still, to a qualitative approach to this inquiry. The analytic components of Wenger’s framework are complex and multidimensional, and it was anticipated that they would be viewed as deeply personal for the study participants. The type of data sought by this study – with questions that asked, for instance, “How has this CoP changed you?” -- is not easily quantifiable and required that participants engage in some self-reflection and intellectualization of their membership and practice, extending even to their perceptions of their identity. It was therefore important to obtain in-depth, personal accounts from participants. Qualitative inquiry methods such as interviews and observation of the group engaged in its meeting activities supported identification and examination of the issues presented within Wenger’s (1998) framework.

Instrumental Case Study Method

This study uses the case of the TRAIN CoP as the vehicle for answering the larger question, “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in helping to understand an existing community of practice (CoP)?” Use of the instrumental case study approach enables what Yin (1994) describes as “analytic generalization…in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (p. 31).
Concerns that the Wenger (1998) framework is not yet an operationalized theory is addressed by Schwandt (2007), who explains that analytic generalization is:

…a type of generalization in which the inquirer attempts to link findings from a particular case to a theory. (Here theory means something more like a set of theoretical tools, models, or concepts rather than a formalized set of propositions, laws, and generalizations comprising a systematic, unified causal explanation of social phenomena.) A study of some phenomenon in a particular set of circumstances (i.e., a case) is used as evidence to support, contest, refine, or elaborate a theory, model, or concept (note that the case is never regarded as the definitive test of the theory) (p. 5).

Although this study works from something of a deductive approach, comparing as it does the TRAIN data to the existing Wenger framework and then offering a conclusion as to the usefulness of the framework, it remains within the qualitative research tradition. The researcher did not propose a hypothesis or set forth a prediction; there was no search for causality; there was no manipulation in terms of, for instance, isolating a variable; and while there was no looking for themes in the traditional sense, the study was intentionally, unlike one from a quantitative stance, designed to leave room for emerging data or data that did not “fit” the framework Wenger proposed. This study did not attempt a “one-final” test of the framework, but sought to evaluate its usefulness and, perhaps, refine it. Additionally, the type of data needed for the comparison required collection via qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and artifact review.
Overview of the Study

The Wenger framework guided the strategies and tactics of this research study, from developing the questions, to identifying data sources, to data analyses methods, to guiding decision-making regarding its “usefulness.” As already described, the Wenger (1998) framework invites exploration of the CoP across four aspects of practice (meaning, learning, identity, and community) distilled into accompanying analytic components. To explore these areas, this study utilized three primary data sources. This study used interviews, participant observation (hereafter referenced as “observation”), and review of physical artifacts and documents, all described by Yin (1994) as among the primary sources of evidence for case study research. These datum would also, as noted earlier, provide the researcher with the same types of data used by Wenger. They would additionally serve to support triangulation of data, as it was anticipated that, for example, observation would confirm or disconfirm data gathered in interviews. Each of these approaches is discussed in more depth below.

Data Sources

The primary sources of evidence for this study were interviews, observations, and document review. Justification for each is provided below.

Justification for Interviews

The semistructured interview process was chosen (over completely scripted or open-ended approaches to interviewing) as it would allow the researcher to format exploration around the existing Wenger (1998) framework while providing interviewees with the
opportunity for first-person accounts of experience with the CoP, experiences with and concerns about practice, and exploration of the ways in which participation in the CoP has affected subjects’ learning, practice, relationship with other communities, and identity. The framing of the research questions also invited the emergence of the ways in which the Wenger framework may not be “useful;” the semistructured approach allowed interviews to be structured around the Wenger framework while leaving room for the emergence of data not explicitly connected to, in conflict with, or somehow not fitting into the framework.

*Justification for Observations*

While the interviews provided the opportunity to interact with individual members, and offered in-depth exploration of member experiences and understandings, the unit of interest in this study was TRAIN as a community of practice. Keep in mind, however, that the TRAIN CoP is being used instrumentally—to understand the Wenger framework. The study was not focused on TRAIN itself, but on how TRAIN, as a CoP, could be understood by Wenger’s framework. It was critical, therefore, to undertake some examination of TRAIN members as they interact in the group (community) setting. Observation conducted at the annual conference provided data related to interpersonal relations, ways of interacting, means of engagement, trajectories of membership, and served to confirm interview data regarding the same.
Justification for Document Review

The analytic components of the Wenger framework explicitly address the development and purpose of tools, documents, and reified items in a community of practice. This suggested that the study should include collecting artifacts as one method of data collection. Review of artifacts and repertoire provided information relative to reification, development of solutions and tools, and the ways in which standards and processes were established and sustained. As will be discussed in Chapter Four: Findings, the artifact review also proved invaluable in constructing a timeline of the TRAIN history.

Data Sources: Summary

There were additional, practical considerations in choosing the approaches listed above. The Wenger framework deals with matters related to development of individual identity and the ways in which individual members “make meaning” of their experience in the CoP. Consequently, the interview approach offered the best means of gathering information relative to these elements of the framework. The “community” aspect invites exploration of the ways in which members work together, interact, and engage with one another. Consequently, observation was an essential strategy for informing that aspect. Several analytic components deal explicitly with the development of tools, documents, and elements of repertoire, and the evolution of these across time; this indicated the need for review of the TRAIN artifacts. Also, although the specifics are not known, these are all strategies used by Wenger (1998) in his development of the framework. A detailed study protocol can be found in Appendix D.
A fourth, rather informal means of data collection was used at the suggestion of the researcher’s advisory committee. At the annual TRAIN conference attendees were invited to provide written anonymous comments related to their experience with and understanding of the CoP (Appendix H). This provided the opportunity for any member (not only interviewees) to have a “voice” in the study and allowed for emerging data to be captured by members in the moment, during a community gathering. As is noted in Chapter Four: Findings, this strategy proved useful in confirming other data collected, and the enthusiastic, sometimes moving comments added to the richness of the findings.

IRB Approval

The researcher submitted the required Institutional Research Board (IRB) forms to NC State University’s IRB office before proceeding with the study. There was no foreseeable harm to subjects as a result of their participation. Confidentiality of participants was maintained through the use of gender-neutral pseudonyms (such as “Pat” and “Chris”) and omission in the report of specifics such as employing organization and workplace location, and removal of names from any name or location identifiers from memos, agendas or other artifacts. In some cases, in reporting findings, this necessitated using phrases such as “one interviewee said…” rather than specifying the interviewee even by pseudonym. The University IRB office reviewed and approved the study protocol. Approval forms submitted to the University IRB office can be found in Appendix B; the participant informed consent forms can be found in Appendix C; the memo informing conference
attendees that observations would be conducted during the conference can be found in Appendix D.

At the start of each interview meeting the researcher provided the interviewee with a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix C) and asked them to read and sign it. The researcher then also signed it and as soon as was possible made a photocopy. The original informed consent forms, with the interviewee’s real names on them, are stored in a folder in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home, away from the transcripts of interviews with which interviewees could potentially be matched. The photocopies of the signed consent forms were mailed to each of the interview participants for their own records.

Research Setting

As described in Chapter One, the group under study is the North Carolina Training Improvement Network (TRAIN). Founded in 1985 by a group of trainers employed by the Guilford County, NC, Department of Social Services with the mission “to stamp out bad training,” the group has grown to a mailing list of 250 members from many state agencies, universities, county and local government entities, and the private sector, all involved in the development and/or delivery of training. TRAIN meets quarterly for a day and holds an annual conference in late spring. Group-wide communication takes place via e-mail, and occasionally smaller groups of members gather informally on their own for lunches and similar events. Phone calls between members are frequent, and some occasionally gather via virtual classroom technology.
The researcher is an active participant in the group and anticipated having access to most members, including the group founders who are still living in North Carolina, as well as access to meetings and the annual conference. It was anticipated that TRAIN members would be willing to participate in interviews and share the content of CoP-related emails and reports of phone calls or other informal contact.

Research focused on interviews, electronic communications between members, artifacts, document reviews, and participant observations at the TRAIN annual conference held at a retreat center. Interviews were conducted at a location of the interviewee’s choosing, usually his or her office.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Wenger’s (1998) framework is organized around the aspects of practice meaning, community, learning, and identity, supported by the analytic components as described in Chapter 2: Literature Review. Data was collected via interviews with TRAIN members, review of documents and other artifacts produced by TRAIN, and observation of TRAIN group meetings. As discussed elsewhere, while Wenger’s framework forms the basis of this investigation, data collection and interpretation were deliberately left open-ended enough to allow for exploration of themes or emergent data not captured by Wenger’s framework.

In approaching the study it became apparent that the existing framework of aspects and markers, developed by Storberg-Walker (2008) from the Wenger text and provided in graphic form as Table 2.1, would not be sufficient to meet the demands of rigorous
qualitative inquiry. The analytic components used a number of overlapping terms, such as “accountability,” and lacked specificity in phrases such as “engaged diversity,” and in earlier qualitative studies had proven difficult to use (Aalsburg-Wiessner, et al. 2008; Storberg-Walker, 2008). Storberg-Walker explained this concern: “From a qualitative research perspective each analytical component must be unique -- it is necessary to define/specify each component so there is no overlap in definitions…Unique elements require explicit definitions and distinctions in order for researchers to code data…” (p. 567-568). Thus, in order to construct interview questions and guides for observations and artifact review, and to ensure valid coding and, ultimately, analysis of data, the researcher found it necessary to revisit the Wenger text in search of information that would provide additional clarification to the original framework (Table 2.1). Relative to each analytic component the researcher located within the Wenger text additional definition, example, or description that provided further detail. For instance, the analytic component “Participation: living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, mutuality” was further described by Wenger as including mutual recognition, or acknowledging one another as members without necessarily engaging with one another, and as something that can occur even when the member is not with the group. These items offered specificity and were distinct enough so as to suggest means of structuring data collection and interpretation: where accurately coding data as related to “living in the world” would involve guesswork at best, coding “participating in the CoP even when not with the group” was a decidedly easier prospect.
Thus, from the Wenger (1998) text the researcher extracted similar additional concepts to further specify each analytic component. Again, these items were developed from Wenger’s work and were not invented by the researcher. These additional items, hereafter called “markers” of the analytic components, represent a deep analysis and synthesis of Wenger’s explicit narrative. Calling these “markers,” the researcher used these as additional sensitizing constructs to plan data collection as well as focus the coding process to ensure that each code was (relatively) unique and trustworthy. The markers were added to the existing framework (Table 2.1) to form, for this study, the extended working framework shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1.

Framework of Aspects, Analytic Components, and Markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect of practice</th>
<th>Brief description of analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Participation: living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, mutuality</td>
<td>Mutual recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation shapes both our experience and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Reification: forms, points of focus, documents, instruments, projection</td>
<td>Creating points of focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final product differs from intended use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Duality: interplay of participation and reification</td>
<td>Participation and reification transform each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Community | Joint Enterprise: negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response | Enterprise is negotiated  
Mutual accountability  
Enterprise is indigenous |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Community | Mutual Engagement: engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance | Enabling Engagement (being included in what matters; community maintenance)  
Diversity and partiality (developing relationships) |
| Community | Shared Repertoire: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts | Repertoire functions to further negotiate the enterprise via history and ambiguity |
| Identity | Negotiated Experience: Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151). Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151) as we give meaning to participation and reification (above). Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154). | Participation becomes reified  
Participants identify their own markers of transition |
Table 3.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Membership  “…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152).</th>
<th>Mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, negotiability of a repertoire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Learning Trajectory  “not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154). There are five types of trajectories: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, outbound trajectories, and boundary trajectories.</td>
<td>Identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving temporarity of identity is not linear identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Nexus of Multimembership: “we all belong to many communities of practice…some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities” (p. 158). Identity entails the experience of multimembership and the “work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (p. 158).</th>
<th>Identity requires multimembership Reconciliation is required to maintain one identity across boundaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally: “In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community” (p. 162).</td>
<td>Local energy is directed at global issues and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement: how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95)</td>
<td>Members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise: aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</th>
<th>Aligning engagement with the enterprise learning to become and hold each other accountable to the enterprise “Defining the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses: “renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts, representations; recording and recalling events; inventing new terms and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines,” (p. 95)</td>
<td>Generational discontinuities: arrival of new members causes discontinuities Practice is not “handed down” but is an ongoing social and interactional process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the Wenger text is organized around the four aspects of practice (learning, meaning, community, and identity) the aspects served as the overarching constructs for approaching this study. Details of how the four aspects of practice guided data collection are described below.
Meaning Aspect of Practice

According to Wenger (1998), the analytic components for the meaning aspect of practice include the interplay of participation and reification. Data collection was therefore informed by the overarching questions: “How do participation and reification occur in this CoP? Does symbiotic participation and reification occur? In what other ways, if any, do CoP members make “meaning?” Data collected in regards to this aspect included exploration of information relative to participation in TRAIN events, how participation outside of regular meetings, whether participation was manifest back on the job, what members perceive as the main points of focus of the COP, and invited member assessment of how well TRAIN “walks the talk:” in their view, does TRAIN in fact “stamp out bad training?”

Community Aspect of Practice

The Wenger (1998) framework posits that the analytic components for the community aspect are joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. Additional markers found in Wenger’s (1998) discussion of community include shared points of reference, stories, and new ideas generated from shared repertoire. Data collection for the aspect of community was informed by the overarching questions: “Does evidence indicate the existence of shared enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire? In what other ways, if any, is “community” manifest in the CoP?” Collecting and interpreting data relative to the “community” aspect of Wenger’s framework was achieved primarily through interviews and review of artifacts, although observation of interactions at the
conference provided supporting evidence for the findings in this aspect. The dozens of photographs taken at TRAIN events over the years provided supporting evidence of interaction and engagement. In collecting data regarding the “community” aspect of practice, areas for exploration included: in what ways members report engaging with one another; descriptions of relationships; descriptions of TRAIN projects; perceptions of what sustains TRAIN and accounts for its longevity; what shared goals or values exist among TRAIN members, and in what ways those goals and values affect community activities; what conflicts exist and how they are managed or resolved; and what mutual accountabilities exist: what do members expect of one another? Gathering data regarding the shared repertoire, one of the analytic components associated with the “community” aspect of practice, markers lent itself to asking interviewees for, and reviewing artifacts for, examples of stories, acronyms, and in-jokes.

*Learning Aspect of Practice*

The analytic components for *learning* are evolving forms of mutual engagement, understanding and tuning their enterprise, and developing repertoire, styles and discourses. In this area the detail offered by Wenger (1998), adapted as markers for this study, focus on the development of practice over time: generational discontinuities, learning subtleties of relationships, and continuing to “tune” the enterprise. Data collection for the learning aspect was informed by the overarching questions: “Does evidence indicate the existence of evolving forms of mutual engagement, understanding and tuning enterprise, and developing repertoire, styles, and discourse? In what other ways does “learning” occur?”
Areas for exploration during data collection included member perceptions of the CoP having “learned” over time; issues related to the resolution of conflicting interpretations of the enterprise of the CoP; examining generational issues, in terms of both ages of members and years of participation; descriptions of the finer points of relationships: who knows what, how to “get along.”

*Identity Aspect of Practice*

The final aspect of practice, *identity*, includes the analytic components negotiated experience, membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multimembership, and belonging defined locally but experienced globally. Data collection for the identity aspect of practice is informed by the overarching questions: “What types of trajectories exist for learning in the CoP? Have the identities developed in multimembership been reconciled into one identity across boundaries? In what other ways does “identity” develop through membership in the CoP?” Collecting data relative to identity included discussion of other groups to which TRAIN members belong, how they are “different” depending on the group they are with, and how they reconcile that; discussing the ways in which they are not only accountable to other TRAIN members but to TRAIN itself (i.e., in what ways they are helping to “stamp out bad training”); in what way they describe their movement within the group over time (“trajectory”), and the ways in which TRAIN is connected to broader, global groups or issues.
Data Collection: Interviews

Volunteers for interviews were recruited with an email request for 3 to 5 volunteers who first joined the group in each of the time periods 1985-1993, 1994-2001, and 2002-present. Selecting three time periods was a purposive sampling strategy designed so as to draw a variety of perspectives across the CoP’s 23-year history. Further, it was thought that a spectrum of experience would be especially important as the “learning” aspect of the Wenger (1998) framework deals with group history and what he calls “tuning the enterprise” across time. The message briefly described the research project, the need for volunteers to be available for one long and possibly more, shorter follow-up interviews, and outlined the right of interviewees to withdraw from the study. A copy of this email is included in the IRB approval forms, Appendix B.

The recruitment of 3 to 5 interviewees from each of the three time periods would provide for a minimum of 9 and maximum of 15 interviewees. The protocol (Appendix E) called for placing the first respondents from each time period into the interview pool. 31 volunteers responded, with the preponderance of those from the most recent time period. All four of the respondents from the earliest time period were placed in the pool, as were the first 5 respondents from the later time periods, for a total of 14 interviewees.

While it is customary to provide a data display of demographics of study participants, concerns about confidentiality precluded inclusion of such data in this report. The researcher instead offers this view of interviewees (Table 3.2) and the years they first joined TRAIN. Pseudonyms are used and, in some cases, genders have been changed.
Table 3.2

Interviewees and Time Periods for First Joining TRAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jody</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Wenger (1998) framework guided the development of the semistructured interview format, with primarily open-ended (“How?” “In what ways?” “How do you perceive…?”) questions grouped within each of the four aspects meaning, community, identity, and
learning. For instance, questions and follow-up probes related to the meaning aspect, informed by the analytic components and markers, were:

a. How do you participate in TRAIN? In what ways are you involved outside of the regular meetings?

b. What are the areas of focus of TRAIN, as you perceive them?

c. How would you say TRAIN looks to an outsider? What would that person say we do? Would that person’s view agree with what TRAIN would say it is or does?

d. Do you feel TRAIN has made a mark on the world, or created a legacy? How?

The questions above were designed to answer the research questions associated with the meaning aspect of practice as described in the ‘data collection’ section earlier. The questions were: “How do participation and reification occur in this CoP? Does symbiotic participation and reification occur? In what other ways, if any, do CoP members make “meaning?”

Questions and probes for the remaining aspects (community, identity, meaning) were similarly developed. A complete list of questions is provided in Appendix A.

At the interviews, interviewees were advised that the researcher would be working from a set of standard questions, but they were encouraged to deviate from it as they felt inclined: the interviewer stressed the value of hearing their stories and personal experiences. It is the nature of a qualitative study to leave room for emerging data. Thus, while the researcher did seek to obtain answers to all the interview questions, effort was
made to avoid over-structuring: as this study sought to assess the “usefulness” of Wenger’s (1998) framework, it was important that data gathering be unstructured enough so as to provide opportunity to identify any possible limitations to the Wenger framework.

Interviews took place in a setting of the participant’s choice, though the researcher encouraged use of a quiet, private space such as an office. For this study it was also preferable that the interviewer and interviewee be alone so as to minimize distractions and encourage the interviewee to speak freely. Most interviews were thus held in the interviewee’s office. All but one interview took take place during business hours, although that was not a requirement.

Semistructured interviews were conducted, averaging one hour and 15 minutes each. Interviews were audiotaped on cassette tapes and transcribed by the researcher to a total of 289 double-spaced pages of verbatim transcription. Member checking followed: interviewees were provided, via email, with an electronic copy of the transcript and asked to confirm that the information was an accurate account of the interview. All interviewees affirmed the accuracy of the transcriptions of their interviews. Had any discrepancy been detected by interviewees, interview tapes were still available as a reference. Per the IRB agreement, the cassette tapes of interviews were destroyed upon acceptance of this dissertation. Following member checking, typed transcriptions were kept in a locked file cabinet and destroyed upon acceptance of this dissertation.

Several members not placed in the interview pool expressed disappointment at not being included in the study. While the researcher felt she had achieved saturation by the
12th interview, in the interest of group harmony, and on the advice of university IRB staff as, “The right thing to do,” the researcher contacted the remaining 17 volunteers and offered the opportunity for a briefer phone interview. Four took advantage of this offer and were asked the single question, “Tell me about your experience with TRAIN.” Formal documentation and recording was not performed; rather, the researcher noted any comments that differed from information already gathered and coded these per the procedure detailed below in the “Data Analysis” section of this chapter. In a few instances some such comments have been included in the findings.

As with members of Wenger’s CoP of interest, the interviewees from TRAIN seemed not only willing but eager to talk about their experiences as trainers and as members of the group; several even offered to drive to the researcher’s office from as far as 100 miles away at a time when gasoline was $4 per gallon (the researcher declined these offers and instead went to the interviewees). Interviewees appeared to enjoy the interview process and there was a good deal of laughter in most of the conversations. One interviewee, who had recently lost a parent to Alzheimer’s disease, sent a post-interview email expressing her newfound appreciation for maintaining memory and thanking the researcher for providing the opportunity to remember old times.

*Data Collection: Observation*

For this study of the TRAIN community of practice, observation of the group members together was critical to fully answering the research question. It was expected that observation would provide the opportunity to collect data regarding the community
aspect that might prove difficult to discern from interviews, for instance, the nature and nuances of relationships, mutual engagement in group activities, and the interaction of members with one another. It was also expected that observations would extend or confirm information provided by interviewees. These expectations were met: as much of Wenger’s (1998) framework focuses on issues of participation and engagement, observation allowed for examination of frequency and types of participation and interaction, content and context of discussions, body language, eye contact, and physical movement during group activities, and some view of member location (for example, periphery or core, to use terms offered by interviewees) within the CoP.

The 2008 conference was attended by 53 members, some 20 of whom were first-time attendees at a TRAIN event. The conference site was a privately owned retreat center, with a large lobby area set up in “conversation pit” style with comfortable leather sofas. A grand piano and fireplace made the area inviting, and it was usual to see small groups of conference attendees chatting in the lobby. The center’s hotel-style rooms did not have televisions but a large lounge area offered a TV for communal viewing. During the welcome session of the conference the researcher, on the advice of the IRB office, introduced herself, briefly described this study, and provided conference attendees with a memo (Appendix D) advising them that observations would be conducted but their confidentiality would be preserved. The researcher also thanked them for their cooperation and participation.
Observations were conducted on the first day of the conference from registration at 11 am through post-dinner activities in a common room ending at 10 pm. On the second day observations began at the start of the 8 am breakfast through the post-dinner game of Balderdash that ended at approximately 11 pm. On the final day of the conference observation again began at breakfast (8 am) and ended with the conference closing session at noon. The researcher attended all group meals and stayed in the lobby area during registration. The researcher attended the two conference plenary sessions. There were also 3 periods of two concurrent presentations available for observation, offered in adjoining rooms. During each period of concurrent presentations the researcher observed the session with the greatest number of attendees in hopes that this would offer the greatest opportunity to observe group dynamics and interactions. Observations were also conducted during group gatherings outside of conference sessions, such as breaks held in a common area, and post-dinner activities at which the researcher was invited/welcomed, such as communal viewing of *American Idol* and large-group games of Balderdash.

During observations the following data was collected. Extensive field notes per recommendations from Bogdan and Biklen (1997) were written as soon as possible following observations. These were written and kept on the researcher’s computer.

Each observation included the following:

1. Brief description of context. For conference sessions: topic of presentation, presentation strategies used (lecture, discussion, small group work, games, etc.), room setup, whether participants were assigned to seats or to groupings or
allowed to choose their own, and tools or documents used. For informal gatherings such as television viewing: situation, setting, length.

2. Photographs showing seating arrangements during conference sessions and meals. Snapshots of break and evening gatherings were also taken.

3. Discussion mapping diagrams during conference sessions and, as opportunity allowed, during meals. As many observations were done during conference presentations, mapping was done primarily during periods of group discussion or activities (not during lecture portions of presentations) to reflect where and among whom interaction was occurring. Discussion mapping is used commonly by TRAIN members, and it is a technique taught in the T101 course. During the conference volunteer helpers created the discussion maps in order to free up the researcher for other documentation tasks.

4. Reportage of verbal comments, as much as possible, spoken to the entire group, such as questions asked and answers provided and topics that sparked discussion. Also, documentation of the gist of conversations within small groups, as much as the researcher could access this. References to tools and elements of repertoire were recorded as well.

In conducting observations the researcher must make some judgment as to what information is “worth” recording. As much as possible anything spoken aloud to the group, for instance, a comment during a conference session, was recorded verbatim. Digital photographs taken throughout the conference allowed for documentation of seating and
member relationships and movement about the group. The discussion maps helped to
capture who interacted with whom, and how often, and sometimes in what ways: for
instance, one member did not speak aloud at all until the final session; another tended to
interrupt with many questions. During meals, breaks, and after-hours gatherings the
researcher, as she was privy to conversations, attempted to capture the gist of each and the
specifics of any particularly related to the business of the CoP. For instance, one evening at
dinner there was a lengthy conversation about smoking: Who was an ex-smoker, whether
they missed it, what strategies they’d used to quit. It was general chitchat and except for
noting that everyone seemed involved and interested, with fairly equal interaction among
those gathered at the table, the researcher did not document much of the conversation.
However, one person then started talking about a commercial she’d seen for a new
approach to quitting smoking. The basic strategy was what she called “situational
quitting”: Try not to smoke after dinner. Try not to smoke when you watch television. Try
not to smoke when you drive. This captured the attention of those seated at the table, who
began to discuss it as an effective training strategy: Teach the smoker to be successful in
various small situations rather than offer the blanket challenge of quitting smoking
entirely. The conversation grew lively after that, with ideas for how this might be used in
their own practice as trainers. At that point the researcher did begin to document individual
comments and closer detail regarding the conversation.

At the conference welcome session the researcher also posted sheets of chart paper
on the wall with the headings (based on Wenger’s framework) “How has TRAIN has
changed your practice?”, “How has TRAIN has changed you?”, “Why (or not) is TRAIN a ‘community’ rather than a ‘club’ or ‘association’?”, and “What has TRAIN learned?” The researcher placed pads of large (4”x 6”) post-it notes at each table and provided a brief verbal description of the study and the Wenger framework. Attendees, particularly the 30 who had attended prior TRAIN events or who had been part of the group for some time, were asked to please, at their leisure, anonymously post their answers. A photo of one of the posters is provided in Appendix H.

Data Collection: Document Review

Apart from meeting agendas and schedules, TRAIN has produced a number of documents, such as handouts for use at conferences, participant manuals, materials and photographs stored on the TRAIN website, and lists of recommended books for trainers. Without knowing exactly what materials would be available for review, it was anticipated that artifacts would be used chronologically in constructing a history of the TRAIN CoP and might, as a means of extending the data gathered via interviews and observation, be grouped according to the relevant aspect(s) of Wenger’s (1998) framework (meaning, community, identity, or learning). While in planning the study it was assumed that some artifacts would be made available to the researcher, in fact hundreds of pages of documents were provided. These spanned nearly the entire history of the group and ranged from meeting agendas to training handouts to entire packets of materials associated with three different iterations of the train-the-trainer course offered by TRAIN. During interviews the researcher asked interviewees if they had any materials to share: most did, and allowed the
researcher to take them back to her office for photocopying. One interviewee provided 3-ring binders containing artifacts, such as meeting minutes and conference brochures, dating back to 1992, arranged chronologically and preserved in plastic sleeves. Some members, aware from the solicitation for interviewees that this study was being conducted, volunteered to share materials they had saved.

Data Analysis Process

Analysis of the data in this TRAIN study sought to identify information relevant to the research question: “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing CoP?” The working framework of aspects, analytic components, and markers shown in Table 3.1 was used as the primary tool for organizing and analyzing data.

Data Analysis: Interviews

Interview data – most often direct answers to interview questions, usually several sentences long, but sometimes anecdotes -- was then coded per Wenger’s (1998) framework according to the protocol. Comments were taken at face value; that is, they were coded per the actual words used, without the researcher assuming any underlying meaning. (During interviews, however, the researcher had asked for clarification or further detail on interview remarks that were not clear at the time.) The protocol called for a “first pass” coding in which data was assigned to one of the aspects “Meaning,” “Community,” “Identity,” “Learning,” or “Other.” An in-depth review was then conducted, in which each item assigned to an aspect was assigned a code associated with one of the analytic
components. Finally, where possible, or as needed for further granulation, items were noted according to markers, sensitizing constructs extracted from the Wenger text, associated with the analytic components. Table 3.3 shows the coding scheme used for data analysis in this study:

Table 3.3

*Coding Scheme Based on Wenger Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Analytic components</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M1 Mutual recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Participation</em>: living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, mutuality</td>
<td>Participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation shapes both our experience and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reification: forms, points of focus, documents, monuments, instruments, projection</td>
<td>M2 Creating points of focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final product differs from intended use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Duality</strong>: interplay of participation and reification</td>
<td>M3 Participation and reification transform each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Joint Enterprise</strong>: negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response</td>
<td>C1 Enterprise is negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mutual Engagement</strong>: engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance</td>
<td>C2 Enabling engagement (being included in what matters; being involved in community maintenance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Shared Repertoire</strong>: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts</td>
<td>C3 Repertoire functions to further negotiate the enterprise via history and ambiguity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>I</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negotiated Experience:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>11</strong> Participants identify their own markers of transition <strong>11a</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151). Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151) as we give meaning to participation and reification (above). Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154).</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>11b</strong> Participation becomes reified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership:</strong> “…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152).</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>12a</strong> mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise negotiability of a repertoire <strong>12b</strong> <strong>12c</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning Trajectory
“not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154). There are five types of trajectories: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, outbound trajectories, and boundary trajectories.

| I3 | Identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving |
| I3a | Temporarity of identity is not linear |
| I3b | Identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories |
| I3c |  |
Table 3.3 continued

<p>| Nexus of Multimembership: “we all belong to many communities of practice…some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities” (p. 158). Identity entails the experience of multimembership and the “work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (p. 158). | I4 | Identity requires multimembership | I4a |
| | | Reconciliation is required to maintain one identity across boundaries | I4b |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>\textbf{Belonging Defined}</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>Local energy is directed at global issues and relationships</th>
<th>15a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Globally but Experienced Locally:} “In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community” (p. 162).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>\textbf{Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement:} (p. 95) learn subtleties of relationships: how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95)</td>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships</td>
<td>L1a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 continued

| Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise: aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about” (p.95) | L2 | Aligning engagement with the enterprise Learning to become and hold each other accountable to the enterprise “Defining the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95) | L2a  
L2b  
L2c |
| Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses: “renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts; recording and recalling events; inventing new terms and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines,” (p. 95) | L3 | Generational discontinuities: arrival of new members causes discontinuities Practice is not “handed down” but is an ongoing social and interactional process | L3a  
L3b |
For instance, the quote, “My job changed. I began facilitating monthly meetings for supervisors, creating meetings, bringing training to people outside of my program. I was able to apply my TRAIN experience there, but also I started taking back new topics, new programs, to share with TRAIN, and I think some of the things I brought back did have an influence on the group” was first coded according to the category meaning, then the analytic component participation, and finally the marker participation shapes both our experience and the community. The final code, then, according to the coding scheme provided in Table 3.3, is “M1c.”

Time spent prior to data collection in parsing out issues, such as the various shades of meaning in Wenger’s use of the word “accountability,” helped to clarify terms, establish the markers, and outline an effective coding strategy. The semistructured interview format, with questions associated with each of the four aspects of the framework, garnered interview responses largely in a straightforward manner associated with a particular aspect. Even stories and anecdotes tended to be closely related to one of the aspects. Some data proved challenging, usually too vague, to code to the finest level – that of the markers – but still fit within the aspect and one of the aspect’s accompanying analytic components. Data coded “Other,” that not clearly connected to the Wenger framework, was then sorted according to general theme, for instance, “relationship with supervisor.”

Following coding by the researcher, a former TRAIN member with a background in workplace training whose own graduate education had included some work in analyzing research data, was provided copies of 5 transcripts, with identifying information removed,
and was asked to apply the coding scheme to these transcripts. Coding for aspects (meaning, community, identity, learning) and analytic components was 100% consistent between researcher and volunteer coder. There was discussion between researcher and this second coder regarding what to do with a piece of data initially coded “other.” This was an anecdote in which the interviewee described learning, through conversation with other CoP members, to navigate the politics of obtaining funding to attend an out-of-state conference. It was not quite related to “practice” in the sense of developing a new job skill, or transferring a changed philosophy of training back to the job; rather, it spoke more to what Orr (1990) had described as not just doing the job but learning how to get the job done.

After a good deal of discussion and revisiting of the Wenger text the researcher and second coder agreed that learning to get things done was part of “making meaning,” and that this is a critical element of practice. The new marker “making meaning includes both learning to do things and how to get things done” was eventually included in the revised framework offered in Chapter 5: Discussion.

Data Analysis: Observations

While the observations did meet the expectation of providing data to supplement that gathered relative to the “community” aspect of the study – difficult to discern from interview data — data collected also proved relevant to the balance of the Wenger (1998) framework. Discrete points of data gathered during the observations were grouped according to the four aspects of practice, according to the framework, and served to supplement or extend the data collected in interviews and artifact review; an overview is
provided in Table 3.4. As with the interview data, specific quotes were coded per the coding scheme provided in Table 3.3.

Table 3.4.

*Grouping of Observation Data.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of information presented in conference sessions/descriptions of how information might be applied back on the job</td>
<td>How, how much, and in what ways people interacted with one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions asked during sessions</td>
<td>Whether and how new members/first-time attendees/returning members appeared to be welcomed/included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of points of focus of the CoP</td>
<td>Behaviors or comments related to community maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of reification</td>
<td>Evidence of conflict/resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments regarding effect of CoP activities on own practice, ways own practice has evolved/changed</td>
<td>Evidence of mutual engagement such as group projects or endeavors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence of shared repertoire, shared points of reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional data gathered during the conference observation included asking attendees to provide anonymous written comments, posted to chart sheets asking, “How has TRAIN changed your practice?” (meaning aspect), “How is (or is not) TRAIN a community?” (community aspect), How has TRAIN changed you?” (identity aspect), and “What has TRAIN learned?” (learning aspect). These comments, already grouped according to the four aspects of the framework, and brief due to the size of the post-it notes, were then coded according to the scheme provided in Table 3.3. Where appropriate these comments...
are included in the sections of Chapter Four: Findings relative to “meaning,” “identity,” “community,” and “learning.”

*Data Analysis: Document Review*

In managing the large quantity of artifacts the researcher employed several strategies. She first made copies of any original materials that needed to be returned to members and printed out screenshots of pages on the website, giving her paper copies of all materials. Artifacts were then organized, in piles, by type: meeting minutes (which were in the late 1990s replaced with a quick email recap of each meeting), schedules, and agendas; conference materials; examples of asking for or receiving help; non-business related materials (such as an email announcing the birth of a member’s child); photographs; manuals for the train-the-trainer course; training packages contributed from individual members; and training packages developed as a TRAIN group effort. Where it was known -- as not all materials were dated -- artifacts were then arranged chronologically within their type. Items not dated were placed underneath those organized chronologically.

TRAIN artifacts were then dealt with in different ways depending on type, but were typically used to confirm or supplement data gathered in the interviews. Meeting and conference agendas were used to construct a timeline of TRAIN interests and activities. This helped to clarify information, particularly regarding timeframes, that was sometimes blurry in the interviews. These materials also provided information about the interests and specialties of particular members, such as one who offered programs on “emotional
intelligence” at several TRAIN events over the years, and provided insight into which members were most active at different points in time.

The initial plan for analyzing artifacts had included, where possible (as it was not known what would be available), only grouping them into the relevant aspect(s) of the Wenger framework, then where possible associating them with one of the analytic components, and using them to support interview and observation data. Some items, however, lent themselves to detailed coding, which was conducted utilizing the same scheme as the interview coding presented in Table 3.3. For instance, the materials from the train-the-trainer course included a diagram, a model for instructional design credited to the TRAIN group. As this shows a TRAIN idea captured in document form, then used as instructional material for the course, it was coded as “M2a”: “meaning—reification—creates points of focus.”

Not all artifacts lent themselves to such detailed coding. For instance, there are dozens of photographs of members at TRAIN events which viewed in the aggregate paint a larger picture of engagement, involvement, and interaction within the TRAIN CoP, and in that way support interview data related to the “community” aspect. Individually, however, these photos, usually having no captions and often no date, do not provide much insight as standalone items.

An unexpected, but welcome, circumstance occurred with regard to artifacts: the opportunity to compare three complete sets of participant materials for TRAIN’s train-the-trainer course from different points in time. This proved invaluable in supporting the data
gathered regarding the “learning” aspect of the framework -- what a CoP learns over time -- as it related to TRAIN. As these manuals each contain 150 to 200 pages of outlines, assignments, tools, charts, guidelines, and items for reading, many from external sources, page-by-page coding was not attempted except where items, such as the diagram described in the preceding paragraph, were clearly credited to TRAIN. The manuals were, instead, literally placed side by side and subjected to careful review for similarities and changes. This comparison surfaced several examples of changes in focus of the TRAIN group which supplemented the interview and observation data (revealing, for example, a shift in focus from instructor-centered presentation skills in the early days to learner-centered approaches in the most recent) as well as extended, concrete examples of the evolution of specific material over time, one of which is included in the “findings” chapter of this paper.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The plan for this study included several strategies for ensuring credible and trustworthy findings. The first is the use of multiple sources of evidence (interview data, observation data, and artifact review), a strategy supported by Creswell (2003) and Yin (1994) in establishing credibility, circumventing the weaknesses that can result from reliance on only one method, and achieving triangulation of data. The rationale for triangulation of data is that it will confirm findings or “strengthen the study” (Patton, 2002, p. 247) by merging different points of data into one coherent picture that may be viewed as “reality.” In data analysis the researcher often achieved what might be called a “triangle” of data, each point supporting the other, with, for instance, an interview comment clearly
confirmed by a moment in an observation, in turn supported by concrete evidence in the form of a document found among the available artifacts.

The study also invited input from others at different times. Member checking of interview data was conducted following transcription of interviews, with interviewees offered the opportunity to review the data before data analysis was undertaken on it. In documenting the TRAIN repertoire (Appendix J) the researcher usually had knowledge of explanations behind references and definitions of terms, but provided a group of conference attendees with the list of repertoire items and asked them to generate their own definitions and explanations, which are included in their own words. A second coder was in 100% agreement with the researcher on applying the coding scheme to transcript data. Feedback provided by members of the researcher’s advisory committee was used in developing strategies for gathering and analyzing data and reporting findings.

Finally, the researcher kept a journal from the time of this study’s inception. This provided an audit trail and contributed to the study’s trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Researcher Biases and Beliefs

It is important to disclose that I am an active member of the TRAIN CoP. Invited by colleagues to my first meeting in the mid-1990s, I have become increasingly active in the group, and since joining have missed only one conference and no quarterly meetings. While I would describe myself as a “core” member of the group in terms of meeting planning, in the last few years I have intentionally stepped back from presenting at
meetings and conferences, feeling that the group needs to encourage some of the newer, younger trainers to try out their ideas and provide presentations. It is therefore likely that while newer members may know who I am, they have not necessarily seen me act in my work role of “trainer.”

In approaching this study I am aware of my position as the “human instrument” of research through which “data are mediated” (Creswell, 1994, p. 145). Unlike any other, outside researcher who might have only been a “human instrument” in studying the TRAIN group, I have had prolonged engagement with it and am a member of its culture. I have been an active member for nearly 20 years and have found the experience completely satisfying and meaningful. I am among those for whom training is a passion. I realize that my own experience and presuppositions could affect gathering and interpretation of data and have tried to remain cognizant of this.

Conscious – and conscientious -- adherence to the Wenger (1998) framework was intentionally built in to the approach to this study as one means of countering the bias of the researcher. In any qualitative study the questions asked will largely determine the answers obtained, and data analysis and collection can be reflexive, one affecting the other in turn. By using the Wenger framework to guide data collection, coding, and analysis I have tried to minimize my own bias. Establishing the table of aspects, analytic components, and markers far in advance of, and then using them to frame, data collection, helped with this. Also, at times in revisiting the Wenger text (for further clarification of an overlapping term, for instance) much care was taken to ensure that the data was being
matched to the framework, without reinterpreting the framework simply to match the available data. It is hoped that this adherence to the Wenger framework made the study somewhat less prone to bias than a study in which the researcher is searching for emergent themes.

Other strategies used for minimizing bias included using multiple sources of data collection, using member checks to verify interview data, use of a second coder, use of feedback from the researcher’s advisory committee, and having CoP members provide explanations of the elements of repertoire. These strategies are described in more detail in the “Credibility/Trustworthiness” section above.

I am confident that data collection did not generate only what I wanted to hear, a danger for any researcher and particularly one engaging in interviews. I am known as something of a “straight shooter” and was clear with interviewees that I was interested in hearing about their real experiences. Several interview questions invited discussion of negative aspects of TRAIN, for example, conversation about conflict or cliques. Interviewees appeared to speak freely about these issues. During interviews, for example, there were two instances of interviewees expressing sharp criticism of one other member, someone they knew to be a friend of mine. The interviewees appeared to be trying to give me honest responses, and trusted me to respect their opinions and protect their confidentiality while they offered less-than-positive comments about an aspect of their experience in TRAIN, and one that may have had personal meaning for me.
I could argue that my relationship to TRAIN, rather than prove a problem, facilitated data gathering and interpretation. My familiarity with TRAIN’s repertoire, terminology, stories, and references to historical events allowed me to work with something akin to shorthand in conducting the study. For instance, interviews, already averaging over an hour in length, would have been made much longer had the interviewee had to stop and explain every reference to people, work situations, topics, events, or elements of repertoire. This knowledge of the CoP additionally provided me more capacity for making sense of interactions and what may appear messy or chaotic activities to an “outsider.” While there is certainly some inescapable bias inherent in the researcher’s relationship to the group, the gathering of data of the depth obtained for this study would have likely required a longitudinal study on the part of an outside researcher, who by necessity would need to embed him- or herself within the TRAIN group for an extended period of time (made particularly difficult as the group meets only quarterly). This would provide something of a conundrum, as a researcher having thus embedded himself in the group would then perhaps be subject to many of the same biases as the current researcher. I believe, then, that my location within this group, and access to its members, proved less a problem than a means of enhancing and enriching the study results.

As for my own beliefs: The central character of the film *Then She Found Me* is a woman, April, desperate to have a child. An adoptee herself, she is convinced that an adopted child is not loved as much by, and does not share the same connection with, the adoptive mother in the way of a “natural” child. Dismissing suggestions that she herself
adopt, and insisting despite several setbacks that she intends to have a child “of her own,” April says to a friend, “You don’t know what it’s like to be adopted.”

The friend replies, “Well, you don’t know what it’s like not to be adopted.”

And that is, I think, the nature of “knowing”: we each construct it, from our own experiences, and our perception of those experiences is our reality. I have spent 20 years in the training field, much of it in delivering management training that included topics such as resolving conflict and coaching for performance improvement. That experience taught me one clear thing: there are at least two sides to every story. And both of them can be “true.” And we often seek data, or disregard data, in order to make our perception “true.” And sometimes there are many more than just 2 sides.

The woman in the film, April, describes a moment she witnessed when she was small, after the birth of her brother (a natural child born later to her adoptive parents). Refusing her mother’s adamant insistence that there is no difference in the love of a mother for a natural versus an adopted child, April offers an example from her childhood in which she says her mother and her newborn brother shared a special “look,” which she interprets to mean a different, better bond between them because the mother gave birth to him. April does not entertain alternative explanations, such as: he was a new baby; she may have been experiencing some sibling rivalry and imagined the “look;” there may be a difference in the mother-son bond and that of the mother-daughter; it may have been a look she and the mother had shared when April was a baby, but no longer…there are myriad
possibilities. But the only one April saw, the “true” story, was that the mother loved the natural child more. Her perception was her reality.

I saw examples of this during data collection for this study, especially as one interviewee described at length his memory of a TRAIN event in which he cast himself as something of a hero. While he clearly believed his version, I was in attendance at the same event and remembered it differently; photographs confirmed my recollection. But his memory was, to him, “true,” and met a need for him, although I am not clear on what that need may have been.

I know my own beliefs of what is “true” plays into my own biases. I love training, am good at it, am passionate about it, and am by any standards a successful training practitioner (published author, paid conference speaker, in-demand consultant). I therefore don’t understand, and don’t have much patience for, those trainers who don’t like it, and aren’t passionate about it, and don’t want to be better at it, and stay in the field even though it makes them -- and likely their learners -- miserable.

In conducting this study I had to be very careful of looking for the “truth” as it was experienced by others, even though it might not mesh with my own. For instance, while it seemed safe to assume that a volunteer interviewee who’d been participating in TRAIN for 23 years would report being satisfied with the experience, there was a possibility that this was not the case. I was surprised by some negative comments, reflective of another’s ‘perception as reality’, made about a friend of mine. I was equally aware of the need to keep my own knowledge of the “truth” out of data analysis and not just look, for instance,
for comments asserting the resounding success of the TRAIN CoP, or give unwarranted weight to comments that supported my own frustrations with TRAIN’s failure to deal with dysfunctional member behaviors. “Truth” can take many forms; mine is only one. In analyzing data and developing findings I have attempted to provide the “truth” as the TRAIN CoP members provided it.

Limitations of the Study

Four limitations of this study have been identified. First, as the TRAIN group meets only a few times a year it was not possible for the researcher to “embed” herself into daily interactions as did Wenger (1998). The opportunity for group observations is limited, and the researcher’s awareness of “offline” group interactions and conversations is limited to those to which she was made privy.

There are two limitations associated with this study’s use of a single case. First, practical considerations limited the time and other resources available for conducting this study. The researcher is a doctoral student working against graduation requirements and the reality of a full-time job. It is hoped, however, that the depth of this study will help to compensate for the breadth that a multi-case approach might have provided. Second, the sample used in this study is admittedly one of convenience. I am an active, long-term member of TRAIN, have easy access to it, and already had a great deal of tacit knowledge regarding, for instance, group repertoire and norms. I was confident that I would have plentiful interview volunteers, be granted freedom in conducting observations, and have access to artifacts. In choosing this as the single case, while I did not know what the findings would say about
the Wenger (1998) framework, I could confidently anticipate that the study could be completed and the research question answered. As discussed in the “Beliefs and Biases” section of this chapter, I believe that my involvement in the group did afford me a deeper, “insider’s” view of TRAIN than could have been gained by an outside researcher.

Fourth, there is also a limitation inherent in the use of Wenger’s (1998) framework: the assumption of success. This study, by virtue of asking for volunteers from the current mailing list who first joined in the late 1980s, is essentially asking for those who have continued to participate. This inherently assumes that, given a participant with up to 23 years of membership, the membership has been found to be meaningful. The study did not seek, for instance, data from people who had dropped out of the CoP over the years.

Methodology Summary

Through using a variety of data-gathering techniques it was hoped that this study would offer insight into the workings of an extant, long-lived community of practice, and ultimately reveal the strengths and, perhaps, flaws in the framework proposed by Wenger in 1998.
Vignette Two: Meaning

Charlie leaves the staff meeting exasperated, frustrated at the news that the patient registration system is changing again and will bring with it yet another level of paperwork and bureaucracy. The reason for the change, according to Charlie’s boss, is, “The Central Office says.”

He leans back in his chair and stares at the wall, his eyes lighting on a yellowed sheet of paper taped to the right of his desk. A star at the center is bordered by nested boxes, with an admonition at the top: “Find your 20%.” This is an old NC TRAIN adage, borrowed from the Pareto principle (the 80/20 rule), which tells trainers and instructional designers to focus on the critical content rather than be seduced into developing an all-encompassing view of material. Charlie looks over the changes again and realizes the change is really just mostly differences in formatting rather than processes or knowledge required to enter the data. The critical information involves the prevention of a patient ending up with 2 different ID numbers, which according to Charlie’s boss creates lots of headaches for those processing the paperwork. Focusing on this content, and handling the formatting issues via a visual on a handout, will help the training be successful.

The other thing that concerns Charlie, though, is the reaction he’ll likely get from his learners. The new hires are always chomping at the bit to get to their new jobs, ready or not, and this new twist will likely add another hour to an already-long orientation program. Seasoned workers, never happy about being hauled back to the classroom for
“refresher” training, will likely see the change as Charlie did: one more level of bureaucracy.

Charlie doesn’t have much time to devote to this, though, as his boss has little patience with Charlie’s “learner first” approach. Believing that training is really just a matter of presenting content, the boss expects a text-laden PowerPoint show with a pretty template. She feels it is the trainer’s job to deliver the content, and up to the learners to apply it. And she isn’t interested in hearing that Charlie wants to go off and conduct a “needs assessment.” She’ll be expecting a plan for delivering the training by late this afternoon.

Charlie sends an email to several of his closest TRAIN colleagues, saying he’s concerned about learner reaction to yet another complication in an already-complicated process. One responds: “What’s the rationale for the change?” Another replies, “Didn’t Margaret have something like this awhile back? What does she say?” She copies Margaret on the email. Margaret is at her desk when the email comes in and calls Charlie: she sometimes moonlights in the lab of a large regional hospital, and yes, she ran into this a few months ago at her own workplace. She asks how she can help. Charlie expresses his frustration about yet another arbitrary change from people who had no understanding of the reality of the job. He expresses the same sentiments that will likely be expressed by his learners: “SO WHAT if there are 2 patient ID numbers? Will the world come to an end? Can’t the ‘paperwork manglers’ do anything on their own? How hard is it to delete one of the numbers?” Margaret listens and says: “The thing is, the duplicate numbers aren’t just an issue for the manglers. Suppose we had someone come in for bloodwork, maybe for
something serious, like leukemia. We could make a serious mistake if we weren’t working with the right ID number. Diagnosis and treatment could be delayed. Plus, with two numbers there’s a chance of double billing, and that’s a nightmare for the hospital AND the patient.”

Charlie was startled. His boss’s rationale for the change was, “The Central Office says.” Realizing the real—and serious—implications for the issue helped Charlie see how to present the training so that it would be viewed as necessary by the new hires, and received with considerably less resistance by the more seasoned processors. Charlie developed a quick 30-minute module opening with scenarios illustrating ‘the dangers of double IDs”, then a job aid—a flow chart handout—for determining that a prior record did not exist (was the patient born in this hospital? Has the patient changed her name through marriage or divorce?). The module is accompanied by a handout showing screenshots of the new formatting; there’s really no need to spend much time on that in class.

Charlie sends his boss a message that the training plan is ready.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings to this study in four sections, organized according to the aspects of the Wenger (1998) framework: meaning, community, identity, and learning. The research question was: “Is Wenger’s framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice (CoP)?” The process of analyzing and coding the data was described in Chapter Three. Here, the findings are presented, relative to each aspect, and the findings illuminate how the application of Wenger’s framework proved useful (or not) to understand the TRAIN community of practice (CoP). The chapter concludes with an overall statement relative to findings regarding the specific research question: Is Wenger’s framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice?

As a reminder to readers, this study used the instrumental case study approach. Unlike an intrinsic case study, in which the researcher seeks for emergent themes, the intrinsic case study seeks to extend knowledge of something else, in this case, the Wenger (1998) framework. Data gathered from this study of the TRAIN group were therefore interpreted not through the search for emergent themes but against the Wenger framework. As will be explained more fully throughout this chapter, data coded “other,” that which did not tie explicitly to the framework, was grouped into general themes.

Findings: Introduction

Overall, the researcher found that the Wenger (1998) framework of four aspects (learning, meaning, community, and identity) and the accompanying analytic components
was useful as a starting point in understanding the internal dynamics of the TRAIN CoP.

The following sections present the findings of the data analysis. The Wenger (1998) framework is extensive and complex, and the findings are challenging to present in a way that does not put too many demands on the reader. The findings are therefore reported in the following way. They are organized into four sections, the four aspects of practice proposed by Wenger: meaning, community, identity, and learning. Each section is structured using the same format. First, the table of analytic components and the markers corresponding to that aspect of practice are presented along with an overview of the aspect. Second, the analytic components for the aspect are briefly described again to connect them to the aspect of practice. Third, the markers and findings for each analytic component are aspect are presented, with the findings supported by data—interviews, observations, or documents. Fourth, a summation of findings is then presented for each analytic component. Fifth and finally, a summation of the findings for the aspect of practice is presented.

To illustrate the organization of the findings, the sections for the “meaning” aspect of practice are:

1. Heading: Findings for the “meaning” aspect of practice
2. The segment of the table of analytic components and markers relative to the “meaning” aspect
3. A brief overview of the “meaning” aspect
4. A brief discussion of the analytic components for the “meaning” aspect
5. A discussion of the markers and the findings relative to each
5. A summation of the findings for the analytic components of the “meaning” aspect.

6. An overall summary of findings for the “meaning” aspect.

This structure is repeated for reporting findings of the remaining three aspects: community, identity, and learning.

Findings for the “Meaning” Aspect of Practice

Table 4.1.

**Analytic Components and Markers for “Meaning” Aspect**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect of practice</th>
<th>Brief description of analytic components (All from Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Meaning                  | *Participation*: living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, mutuality | Mutual recognition  
Participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people  
Participation shapes both our experience and the community |
| Meaning                  | *Reification*: forms, points of focus, documents, monuments, instruments, projection | Creating points of focus  
Final product differs from intended use |
| Meaning                  | *Duality*: interplay of participation and reification | Participation and reification transform each other |
Meaning: Analytic Components

The three analytic components in the meaning aspect are participation, reification, and the interplay (duality) of the two. Meaning “is ultimately what learning is to produce” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4) through the process of negotiating ideas and concepts to make them less abstract and more real. In the process of reification we create “points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized” (p. 58). (Wenger offers the example of a using a law – a reified idea open to negotiation of meaning -- to argue a point.) Asserting that participation cannot exist without reification, and vice versa, Wenger explains that “Explicit knowledge is … not freed from the tacit” (p. 67). It is through the act of participating that we negotiate meaning and make the shared experience “real,” and it is through the act of reification that we make concepts and ideas also “real.”

Meaning: Participation

The three markers for the analytic component of the meaning aspect “participation” are (1) mutual recognition, (2) participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people, and (3) participation shapes both our experience and the community. Briefly, the definition for each is: that participation, while involving mutual recognition (as participants in the community recognize one another as group members), does not necessarily entail agreement or even equality. For the second marker, the notion that participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people refers to Wenger’s finding that participation transcends the active community: we participate even when we are not with the group. The third marker, participation shapes both the participant and the
community, speaks to a symbiosis resulting from participation and the notion that people bring back energy, ideas, and innovations to the community.

The first marker helped discover data that seemed to be aligned with Wenger’s unique idea about what participation in a CoP is. Wenger asserts participation is not tantamount to collaboration in the community of practice by explaining that participation may only involve “mutual recognition,” member acknowledgment of one another as members. This differs from Wenger’s conception of “mutual engagement,” an analytic component of the community aspect of practice, which carries the connotation of agreement or camaraderie. Pat, one of the interviewees, spoke of this when she said, “Well, I don’t know that I’d say we’re one big happy club, there are some people who just get on my nerves and I admit I kind of avoid, but they are trainers and I respect their right to be part of the group.” This idea of “participation” as separate from “engagement” is a challenging one in the Wenger text and it was anticipated that this would prove difficult to code. Interviewees, however, seemed clear on this distinction, noting that one could “participate” in the CoP – in the sense of attending meetings and having lunch with the group – without necessarily “engaging” with it; that is, being regularly and actively involved in conversation, activities, and projects. By way of analogy one interviewee offered this: “It’s like the ‘lurker’ in an online course. They can always be present and maybe even chime in to discussions once in awhile. But they aren’t engaged.” In this example the interviewee acknowledged the mutual recognition of the “lurker” as a fellow
member of the course while confirming that the lurker’s participation was not viewed as collaborative.

Likewise, the marker “participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people” revealed ways in which interviewees were making meaning of their experience with TRAIN by transferring learning back to practice: they continued to make meaning by “participating” even though they were not with the group. All fourteen interviewees were able to provide at least one example of this. Jess, for example, explained the effect of her TRAIN CoP participation on her overall approach to providing training:

From the moment I start designing I feel TRAIN’s influence. On the day of a training session, or as I’m getting ready for it, I think about [another member] always saying, “You’re hosting a party, and it’s like being home and getting your house ready.” People should walk in as if you’re hosting a party for them. Not so much the festive side of it, but you’re welcoming them, you’ve prepared for them, the room is ready.” I think about that almost every time I start a session. Is everything ready so I can be at the door and welcome them? Is there music playing, is the room appealing, is the food ready?

Jess’s comment on the way she was still “participating” in TRAIN even when not with the group also reflects the way in which she was making meaning of her experience with TRAIN. In this instance, she reveals that her participation in the CoP had influenced her conception of the role of “trainer” and the meaning she assigned to “training.”
Another interviewee offered a different perspective on the same phenomenon. Devon described the way he made meaning of a TRAIN meeting presentation as it influenced his thinking about a specific element of his practice “back home”:

At one of the meetings there was a short presentation on developing good handouts. The gist of it was that a handout is for the learner, not the trainer, so don’t just restate your own notes. So maybe a week later I was getting ready for a presentation, and I was going to just print up copies of my slides, and I caught myself. I remember making a conscious effort to consider what the purpose of the handout was, and I redid it so it would be useful as a resource when people got back to work. That’s part of my everyday practice now.

This quote from Devon illustrates two important ideas. First, he connected the new task learned (e.g., how to develop new handouts) to the underlying rationale for distributing handouts in the first place (e.g., to help the learner; to enhance and add value to the presentation). His participation in TRAIN generated a deeper understanding of why the new skill was important. Making sense in this way helped him utilize the new skill to enhance training practice.

Second, Devon’s quote illustrates how his understanding of why the new practice is important caused him to stop his automatic way of developing handouts. Devon chose to describe this stopping as having “caught myself” and having to (make) “a conscious effort…” Changes in behavior and practices such as this example are not standard, as
evidenced by the low levels of training that are reported as actually transferring back to the job (Kupritz, 2002, cites anecdotal reports of transfer typically as low as 10%). Given Devon’s understanding of why helped him embody and integrate the new practice in using handouts” back home.”

The final marker for the analytic component of “participation” of the meaning aspect is “participation shapes both our experience and the community.” This was described by interviewee Sam, who said:

My job changed. I began facilitating monthly meetings for supervisors, creating meetings, bringing training to people outside of my program. I was able to apply my TRAIN experience there, but also I started taking back new topics, new programs, to share with TRAIN, and I think some of the things I brought back did have an influence on the group.

Sam’s comment reveals the symbiotic nature of participation in a CoP, in which she reported her own practice being changed even as she, through her participation, changed the community.

In regards to “participation” as an analytic component of meaning, data from the TRAIN study can be summarized as revealing that the phenomenon of “mutual recognition” (acknowledging one another as members) was, in keeping with the Wenger framework, distinct from “mutual engagement” (collaborative interactions with others). It additionally showed that new learning (transfer) was occurring as CoP members made meaning of their experience of participating in the CoP. Findings also showed that
participation can be symbiotic: participation changes the community as the community changes the participant.

Meaning: Reification

The second analytic component for “meaning” is reification. Wenger describes this as giving an idea “thingness.” This does not always mean concrete form: Wenger offers the examples of “democracy” and “the economy” as abstract concepts that tend to be discussed as if they were actual living objects (as in, “The economy took another dive today…”). The “reification” component includes 2 markers: creating points of focus, areas around which negotiation of meaning can occur, and the final product as differing from intended use. Review of data shows reification in the TRAIN community, from creating points of focus to actual, literal reification in the form of documents.

Wenger describes a “point of focus” as a problem to be addressed, often subject to negotiation. A point of focus that appears throughout the data gathered during the study of TRAIN is that of “finding your 20%.” Adapted from the Pareto Principle, TRAIN members describe “finding your 20%” in training as focusing on the few critical points a learner must know in order to perform successfully on the job; “good” training culls out extraneous information. The idea of “finding your 20%” came up in nearly every interview, was mentioned repeatedly at the conference, and appeared on the conference participant comments in response to the question, “How has TRAIN changed your
practice?” Several interviewees discussed the importance of “finding the 20%,” particularly Chris:

I remember here in [county] we had program trainers who felt you had to train every paragraph and comma of the policy, which was overwhelming, no one could remember it, it was really confusing, it was information overload. Then workers would get back to their jobs and the supervisors would say, “They don’t know what to do!” They were deluged with all this stuff and hadn’t been given any information about how to proceed. So finding the 20% helps trainers to focus on the most essential information people need when they leave this training. It helps trainers put in perspective, “I have this huge amount of information, but what is most important for learners to take out the door with them when they leave?” The most routine, ordinary, regular, most-of-them kind of case is what the training should focus on. Everything else is an exception, and that’s when you refer learners to the manual or tell them to go to their supervisor or an experienced worker.

Chris’ description of “finding the 20%” sheds light on the function of the CoP as means of generating negotiated meaning. TRAIN’s overall broad mission of “ stamping out bad training” is here refined to include the idea of “identifying the content most critical to the learner’s reality.” Literal reification of this concept has occurred as well: a graphic titled “Find your 20%,” attributed to “the founding TRAIN members,” is included in the
TRAIN-sponsored train-the-trainer course ("T101") participant materials and is included in the glossary of TRAIN repertoire as Figure Appendix J.1.

As noted by Wenger, a “point of focus” is one around which negotiation occurs. Despite its existence as a concrete item (an image on a document) the idea of “finding the 20%” is itself not concrete. For example, two trainers charged with providing instruction in “listening skills” may have different ideas on exactly what that 20% encompasses. The reified idea of “finding the 20%” is thus a continued point of focus for ongoing negotiation within the TRAIN community.

Another example of reification originated during development of TRAIN’s T101 course and, as faculty and course attendees continued to participate in the CoP, spread to more general group activities. These include the “3 Key Principles of Effective Training.” These Key Principles, or variations of them, came up time and again in interviews, in artifacts, and in observations. Parenthetical explanations were added by the researcher per definitions offered by interviewees:

1. Learner first, situation second, content last.

2. You choose when you sweat (the effective trainer prepares and rehearses ahead of time);

3. If what you’re doing isn’t working, try something else (it is critical to have many items in your training toolkit: don’t blame your learners or content if something isn’t working; it’s your responsibility to fix it).
The reification of the first Key Principle ("learner first…") and the idea of "finding the 20%" was further evidenced during the conference wrap-up, a whole-group “ABC Review” of key points attendees were taking away from the conference. The facilitators wrote the letters A through Z on a chart pad and asked the group to shout out one item, something from the conference sessions, to go with each letter. While most items shown on the chart refer to new information provided at the conference, such as the reference to the “Generational Gumbo” workshop or the creation of a “window pane” game during the closing session, two items on the list are reified TRAIN concepts that came up at some point during the conference and were meaningful enough for those participating in this “A-Z review” to shout out, even though they were not topics of presentations or explicitly connected to conference activities. Figure Appendix J.2 is a photograph of the final product of this activity, with the reified items “learner first” and “20%” discussed above, highlighted by the researcher.

Wenger notes that the point of focus, the idea around which negotiation occurs while meaning is made, may be intentionally created as a means of preserving or transferring knowledge from one CoP member to another. An example occurred during the annual conference that was observed. The presenter described her success at using the 4-point “Compass” model from Joseph Grenny’s “Crucial Conversations” training in her job, and demonstrated her use of it in new hire orientation training to emphasize the need for good customer service. She placed two sheets of chart paper on the wall and drew a quadrant
diagram (the “compass”) on each. She then said, “Let’s pretend we’re new hires who will be working with our public assistance programs. Try to put yourselves in their shoes for a few moments.” She then worked with the group to generate lists of the emotions, wants, and needs of new hires as well as a list of “stereotypes we have of the public seeking assistance from us” we have about our clients” and “beliefs our clients have about us.”. On the second sheet she worked with the group to generate lists of the emotions, wants, and needs of the public seeking assistance from us, and the stereotypes that those seeking assistance have of the government workers in the public aid offices. She then placed the charts side by side, with the following result shown in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2.

Wants and Needs of Clients Compared to New Hires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLIENT: EMOTIONS</th>
<th>NEW HIRE: EMOTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tired</td>
<td>Want to make good impression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEREOTYPES the public has of workers in the aid offices</th>
<th>STEREOTYPES we have of the public seeking assistance from us</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>Lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich</td>
<td>Working the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careless</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninterested</td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assume we are cheating the system</td>
<td>Tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulative</td>
<td>Want more $$/feel entitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manipulative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uneducated/ Illiterate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Careless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attendees gasped aloud at the similarities of the two lists. There followed a discussion of the ways in which trainers could further facilitate this information to encourage new hires in changing their attitudes/perceptions of the public, find commonalities with them, and provide the services the customers want rather than just those they need.

The presenter then invited negotiation of the point of focus she’d introduced -- the “compass” model -- by asking, “How could you use this model in training that you do?” Responses came from around the room in rapid-fire fashion, including, “Use it with new hires and their supervisors, rather than clients”; “Use with new supervisors and their staff”;
“Use in teambuilding with the team leader and members”; and finally, “Use it any time you have any two groups working together.” The presenter stated her success with the model and mentioned the ease of using it even as an on-the-fly activity, as it requires no preparation or materials other than something to write on and with. At lunch that day several CoP members discussed their plans for using the model in their work. This example, again, shows the intentional attempt to transfer knowledge from one CoP member to another (or, in this instance, others) and to help the members “make meaning” of the compass model. This example additionally provides an extended, detailed example of how the TRAIN CoP “works,” by showing the intentional, collaborative effort to learn and use a new tool in training. It provides insight into the matter of “internal dynamics” this study addresses.

The additional marker for “reification” is “may differ from intended use.” In applying the framework to the TRAIN study this marker did not prove distinct enough from the overall idea of reification as “negotiated” to make it useful in coding and interpreting data. The example of the “compass” model showed the explicit attempt to take a reified item -- the model -- and adapt it to a variety of applications (as the conference attendees offered suggestions); whether this might be what Wenger would interpret as “differing from intended use” is unclear. At any rate, the TRAIN study did not produce data that surfaced evidence of reified items as different from the intended.
Meaning: Duality

The final analytic component from the “meaning” aspect is duality, the interplay of participation and reification. The only marker for this analytic component is “participation and reification transform each other.” Evidence of duality of participation and reification surfaced largely through interview comments related to presentations of new training topics at TRAIN events, in particular, the interviewees’ need to have access to both the materials and to see them presented. Six interviewees stressed the value of not only being provided with training materials, such as lesson plans and slide shows, but also being provided the opportunity to see a trainer deliver the material. (Wenger, 1998, p. 65 recognized this and addressed it in his comments regarding the need for both reification and participation, noting that, “Putting everything in writing doesn’t seem to solve all our problems.”) According to several interviewees it is this duality that creates learning necessary for changes in practice. Taylor, Robin, and Frankie all elaborated on this:

Taylor: If someone’s doing, say, a PowerPoint presentation, I’m not just looking at the information in their presentation, but I’m watching how they do it. Are they reading slide to slide, are they ad-libbing, are they adding humor in, are they moving, are they pulling people from the audience? Are the lights off, are they on, where are they standing? And I watch the learners’ reactions. If the presenter is getting a good reaction I’m like, ok, I need to try that next time I do a PowerPoint. And if it’s a bad reaction, I’m like, ok…not that.
Jess offered perhaps the most eloquent comments on the importance of the interplay between participation (watching) and reification in terms of affecting practice. Her description of the shortcomings of even the most detailed written instructions speaks exactly to the problems encountered as the business world attempts to capture “knowledge” as discrete items in a database or, in this case, a lesson plan:

The state has been using the canned leadership training packages from [name of company] for years. Every time the materials are updated the instructor guides get longer and more detailed—you know, “Stand here, use the blue marker, show part 1 of the video.” The thing is, no matter how detailed the instructor guides get, they still can’t replace the experience of watching a good instructor present the material. The instructor guides can’t capture things like managing audience energy, dealing with some weird participant behavior, the difference the instructor’s mood can make, managing all the charts and videos and handouts without fumbling, and linking the material to the learner’s everyday work. You really need to see someone do it well to understand how to do it yourself. Then, of course, you’ll probably end up going back and tweaking the materials for yourself as well.

This last comment is tied to the only marker for the analytic component “duality”: “participation and reification transform each other”: Jess says that although the lesson plan is problematic for already being loaded with detail, the observers will, following
their “participation” as observers, go back and make more changes to it. The experience of watching another trainer at work will change their delivery of the material even as they change the material itself.

The importance of duality – the interplay of participation and reification -- in making meaning may offer new insight on the strategies for transmitting tacit knowledge. This will be examined further in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”

Meaning Aspect: Summary

Most interviewees provided at least one detailed example of the way in which their TRAIN participation helped them to make meaning and, in turn, allowed for transfer of this meaning, or “learning” to their training practice (Jess, for instance, had changed her overall approach to training by always treating her learners as if she were a host welcoming them to her home). Interviews, artifact review, and observation revealed many points of focus and showed that a number of TRAIN concepts have been reified, including the Key Principles originally developed for the T101 course and what TRAIN considers the cornerstone of good training design, “find your 20%”.

Duality, the final analytic component in the “meaning” aspect of the Wenger (1998) framework, surfaced largely through interview comments expressing the member’s need to both have access to training materials and to see them presented. As described by interviewees, the importance of duality in this form may shed light on the effective means of transmitting tacit knowledge; this will be examined further in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”
An additional finding relevant to “meaning,” as well as the other aspects, emerged in interviews, and has to do with the level of involvement and participation. Throughout the interview process the three less-involved TRAIN members, Jody, Jamie, and Alex, provided answers of less specificity than the others. For instance, in regards to “meaning,” while they did say they felt their TRAIN participation had positively affected their practice, they were not able to provide any specific examples. Compare the responses to the question, “How has participation in TRAIN affected your practice?” provided in Table 4.3. The response in the column on the left is from Taylor, who has been a member for 2 years, attends most meetings, has presented at the conference, describes a number of relationships with other members, and has taken an active role in activities like meeting planning. Jamie, whose response is offered in the column on the right, is a 5-year TRAIN member who rarely attends meetings, does not help with meeting planning or other activities, and who during the interview mentioned interacting with no other members.
Table 4.3.

Comparison of Interview Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Taylor: 2 year, actively involved member</strong></th>
<th><strong>Jamie: 5-year, less involved member</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The meetings are useful because we can get something we can take back to our organization.</td>
<td>If you learn something and you like it and it’s helpful and you believe in whatever, you, just because of the work I do you can put it in practice right away, so when you learn something or hear something, um, you know, within the next week you’ll be doing it, for the most part, I know I will. [Researcher then asked: “Can you think of anything in particular?”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even though there’s one topic being presented, each person can take that topic and turn it into something else that will work in their specific area. That hand washing presentation at the fall meeting? The one where she showed the pictures of the nasty germs growing on the faucet handles and the water fountain? I don’t especially care about laboratory research and germs on my hands. But the presentation was an excellent example of making dry, technical content more interesting, and figuring out a way to get the learner’s attention. I was able to apply some of her ideas to a policy training program I’ve been working on.</td>
<td>Umm, it just, just training techniques and stuff, I mean I can’t name anything off the top of my head or anything, but techniques and styles and little activities and games from the more concrete to the more obtuse kind of stuff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This finding may be especially interesting in a larger context: for the most part, these 3 interviewees were the least articulate of those in the interview pool, and in general could not


provide specifics about anything regarding their practice. The possibility that those who are more peripherally involved may be less conscious of their own practice will be further examined in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”

Findings for the Community Aspect of Practice

Table 4.4 shows the table of analytic components and markers corresponding to the “community” aspect of practice:

Table 4.4.

*Analytic Components and Marker for the “Community” Aspect*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect of practice</th>
<th>Brief description of analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Community                | *Joint Enterprise:* negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response | Enterprise is negotiated  
Mutual accountability  
Enterprise is indigenous |
| Community                | *Mutual Engagement:* engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance | Enabling Engagement (being included in what matters; community maintenance)  
Diversity and partiality (developing relationships) |
Table 4.4 continued

| Community | Shared Repertoire: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts | Repertoire functions to further negotiate the enterprise via history and ambiguity |

According to Wenger (1998), “community” is what binds members to one another. It is within this aspect that members interact and engage with one another, operate in a spirit of generalized reciprocity, demonstrate accountability to other members, develop a shared repertoire, and develop collegial relationships and, in TRAIN’s case, even friendships with other members.

*Community: Analytic Components*

The three analytic components in the community aspect are joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire, which distinguish the concept of “community” from constructs such as “culture” or “structure.” Joint enterprise is the business of the community, such as processing claims forms efficiently or stamping out bad training. Mutual engagement refers to doing things together, developing relationships, and being involved community activities. Shared repertoire refers to the shared points of reference of the community, the basis for common discourse or “language” of community members.

*Community: Joint Enterprise*

Wenger’s (1998) says the defining of “joint enterprise” as an ongoing process of negotiation, not a fixed agreement, and, describing it as the means by which the CoP is
both pushed forward and restrained, both held in check and changed, he says joint enterprise “is like rhythm to music” (p. 82). Wenger offers three defining points about joint enterprise, here used as markers: (1) enterprise as negotiated, that is, negotiating what is meant by processing claims “efficiently,” or by “stamping out bad training”; (2) mutual accountability, the idea that community members are accountable to one another; and (3) enterprise is indigenous; that is, the community does not exist apart from the larger organization, but must operate within the constraints and resources of it.

The first marker for joint enterprise holds that the enterprise is negotiated. The TRAIN CoP states its enterprise as “stamping out bad training,” but what, exactly, is “bad training”? And how does one, or a group, go about stamping it out? According to Wenger the joint enterprise is both pursued and defined by those engaged in it. Across time, as will be further discussed in the section on the “learning” aspect of Wenger’s framework (in which the enterprise is “tuned” across the history of the CoP) TRAIN has defined “stamping out bad training” as including such varied approaches as strengthening classroom presentation skills, strengthening discussion facilitation skills, creating effective visuals, and consciously working toward developing and mentoring new trainers.

Wenger (1998) includes in the idea of negotiated enterprise the concept of the enterprise of the CoP as negotiated to make the job habitable; that is: “their daily practice…is a complex, collectively negotiated response to what they understand to be their situation” (p. 78). In the case of TRAIN such “understanding of their situation” included managing feelings of isolation, marginalization, and being misunderstood. The TRAIN enterprise,
from its early days of a small group gathering to share resources, had evolved to include such functions as providing a platform for allowing trainers to try out new topics, get solutions to problems, or alleviate monotony. Interviewees described the ways in which involvement with TRAIN made their jobs more habitable.

For Lee, the TRAIN CoP makes the job more habitable by buffering her concerns that her organization management doesn’t really understand or support training:

TRAIN fills a need for us by reminding us that there are reasons for what we do and the way we do it. Adult learning, the way adults learn—the regular bureaucrat doesn’t know a lot about it. They’ve been to college and think that’s what “adult education” is. They experienced what was probably crappy training all their lives, they don’t see the sweat that goes into making training effective and good. They see the end result but don’t connect it to theory or effort. And I think sometimes trainers are held to a higher standard. You know, it’s like, “You’ve got to be really good because I don’t understand what you’re doing to begin with” (laughs).

Chris discussed the role that TRAIN played in helping trainers fine-tune their work before presenting to a group of non-trainers, or get solutions to problems they were encountering back on the job:

At every meeting we’d say, “Who would like to do a program next time?”

Sometimes it was somebody who was working on a big training program
and they wanted to do a dry run. So we’d give feedback, like, “The instructions for that activity were kind of confusing.” We’d help them fine-tune it, so they ended up with a better product, and they didn’t have to dry run on a real live group. So that helped.

Wenger (1998) also describes a job made more habitable as its monotonous and meaningless aspects are mediated by the community. Devon offered an example:

Mostly we [his work unit] were delivering either mandated stuff which is just jumping through hoops, we don’t expect anybody to learn anything… TRAIN gives me ways to punch up a lot of that stuff, and reminds me there are other things I can do. For instance, I got interested in “emotional intelligence” through TRAIN, and ended up developing workshops on my own and doing them back at my facility. I really enjoy those, and they’re a nice break from all the mandated programs.

These examples illustrate the ways in which TRAIN’s joint enterprise had been negotiated through the years in response to the situations of members working to “stamp out bad training.” TRAIN began with founding members gathering to share materials, but in response to member needs had come to be a platform for exploring the tenets of “good” training, a vehicle for doing “dry runs” of new programs, and a place for introducing new topics and strategies to alleviate routine and generate new interests.
The second marker for the joint enterprise analytic component of the community aspect is mutual accountability. This is accountability in the sense of being responsible to one another; Wenger (1998) places accountability to the enterprise itself elsewhere, in the “identity” aspect of the framework. Data revealed a pervasive sense of mutual accountability among TRAIN members in regards to sharing resources, operating in a spirit of general reciprocity, helping one another, not making life harder for others, and being actively involved in the CoP – as one interviewee said, “Being part of the community, not just an attendee at a meeting.” Pat noted that from TRAIN’s inception in 1985 the overall feeling among members was, “’Whatever’s mine is yours, and I will give you whatever you ask for’. We figured since none of us were self-employed, since none of us owned what we were doing, why not give it to other people?” The willingness to share was an explicit expectation of members and was regarded by interviewees as an integral part of the joint enterprise of TRAIN. Parker noted, “Don’t show a PowerPoint presentation if you don’t expect others to ask for copies of it.”

Mutual accountability, as noted by Wenger, also involves “being responsible to others by not making life harder for others” (p. 81). Interviewees were unanimous in describing the behaviors expected of members in providing a supportive, safe climate for one another, particularly those offering presentations at meetings or conferences:

Jess: We treat each other with respect. You don’t talk bad about people, or embarrass somebody in front of the group, or challenge them. You’re not
the idiot in the back of the room making it hard.

Dale: Nobody’s got anything to lose. It’s a safe place. You can talk about a book you’ve read and nobody’s going to make fun of you. You can try out a piece of training you’ve been working on to see if it works—it works in your head but it might just really bomb in real life. You can do that and everybody can learn from your lessons.

Devon offered a first-person account of being the person -- a relative training novice -- trying out a new program at a TRAIN meeting, a positive experience that encouraged him to do more:

I presented at a meeting pretty early on. I wanted to try out a thing I was doing on [new topic of interest] and so I did an hour at one of the meetings. Everybody was really supportive and I had a really good experience, and got excellent suggestions for tweaking it and making it better.

A specific example of providing a safe, improvement-focused environment -- part of “mutual accountability” in terms of behaviors expected of one another in this joint enterprise of “stamping out bad training” -- ties to a presentation discussed in the “meaning” section of this paper. This referenced observation of a conference session that included the Grenny “Compass” model (described in this paper on p. 119) to illustrate the similarity of the needs and wants of an organization’s new hires and its clients or customers. The presentation ended with a discussion of how members might adapt the tool
to their own situations. One member at that meeting said he had recently facilitated a staff retreat, and his attempts to generate team concerns met with silence: “No one was willing to say anything negative.” He asked how to manage that situation next time. Suggestions came quickly from around the room: have attendees write concerns anonymously on note cards and pass them to the facilitator; do private pre-interviews with attendees; as the facilitator, consider being the one to start generating the list of things that typically come up in this type of retreat, as a way of “priming the pump.” Others offered developmental suggestions: Read Campbell and Litman’s book *Retreats that Work*; seek out in-depth training in group facilitation skills. One member recommended that the trainer, a relative novice, might consider recruiting a more experienced trainer to partner with him on the next try; two of the more senior members in the room said they would be willing to help. Lunchtime conversation that day included a good deal of chatter about member experiences with, and lessons learned from, facilitating teambuilding programs.

This example reveals a good deal about the internal dynamics of TRAIN as it relates to both its overall joint enterprise and, specifically, the behaviors expected of one another. A TRAIN member in a room with 30 others, some he didn’t know, felt comfortable in disclosing what he felt was his failure at facilitating the retreat effectively, and asked directly for help from TRAIN. This was met not with criticism or an analysis of what went wrong, but with a collegial sense of “we’ve been there” empathy. Others present offered varied constructive suggestions for improvement and, recognizing that the member was relatively inexperienced, two of those present volunteered to actually go with him and help
in the future. A sense of camaraderie was evident in the informal lunch session that followed, as members shared their own experiences with the topic that proved challenging to the member having trouble.

A tension that surfaced in interviews regarded two members who, it was felt, did make life harder for others. Three interviewees mentioned the same member who frequently interrupted presentations with what interviewees felt to be irrelevant, distracting questions. This was interpreted as being disruptive, wasting time, and failing to cooperate with the spirit of the community. An additional criticism was that the member does not “give back” by providing presentations or other help.

Concern was also expressed about a senior member who occasionally leveled what was reported as sharp, public criticism of or corrections to presenters, particularly new or younger trainers. Those who had witnessed the behavior referenced it in discussing what was expected of others (part of mutual accountability in the sense of “not making life harder”). One interviewee interpreted the behavior as a response to feeling threatened by the newer trainers; two others suggested the behavior came from a need to feel validated and perhaps to show off. Chris described the behavior as especially problematic because of its impact: “She knows very well that it’s not how people learn, so she must be motivated by something else. What she’s doing isn’t helpful.”

Aside from information regarding these 2 disruptive members, data collection for the “mutual accountability” marker for joint enterprise surfaced another tension in the CoP. This -- five interviewees spoke of it -- was the matter of members, like the one described as
asking excessive disruptive questions, who do not participate in reciprocal ways. The most common complaint regarded those who were perceived as taking without giving back: coming to meetings and taking materials, or sending out requests for help, but never presenting, sharing materials, offering to host a meeting, or providing refreshments. Sam felt the worst “takers” were the ones who rarely attended meetings but instead sent an email asking someone for the handouts: “That’s not, it’s not being part of the community.”

The issues with both the disruptive member behaviors and the “takers” were described by interviewees as long-term situations that had not been resolved. This posed something of a conundrum for the interviewees: even as they said they felt problems needed to be addressed, as the problems evidenced lack of mutual accountability among some TRAIN members, the interviewees admitted that a strength of TRAIN was its lack of what might be called “management.” With no formal policies in place there is nothing to enforce, and with no formal board or manager in place there is no one to take responsibility for dealing with the problem behaviors. One interviewee suggested that the group’s failures to confront problems head-on may be tied to the fact that so many members come from the “helping” areas of government, such as social services, and in an effort to seem supportive to all there was a failure to address problems with the few. In short, while some felt that conflicts were under-managed, they also agreed that the alternative — implementation of rules or people in official authority — was not worth the damage it might cause to the CoP. The tensions were not without a cost: in terms of the data available: Failure of the CoP to
effectively manage the tensions had resulted in decreased participation on the part of one interviewee, and the dropping out of one phone interviewee.

The final marker for joint enterprise is that it is, to use Wenger’s (1998, p. 79) word, “indigenous.” That is, TRAIN does not exist wholly apart from the organizations that employ its members, but operates within larger social, cultural, and institutional contexts. According to Wenger, the community’s negotiated practice is “produced by participants within the resources and constraints of their situations” (p. 79). In regards to the TRAIN members, all of whom joined the CoP while employed by different, but still state or county government, organizations, data regarding indigenous enterprise fell into two general themes: money and mandates. In their joint enterprise of “stamping out bad training,” TRAIN members were continually constrained by lack of funds and other resources (such as comfortable, adequate classroom space and state-of-the art equipment) while frequently charged with delivering dry, content-heavy training topics mandated by upper management and/or law. The mandates often required not “training” per se – as there were no stated performance outcomes -- but for assuring that employees had been told about a particular policy or rule, for instance, “zero tolerance alcohol policy training.” Evidence of the community response to constraints, apart from being mentioned by nearly every interviewee, was plentiful in the review of TRAIN artifacts. There are, for instance, lists of suggestions for inexpensive resources for training materials and equipment from different time periods in the CoP’s history; a review of conference and meeting agendas and
website materials show frequent references to such topics as, “making technical training more tasty”, “activities for punching up dry content,” and “making the mandate matter.”

An issue that surfaced during interviews on the topic of indigenous enterprise – in the sense of the CoP operating in larger social, cultural, or institutional contexts -- was the inverse of it: not the employing organization’s impact on members and TRAIN, but TRAIN’s impact on the employing organizations. While Wenger reported that such influence by “his” CoP of insurance claims processors was minimal, several TRAIN interviewees spoke at length of the influence they felt the TRAIN CoP has had. Some of these were specific to significant program changes or revisions affecting the larger organizations. For instance, Dale, Parker, and Jess described providing train-the-trainer work for others in their organizations, often for subject matter experts charged with providing presentations.

Other comments described TRAIN’s having made a mark or created a legacy. Both Pat and Devon felt that TRAIN had added legitimacy to the training function across the agencies employing its members, and through its existence had conveyed the implicit message that much existing training was bad and needed “stamping out.” Pat said:

TRAIN has stamped out a lot of crappy training. It has at least revealed what crappy training is. It has pulled the curtain back. And even the most pathetic people that only come to TRAIN one time and aren’t really trainers recognize that reading aloud out of a book is not
ok. Even if they can’t do anything else, they recognize that there is a
difference, and that makes all the difference to me.

While Pat and Devon felt TRAIN had affected the way training was viewed, Jamie and
Jess both spoke of a “ripple effect” that affected the quality of training beyond the scope of
the CoP. Jamie felt that individual TRAIN members, back on the job, could cause this
“ripple”: “If we shut down tomorrow we would have made a difference. It’s like you threw
a bunch of gravel into the pond with the people who’ve been active in TRAIN, and those
little concentric circles would keep going.” Jess envisioned the ripples as extending beyond
individual learners or training programs to the wider organizations, state government itself,
and, ultimately, to the citizens of the state. This idea of the CoP as affecting a broader
sphere is further examined in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”

Community: Mutual Engagement

Unlike participation, which per Wenger’s (1998) definition can occur even when a
member is not with the group, mutual engagement implies meaningful, collaborative
interaction with other CoP members. “Engagement” includes doing things together,
sharing information related to training practice, and working on collective problem-solving
tasks. The markers for “mutual engagement” are 1) “enabling engagement,” being included
in what matters and contributing to community maintenance; and 2) “diversity and
partiality,” developing the relationships necessary in order to engage with others and being
able to draw on community resources, such as asking other members for help.
Conversations with interviewees as well as review of meeting agendas and website materials revealed instances of members working together at their own initiative, and even on their own time, to create new training programs to share with TRAIN or to take back to their workplaces. These were typically not tied to any work assignment or response to a management request, but came from a shared interest in a topic or response to a training need members felt existed in their employing organizations. Members developed myriad programs together, from TRAIN-focused workshops such as “Using Storytelling in Training” and “Finding the Trainer in You” to programs meant for workplace delivery, such as “Business Etiquette” and a still-in-development workshop on generational diversity. Those involved in working together on such a project described it as worthwhile and energizing. Chris, Pat, and Lee, for instance, found it meaningful to work with other members in developing the original T101 course. Chris said:

Well we saw that the state and county offices had an awful lot of people who just didn’t have any basic training skills, so we decided it was up to us to offer a course to those who wanted to come… [The course] was great, just great, and at first was 2 days long. That’s all we felt like we could get people to commit to. We all just really worked hard – sometimes it seemed like a second job. We realized we had far too much material to cover in just those 2 days, so we eventually ended up with I think a 7 day course. And all that was our own doing, it wasn’t a work assignment. We wanted to do it and we wanted to work together on it. It was completely voluntary.
It seems important to note that in interviews Chris’s example of “mutual engagement” -- voluntarily working together on a project so large it seemed like a second job -- was the most detailed of many such comments. Others described being involved in TRAIN endeavors requiring overnight travel at their own expense and gathering on weekends as work schedules prevented working together during business hours.

The first marker for the analytic component “mutual engagement” is “enabling engagement” – whatever it takes to make mutual engagement possible -- which Wenger (1998, p. 74) identifies as being included in what matters as well as contributing to community maintenance. Wenger describes this as sometimes nothing more than being made privy to group gossip as well as receiving official memos. Several interviewees spoke of being flattered and energized when they were first asked to present at a TRAIN event. Sam discussed the positive experience of having another member say, “Let’s work together on it.” For these interviewees, being asked to help equated with “being included in what matters” and appeared to enhance their sense of belonging to the TRAIN group.

During interviews it came to light that, for some, being included in “what matters” meant not being involved in things that don’t, a reference to TRAIN’s (typical of CoPs) lack of formal structure, policies, and governing entities:

Jody: You don’t feel like you’re (pause) bound by so many rules and regulations. If you have a board then you’ve got to have board meetings, and you’ve got to have budgets and all that administrative
kind of thing…. we give people (stresses this) the opportunity to really contribute. We don’t just ask for Mickey-Mouse busywork like going to administrative meetings and typing up minutes.

Devon: I love that there’s no bureaucracy! I don’t feel like I’m stuck on a committee. I love the lack of, what do you call it, protocol or something. My time spent with TRAIN is always well-spent. I think other people feel that way too, like TRAIN is a meeting, but it isn’t work.

As defined by Jody and Devon, “what matters” to a TRAIN member means being involved in those things related to the practice of training or connected to the idea of “stamping out bad training.” What does not matter are activities related only to what might be the administration of a more formal group.

“Enabling engagement,” apart from being included in what matters, also refers to contributing to community maintenance. In the case of TRAIN, this centered around helping with meetings and other events as well as taking steps to recognize the personal side of member’s lives, such as successes, life events, and personal challenges. Interviewees sometimes spoke of the idea of members “stepping up” to help with TRAIN activities out of commitment to the CoP:

Parker: I see dedicated members stepping up and taking on roles and responsibilities and working as a team. People from different agencies from
all different parts of the state working together to make sure that the meetings are a success. They’re not paid, they don’t have to, the do it for the love of the organization. And I think that’s one of the things that makes TRAIN what it is. What is TRAIN about? It’s about taking a role you don’t have to because you love it.

Observation at the conference provided evidence of community maintenance, from members volunteering to stuff gift bags to others making sure that first-time attendees had company at dinner. An incident occurred at the registration table when a member arrived to find that, due to a communication glitch, she was not registered and had no room. Two members who happened to be in the area at the time offered to share their rooms with her if other arrangements couldn’t be made.

The review of artifacts uncovered a number of instances regarding maintenance tasks such as helping with meetings or refreshments. They also included notices of births, marriages, the death of a member’s parent, news of the completion of an undergraduate degree after years of part-time study, updates regarding deployments of member’s husbands and sons to Iraq, and reports of a member’s recovery from a serious illness. One such item, the announcement of a member’s marriage, can be found in Appendix H.

Per Wenger (1998) a critical element of mutual engagement, and the final marker for it, is mutual relationships; that is, developing the relationships necessary in order to engage with others. (Compare this concept in the “community” aspect to Wenger’s concept of “mutual recognition,” acknowledgement of one another as members, with no implication
of collaboration or agreement, in the “meaning” aspect.) Most interviewees described having developed relationships with other members, with eleven of the 14 stating that they had at least one very close friendship with another member. In most cases these began from a shared interest or similar job role; for example, interviewees affiliated with a university tended to have developed relationships with trainers at other universities. Likewise, interviewees with a shared interest, such as with “emotional intelligence,” had tended to find one another. Relationships often began during meetings, or from one member with a particular interest or need being referred to another. Some describe their TRAIN relationships as a primary motivator for their continued participation: “I really appreciate the chance to be with my training friends...being able to connect to others on a value level” (Jess); “I enjoy seeing old friends. Some of us go way, way back. It’s a good opportunity to see people that I care about, that I grew up with in a sense, so that’s meaningful. Among those of us who were the first members there is a deep affection and friendship” (Chris). Robin looked forward to TRAIN gatherings and working on TRAIN projects, and delighted in the chance to be with other members.

The exception to the development of close relationships among CoP members was, again, among the 3 interviewees who had been the least involved. Of these, 2 did not mention developing any relationships with others, and one of those did not mention any other member at all. The third interviewee described having developed relationships with other trainers, but of the two she mentioned one had attended only one TRAIN meeting, several years ago, and the other was a benefits representative at a state agency who does
not work in a training role, has never attended a TRAIN meeting, and is not on the TRAIN mailing list. The interviewee seemed to have little awareness of the TRAIN membership.

Observation at the conference provided the opportunity to watch relationships rather than only hear interviewees describe them. While first-time attendees tended to stay with their coworkers or with others they happened to know, such as a group from the most recent T101 course, seating diagrams and photos reveal fluidity in movement within the group, with people moving from table to table between conference sessions and during meals. The members most heavily involved in conference planning, known to be friends, made an intentional effort, confirmed in conversations with them, to mingle amongst the tables, particularly at meals, and sit in different places each day. This was done partly to ensure that they’d had a chance to speak to everyone, but also to combat the idea that they might be cliquish. One group, a mix of older and new members, developed a good deal of camaraderie by gathering in the lounge each night to watch American Idol on the conference site’s only TV: they began to sit with one another during conference sessions and at meals, and offered enthusiastic joint recaps of the previous night’s show to the bigger conference audience. By the third day, as evidenced in the photographs, many of the first-time attendees had begun to move about the larger group.

According to Wenger (1998) a critical element of mutual engagement, and the final marker, is “diversity and partiality.” The members of the TRAIN group all have personalities, lives, and jobs outside of TRAIN, and each brings a different perspective to the business of being a “trainer.” Within the CoP this “diversity and partiality” as part of
engagement includes acknowledgement of that diversity and partiality: knowing how and when to draw on community resources, as “mutual engagement involves not only our competence, but the competence of others” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). Asking for help is actually an expectation of the CoP, as Wenger found with his group of insurance claims processors: “Because they belong to a community of practice where they help each other, it is more important to give and receive help than to try to know everything yourself” (p. 76). Many interviewees mentioned the free sharing of materials and resources; the review of artifacts provided evidence of sharing material, from conference and meeting items to material placed on the TRAIN website, ranging from handouts to complete training packages developed and shared by members. Devon and Jess mentioned that they found occasionally being asked for help flattering and reinforcing and felt it enhanced their ties to the CoP. Additionally, the phrase “not reinventing the wheel” – passing practice along -- came up repeatedly in interviews. Devon, for instance, recalled asking for help with a program on “succession planning” and receiving half a dozen lesson plans and slide shows from members: “Everybody wants to see everybody else succeed, everybody understands what we’re all up against. You only have to ask for what you need.”

Robin discussed her comfort in calling upon other members:

If I need some kind of training, or have some kind of question, there are people I would talk to, or feel very comfortable, calling. For instance [names another member, who happens to be another interviewee], I don’t have much communication with her, I don’t have a reason, but if I said,
“You know what? Let me see if she has what I need.” Or if I had an interest in something I could see if she wants to collaborate. I think she probably would, we could work it out, she would be very welcoming. She would return my call. Those kinds of things, when you need something, you know you’ll get it.

Robin’s comment that she felt confident in asking for help from someone she didn’t know well also speaks to the idea that, within the CoP, members are accountable to other members, not just to their own circle of friends. Artifacts included dozens of examples of requests for help. One example of such a request, and a member response, can be found in Appendix I.

Several interviewees mentioned their perception that extensive informal sharing and networking occurred among TRAIN members. Parker, Dale, Lee, and Jody all mentioned their belief -- they had in some cases been involved themselves -- that a great deal of conversation took place “offline” among smaller clusters of members, members who had a specific shared interest -- one discussed the TRAIN subgroup of those interested in technology-based training, of which the researcher is a part -- or just among a few of a member’s closest TRAIN friends.

**Community: Shared Repertoire**

The final analytic component for the aspect “community” is that of shared repertoire, the recognition and utilization of the shared history and common language of the CoP. This includes “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres,
actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). Wenger’s assertion that repertoire combines both reificative and participative aspects, was borne out by the data: a compilation of items in the TRAIN repertoire (Appendix J) shows items falling into 2 general categories: those that have become reified, such as the Key Principles, the concept of “stamping out bad training,” and the importance of “finding your 20%,” and those related to events, incidents, stories, and nicknames arising during TRAIN events or as part of TRAIN communications.

Wenger’s discussion of repertoire is very brief – barely 2 pages – and the only marker for it is the repertoire’s function as a way of further negotiating the enterprise via history and ambiguity. Items within the repertoire accumulate over time, attained from a common history but without imposition of boundaries. That is, the repertoire is a pool of resources that members not only share but also contribute to and therefore renew.

The CoP’s shared repertoire supports camaraderie and a spirit of community: it provides a common discourse and shared points of reference, and brings coherence to the CoP via its prevalence. As Devon said regarding the second key principle of good training, “You choose when you sweat”: “[The idea of “sweating” in terms of preparing in advance] is not so much a matter of time management as being proactive about what will make the training successful. We talk about it all the time
even when we’re not talking about it, you know?” Examples of repertoire provided
during interviews, observations, and via artifacts are compiled in Appendix J.

Community: Summary

Data collection related to the “community” aspect of the TRAIN CoP evidenced a
vibrant, active, diverse community that prided itself on its inclusiveness and its
accomplishments. The analytic components related to the “community” aspect of practice
(Wenger, 1998) are joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. Existence
of and commitment to the joint enterprise of TRAIN was evidenced by an explicit sense of
mutual accountability, reciprocity, and support for one another as well as the development
of deep and lasting friendships; the word “affection” came up more than once in
interviews. Interviewees also described the ways in which the community served to make
their jobs more habitable by, for example, providing the chance to fine-tune new training
programs and inspiring interest in new topics to alleviate more mundane job tasks.
Evidence that TRAIN’s joint enterprise is “indigenous,” that is, influenced by the culture
and contexts of the employing agencies and state government, was revealed especially by
the number of artifacts referencing ways of saving money and strategies for enhancing the
dry content often part and parcel of training mandates. Interviews revealed an additional
issue, perhaps easiest to consider as the inverse of indigenous enterprise: that of the CoP’s
effect upon member workplaces.

Mutual engagement, the second analytic component of the “community” aspect, was
evident in the scope and quantity of projects members chose to undertake together.
Interviewees spoke at length and in detail of the value they found in being included in “what matters”; review of artifacts and observations evidenced a variety of examples of member contributions to community maintenance. Data also revealed the establishment of relationships and even close, lasting friendships.

The final analytic component for the community aspect is “shared repertoire.” Given TRAIN’s 23-year existence the shared repertoire is extensive and includes items related to “good” training, such as job aids and mottoes like, “If you want to be a good trainer, hang out with good trainers,” and those related to community member interactions, such as in-jokes, stories, and recollection of events. Examples of elements of repertoire are provided in Appendix J.

This study surfaced only a few tensions within the TRAIN group, two of them related to issues of mutual accountability (dysfunctional member behaviors and those members described as “takers”). Interviewees felt that TRAIN was not effectively managing the tensions while offering few ideas for resolving them; the overarching concern for interviewees seemed to be that attempts to manage internal problems would impose “management” that might harm the community. This is further discussed in the section addressing the “learning” aspect of the Wenger (1998) framework in regard to the CoP’s learning to deal with conflict.

The Wenger (1998) framework proved useful in developing interview questions and follow-up probes, supplemented by data gathered in observing interactions and engagement at the annual conference as well as the abundant documents available.
Findings related to the “community” aspect of the TRAIN CoP surfaced two issues not explicitly expressed by Wenger. The first is what was earlier described as perhaps the inverse of indigenous enterprise; that is, the effect of the TRAIN CoP -- which Wenger did not find with the insurance claims processors -- upon the larger organizations, cultures and contexts in which members operate. This was a matter important to interviewees and one that would, it seems, be of interest to those organizations and contexts.

An issue not explicit in the framework relates to the idea of the community as a relief for isolation. While Wenger (1998) talks broadly of negotiation of the enterprise to include making the job habitable, the idea of “isolation” singularly stood out as an issue for interviewees. Six of the 14 interviewees described themselves as feeling isolated in their work roles and viewed TRAIN as a relief for that. Among these six even those working alongside other training staff felt some isolation in that they viewed themselves as the only ones interested in making training better or enhancing their skills. This may speak to issues of individual motivation for participating – as relief for isolation -- and, as discussed in the findings for the “meaning” aspect, this may be a matter related to the differences in the CoP of interest to Wenger (an intact work group, with members essentially enrolled in the CoP upon being hired) and the TRAIN CoP (with members from disparate organizations, who must find and join the CoP). It may also be a finding of importance to management and organizations employing these trainers. This will be further explored in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”
In considering the “usefulness” of Wenger’s (1998) ideas, here in regards to the community aspect of practice, it seems appropriate to share some data gathered at the TRAIN conference. Attendees were asked to write anonymous post-it note responses to the question, “Why (or not) is TRAIN a community rather than a group, club or association?” They were not provided with Wenger’s definition of a community of practice nor, to the researcher’s knowledge, had any of them ever read Wenger. Compare some of the comments by TRAIN conference attendees to the definition of a community of practice from Wenger’s website (www.ewenger.com): “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”:

1. I believe TRAIN is a community because there is a connection amongst the members of ownership in a common interest. We are protective, supportive, we watch out for the training and the personal interests of others as we would if we were in a neighborhood.

2. I see our TRAIN community as a group of mentors.

3. I think it is a community because of the concept of shared learning. We share activities specifically so people can make them their own (steal). We share what we did well, what we would do
differently—self exposure, learn from mistakes, learn from other’s challenges and victories.

4. We are a community because we are all lifelong learners committed to improving and helping each other improve.

5. It is very meaningful to be able to spend time with people who get what I do, share my passion for it, and who want to work together to learn to do it better.

Findings for the Identity Aspect of Practice

Table 4.5 provides the analytic components and markers for the “identity’ aspect of practice:

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect of practice</th>
<th>Brief description of analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td><em>Negotiated Experience</em> Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151). Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151) as we give meaning to participation and reification (above). Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154).</td>
<td>Participation becomes reified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants identify their own markers of transition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152).

There are five types of trajectories: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, and boundary trajectories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Trajectory</td>
<td>“not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories.
Table 4.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Nexus of Multimembership</th>
<th>Identity requires multimembership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“we all belong to many communities of practice…some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities” (p. 158). Identity entails the experience of multimembership and the “work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (p. 158).</td>
<td>Reconciliation is required to maintain one identity across boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally</td>
<td>Local energy is directed at global issues and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community” (p. 162).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wenger (1998) carves out a specific notion of identity, identity in practice, that emerges from being part of a community of practice. Essentially, according to Wenger, “practice entails the negotiation of being a person in that context” (p. 149). As will be
discussed throughout this section, this aspect proved the most challenging of the four (learning, meaning, identity, community) from which to parse out meaning and understanding from the data. Often, interview data had to be mined for implicit comments and, in the case of data provided by one interviewee, compared to other existing data for accuracy.

Identity: Analytic Components

The Wenger (1998) framework offers five analytic components for “identity” which were found to provide varying levels of usefulness in gathering and analyzing TRAIN data. First is negotiated experience, how TRAIN members differentiate themselves from other individuals and groups, and how they identify themselves with a particular way of training using specific artifacts and approaches. The second analytic component is membership; as a component of identity, this implies competent membership: the member identifies with the group, understands the common conception of what makes training “good,” and is fluent with the TRAIN repertoire, and because of this can make valuable contributions to the group. The third analytic component is learning trajectory, the different paths a member may take. The fourth analytic component is nexus of multimembership, the space in which participation in and identification with other groups intersects; and, finally, the fifth analytic component is “belonging defined globally but experienced locally”: through the TRAIN CoP, developing an understanding of how training fits into the broader experience of life.
Identity: Negotiated Experience

Negotiated experience examines the ways in which CoP members differentiate themselves from other individuals and groups. As the data show, TRAIN members identify with a particular way of training using specific artifacts and approaches, and identify themselves, at least in part, as someone interested in “stamping out bad training.” The artifacts and approaches reify what it means to stamp out bad training and represent the contributions members have made as they define their identity in the community. While Wenger does not offer markers explicitly in his brief text related to negotiated experience, he does offer two defining terms used by the researcher markers for analyzing data: participation becomes reified, and participants identify their own markers of transition.

During interviews the reification of participation most often surfaced in the form of labels, as TRAIN members labeled themselves in a number of ways: “Trainer” was offered many times, but also “storyteller,” “caregiver,” “volunteer,” “helper,” “information junkie,” “mother,” and “spiritual advisor.” One senior member identified herself as “a wise old trainer.” Several conference attendees, when asked to provide anonymous post-it note responses to the question, “How has your membership in TRAIN changed you?” spoke of their differentiation from other trainers, again in terms of labels: “I see myself more as a performance consultant and less as an order taker”; “I am a facilitator, not the giver of information”; “I am NOT an order taker!” [Note: “order taker” is part of the TRAIN repertoire and refers to the importance of a trainer performing needs assessment — trying
to find the root cause of a performance problem — rather than rushing in and providing whatever training intervention management has requested.]

Wenger (1998) notes that identity emerges “as we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p.151). Per Wenger it is during the development of identity-in-practice that participation becomes reified: being a “good trainer,” as defined by TRAIN, means doing what a “good trainer” does, associating oneself with other “good trainers,” and finding one’s place among them. Pat said:

I realized from TRAIN that there are other people who do what I do. Do it better, do it as well, do it worse. I’m not by myself. I’m not someone really special. I’m only relatively special. Among a group of special people.

For Devon and Taylor, identity as negotiated experience was intertwined with the validation and sense of worth they got from TRAIN. As Devon said, “It enhances me, I feel like I’m more professional…. TRAIN has a good reputation for being a place for ‘good trainers,’ and I like being considered a good trainer.”

In choosing an identity that separated them from other trainers, Devon and Chris acknowledged that it could create tension with non-trainers and even coworkers, but were not especially concerned by this:

Devon: With my coworkers, well, you know, it’s collegial, we all get along, but I’d say they aren’t really as interested in training as a profession as I am, right? They see it as just a job, I see training as my life’s work. Then they kind of resent the fact that I’m a popular trainer and that learners ask to be
in my sessions, or managers ask me to do some special workshops for them. My coworkers think that’s luck or my personality or something, but I don’t think that’s it. My training really is just better. I owe a lot of that to TRAIN.

Chris: I feel really confident and comfortable saying I’m a professional trainer. I’m not a something-else and a trainer on the side. I’m a trainer. And there’s a certain identity that I choose to take with that. Not everybody else understands, because they don’t always value training, or they had terrible training, but part of it is a professional identity.

Jess felt there was a shared identity, particularly among the more active members, that went beyond just that of “trainer.” She said she perceived both “shared values,” in the sense of commitment to training and a willingness to mentor, as well as additional shared characteristics:

[The most active members] are all high performers, high achievers, and self starters with a lot of initiative… people who like to have fun and like to enjoy their work, and don’t see it as just a job. They say, “This is a pretty cool thing that we do.” I think that’s pretty consistent across the central membership.

This idea of shared values or a shared identity extended to the perception of non-TRAIN members. Within the TRAIN CoP, reifying one’s identity includes judging the work of other trainers with similar interpretations and shared perceptions. Interviewees
were essentially in agreement about what constitutes the “bad” training that needs to be “stamped out,” and tended to describe training they observed with a shared critical view. Parker, for example, described his own new perception of training he was once part of, before joining TRAIN:

Since I’ve become involved with TRAIN I have gone to other training, training my own unit is doing, and that I used to do. I sit there and say, “I cannot believe these people. I cannot believe that we are making learners sit through this. I cannot believe that we ever thought this was good.” I watched one presenter… bunch of text on a PowerPoint slide, and the slides weren’t even good, the stuff was redundant, and she was just reading it to us. What were we thinking, letting our people do training like this?

Another defining element of negotiated experience noted by Wenger is that CoP members are often cognizant of their own development and, as demonstrated by the TRAIN interviewees, recognize their own markers of transition (this idea was adapted by the researcher as a marker). For some interviewees the transition came with the accomplishment of a specific task, as when Frankie developed her first formal lesson plan according to a template provided in the T101 course: “I knew then that I was a train-er.” For others the transition occurred when they realized they had attained a certain level of expertise. Lee, for instance, recalled an early-1990s TRAIN conference. The planning group, of which she was a part, decided for the first time to offer two different conference tracks, one offering basics for novices and the other offering advanced topics for more
experienced trainers. Lee described having what she called an “epiphany” as she realized she no longer considered herself a novice trainer:

I wanted to be in the one for those that were more seasoned and would be exploring other subjects. That was the moment I started identifying myself as one of the “oldies.” That was the first time I really thought, “I don’t want to go learn basics anymore, I think I know them.”

For Devon a transition is occurring now, as he recognizes that he is increasingly being viewed by other TRAIN members as a seasoned trainer and mentor, adding, “It rocks. I really like being seen that way, and I really like helping them.”

Parker was able to describe the path of her own transition to the identity of “trainer,” which also involved a shift in her perception of the trainer’s role:

“Learner first” was my first light bulb. The focus should be on helping learners get what they need to do their jobs, not just dump all your content on them. The second was that it’s ok to set your training up so you have participation from the participants. I always had this mindset, “I’m the trainer so I’m going to sit up here and give you this information. And I’m in charge, this is mine, I have all this information here that I am going to give to you. You signed up for it, and I am going to teach it.” And through TRAIN I found out that it’s ok to have audience participation and you don’t have to just teach all the time. You have to let them learn. I realized what we were doing wasn’t working, and if learners don’t get what it is that
you’re training them on then you’ve just wasted your time, you’ve just wasted their time. And the training has not been successful even if you taught all day long. And that has really stuck with me because I really like to be successful. I see myself very differently now, as a facilitator of learning rather than a ‘teacher,’ and I know I am more effective.

Parker and Taylor both spoke of similar moments of transition that came with the realization that they had developed the identity of “trainer” as opposed to “program expert who happens to provide training.” As Taylor said:

I overcame this myth that you are just a welfare qualification trainer or just a policy trainer, but that once you have the basic skills you’re actually a training professional who is capable of training anything and applying the principles that you learn. That is how I see myself now—as a trainer.

These quotes illustrate the myriad ways in which identity may evolve through engagement in the CoP as the member learns to do what a trainer does, and how to be a “good” trainer in the context of TRAIN. For Frankie transition in perception of self came with competent application of the tools of a trainer; for Lee, re-defining herself as a one of the more seasoned TRAIN members. Devon’s transition was spurred by the way others were assigning a new identity — that of “expert” – to him. For Parker the transition was associated in her revised understanding of the trainer’s role, and her consequent definition of herself as a “facilitator of learning.” The comments from Parker and Taylor reflect ideas
shared by many interviewees, their view of self as having evolved to be broader than that associated with their particular work role.

To summarize data for this analytic component: Interviewees were able to provide clear illustrations of Wenger’s (1998) conception of negotiated experience, the ways in which TRAIN members differentiate themselves from other individuals and groups. They described their participation as reified; labels they chose aligned them with TRAIN’s conception of being a “good” trainer while differentiating them from other trainers (“I am a facilitator of learning, not the giver of information”; “I am not an order taker!”) even if such differentiation caused tension between the TRAIN member and his or her non-TRAIN member coworkers. Interviewees were additionally able to provide instances of their own markers of transition. An example provided by Devon, who is increasingly being seen as expert by his TRAIN peers, shows an instance of identity as a “constant becoming” (p. 154).

*Identity: Membership*

According to Wenger (1998) being a community member means having some level of competence: the full member in the TRAIN CoP understands what makes “good” training different from all training, and is able to make meaningful contributions because of this. Sharing the identity of “member” means understanding what is important about the community and being fluent with its repertoire. “Membership,” in this sense, implies *competent* membership. The markers for this aspect are what Wenger offers as three dimensions of competence as discussed below.
The first dimension of competence (and the first marker) is mutuality of engagement: not the fact that one engages, but engaging with a persona that is similar to that projected by others in the CoP. As Taylor describes this mutuality, “You have to have an overall belief that this is important work, and through this work we influence other people, and by being at this meeting I want to be the best that I can for those other people.”

The second dimension of competence (the second marker) is accountability to the enterprise — not to one another, as with the community aspect -- but to the enterprise itself. This includes the perspectives gained from a sense of investment in the enterprise. One interviewee described this as “walking the talk”: Doing what you can to uphold the ideas of “good” training and to stamp out “bad” training. This is also somewhat different from “meaning,” the ways in which a particular member makes adaptations to his or her practice. Accountability to the enterprise relates more to attitude or philosophy about training, and the way it affects CoP involvement, the persona one chooses to project to learners and those in other spheres, and in the member’s overall approach to his or her work. Chris spoke at length about this:

When I first became a trainer, I felt like I had to have all the answers, which is a typical new trainer feeling. Now, I’ll say to my learners, we have many years of wisdom. I have some answers, but not all the answers, and I want to learn from you. I tell them, “Everybody’s a teacher, everybody’s an instructor. It’s your responsibility to help your colleagues learn as we go through this and share your experience.”
…I think we have made people in training more aware of their responsibility for helping people learn. Ultimately the participant is responsible for their own learning, but we created a climate that is encouraging and supportive, and safe, for people to say, “I don’t understand this, it doesn’t make any sense to me.” And — we have a responsibility to present the information, whatever it may be, in an understandable, convenient, way that they can actually use it.

In this example Chris encapsulates much of what interviewees collectively described as TRAIN’s conception of “good” training, and his own allegiance to it. For him, “walking the talk” of TRAIN means approaching training as a shared experience with the learners, not as the “teacher” out to simply impart information. It also includes creating a safe environment for learners; employing the reified concept of “learner first,” that is, for Chris, making the training “understandable, convenient, in a way that they can actually use it.” Thus Chris delivers his understanding of “good” training in his role of “good” trainer.

One of the most stirring tributes to accountability to the enterprise came from Mel, who began participating in TRAIN as a novice and is now a popular keynote speaker for large conferences. Mel said, “I take my job very, very seriously and work very hard to give the participants a meaningful, useful experience. When I do these presentations I feel I must do right by TRAIN.”

The final dimension of competence, and the final marker for it, is negotiability of a repertoire. In the case of TRAIN, this refers to members’ ability to recognize and make use
of the repertoire. Pat mentioned “repertoire” without prompting: “I think what makes a
good trainer, is they have any number of these things within themselves, and they can pull
them out of their repertoire when the opportunities present themselves.”

Devon acknowledged the role TRAIN’s repertoire had played in his development:

TRAIN has given me lots and lots of tricks to keep in my bag. Not just in the
literal sense, like icebreakers, but in the sense of being able to switch gears or
pull up a different approach when I need to. I can apply information to appeal
to learning styles, I can better respond to difficult learners without letting it
get personal, I’m always looking for my 20%. I am much more fluent than I
was before. Some of that comes from experience, sure, but I really do owe a
lot of it to TRAIN.

This ability to negotiate the repertoire, to operate and adapt practice based on this
common discourse, again supports the endeavor of “stamping out bad training” by using
the tools and approaches understood to be those belonging to a “good” trainer.

A concern expressed by several interviewees is the worry that in being supportive,
inclusive, and helpful TRAIN has inadvertently let some participants (who are not, by the
implications of the term “competent membership,” necessarily “members” of TRAIN),
develop a sense of false competence. Comments on this issue related particularly to those
who are less involved or are among the “takers.” Pat felt strongly about this and felt it had,
in turn, an impact on her identity:
We’ve allowed these people to think they’re as good as we are. When I say, “As good as,” I mean, “As involved in training as a training professional.” I think we have done some disservices by letting people think they know what they’re doing. I am equally offended at the idea that a [Pat’s alma mater] graduate can’t read. Who let them graduate? Who gave them a degree? That’s a disservice, too. I am just horrified by it. I’ve become less proud of being a member of a good group when people claim it as if they were as involved as I, particularly people who are graduates of [alma mater] who can’t write a sentence.

Pat’s comment is a reflection, first noted in the section on “Community: Mutual Accountability,” of the difficulty TRAIN has had in managing the tension surrounding the matter of “takers,” those who attend meetings and take handouts, or ask for help, without contributing back to the community. This instance shows that the problem behavior has, for Pat, extended beyond a tension or mere source of irritation: she feels it has actually affected her own sense of identity and pride as a TRAIN member. Pat’s concern about TRAIN’s tolerance of the “takers” -- those not demonstrating competent membership – reveals an underside to Wenger’s (1998, p. 152) statement that “…our membership constitutes our identity…..” Wenger, in his text, implicitly assumes that “membership” is a desirable state: Pat indicates that, depending on one’s perception of the group (as hers is now diminished), that may not be the case.
Summarizing the data related to the membership component, the TRAIN data revealed the ways in which competent membership was manifest within the CoP. Interviewees described mutuality of engagement, a common understanding of what was important in the community, and expressed their feelings of accountability to TRAIN’s enterprise of “stamping out bad training” (as phone interviewee Mel said, “I feel I must do right by TRAIN”). They also felt they had developed fluency with the repertoire, which supported competent practice by enabling improvisation in the practice of “good” training. Pat’s comment on the problem of the “takers,” tolerated by TRAIN, revealed the possibility that, in contrast to Wenger’s view, “membership” is not necessarily a desirable state.

**Identity: Learning Trajectory**

In interviews it emerged that, while one’s first exposure to TRAIN was a clear event, identifying as a TRAIN member has no end point. Depending on the path one chooses to take within the CoP identity is reinvented, for instance, as one transforms from a new member to a more senior one, or, as with Devon, one progresses from novice trainer to being viewed as an expert or mentor. Some interviewees described the experience of sometimes briefly stepping from expert back to novice when, for example, encountering the advent of new training technologies. Identity also evolves as one forms relationships with those who are more experienced or who have more grounding in academic thought regarding the discipline, with those who can impart history and knowledge, and with newcomers who may have different points of view or problems.
Wenger describes 5 trajectories:

1. Peripheral: Those working parallel to the community but distant to the center; peripheral involvement does not lead to full participation. The data suggest that Alex, Jody, and Jamie most closely fit this trajectory. They sometimes attend meetings and may even occasionally present, but they are largely uninvolved with TRAIN endeavors, have not engaged much with other members, do not describe having developed relationships with others, are less in tune with mission/values, and do not contribute to community maintenance. The three, when asked whether TRAIN had changed their practice, said yes but were unable to provide specifics. When asked whether TRAIN had changed them, all said, “No,” with two seeming surprised by the question.

2. Insider: Those who are parallel and close to the center, and continue to evolve their practice. Robin, Dale, Devon, Sam and Jess, by their own words and as supported by comments from other interviewees, are among what tended to be referred to as the “core”: those frequently providing presentations, serving as lead faculty for the T101 course, largely responsible for meeting planning and maintenance, and in many ways serving as what might be viewed as an informal board of directors. They are fluent in the repertoire, knowledgeable of the history, and in large part set the example for how TRAIN members act and what TRAIN members do.

3. Inbound: moving towards the center, becoming full participants. The data indicates that newer members Taylor and Parker are on the inbound trajectory, already providing
presentations and serving as support faculty for the T101 course. Frankie left TRAIN but has recently returned and by her own description says she is on the inbound trajectory back to the level of participation she once had, which first requires getting to know the new members, new items in the repertoire, and the changes in TRAIN’s interests since she last participated. In terms of “learning,” these people are developing their practice but also learning to be full TRAIN members: how TRAIN does things, how those on the insider trajectory act, how the various bits of repertoire tie together.

4. Outbound: leaving the center, by choice or by maturation. Founding members Pat, Lee, and Chris all placed themselves on this trajectory, as they had begun to move out of the workforce and, while they still occasionally participated in TRAIN, did not always make it to meetings and were increasingly less likely to engage by volunteering for projects or community maintenance tasks. Lee has found herself on the inbound trajectory with another group, this time of coworkers, as a long-term consulting contract has demanded that she become more fluent with e-learning. One phone interviewee, by his own description increasingly less involved, said he felt that he had just outgrown the group, did not find the meeting topics informative, and had become less interested in giving back or mentoring newer trainers.

5. Boundary: perpendicular, spanning boundaries, linking other communities. The interview pool did not include a TRAIN member who fit this category, and in conversation with the inside members no one was identified as moving on this trajectory.
If boundary spanners exist within TRAIN, data collection did not surface information about them. This may be a function of the nature of this particular CoP as comprised of individuals from different organizations rather than one employing entity; it will be further discussed in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”

In Wenger’s text the discussion of “identity” is perhaps the most complex and abstract. The researcher, in approaching this study of the TRAIN group, anticipated difficulty in determining details regarding trajectory and initially planned to use markers adapted from his further specifications (p. 154): “identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving,” “temporarity of identity is not linear,” and “identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories” to support data analysis, particularly coding. This proved, however, to be unnecessary: of the five analytic components of the “identity” aspect the matter of trajectory proved the most clear-cut. A suggestion to future researchers, included in the revised framework (Table 5.1) is to include the five trajectories as markers for guiding data collection and coding while recognizing that CoP members may exist on different trajectories at different times.

Identity: Nexus of Multimembership

According to Wenger (1998) our trajectories are not bounded and separate; the researcher does not, for instance, stop being a graduate student when she is at work. Wenger’s concept of the nexus is that of a space where our multiple memberships can affect each other, where we must negotiate the terrain of the different groups to which we
belong; he asserts that identity requires multimembership. In interviews this was most
evident as a member’s occasional clash between his or her TRAIN role and other roles.
Dale, for instance, is a member of the TRAIN CoP, and by extension the larger
“community” of “workplace trainers”; she is also a “member” of a work unit and an
organization. In discussing her role as the only trainer working in an office with subject
matter experts who provided presentations during the new hire orientation program, she
described a moment in the nexus of that multimembership:

Nobody asked me about their PowerPoints, so I have to rely on my relationships
with these people, and use my ‘class clown’ role. Our Director was in here one
morning going through his presentation, and I just looked up and said, in my best
joking tone, “By the way, you know those are terrible PowerPoint slides, don’t
you? Nobody wants to read seven bullet points about the budget. The general
worker here does not care about the budget. I know you care about the budget so
pick the bottom line and tell them what that is. The end.” So I’m not coming across
as the PowerPoint police, but I try to play off that role and my relationships.

Where Dale discussed taking on a role identity she perhaps hadn’t asked for (“nobody
asked me about their PowerPoints”), Robin spoke of giving one up:

I spent lots of time trying to make people come to Safety training. Then
one day I realized I don’t even care about safety training—it used to irritate
the crap out of me, dealing with getting people there, you can tell when
people are trying to get out of training. So now I’m like, “I’m going to do my job, and if you don’t show up I’m just going to report it.” I’ve decided that enforcement of attendance is not my role. I refuse to take it on. I used to, because some managers won’t step up. I’ve now refused that role.

In terms of the Wenger (1998) framework: except for these two comments regarding the roles played (or not) in regards to the job, data on the “nexus of multimembership” is sparse. Of all the elements of the framework, the matter of “multimembership” proved the most difficult about which to generate conversation, and observation and artifact review offered virtually no evidence of multimembership at all. Interviewees felt they didn’t belong to any other CoPs: none of the interviewees was currently a member of ASTD (the American Society for Training and Development) or ISPI (the International Society for Performance Improvement), although 2 of the founding members had attended in the past and others occasionally attended if the meeting topics were of interest. They did not consider themselves “members” of ASTD or ISPI, however. Most interviewees were involved in church activities, and others in civic or women’s groups, but saw these as “communities” and not about “practice.”

As we do not know the specifics of Wenger’s methods of data collection it is unclear why his findings in this area differed so greatly from the findings for this study of the TRAIN CoP. This raises two issues: The first has to do with qualitative evidence: within the scope of a study such as this, or of Wenger’s, what sort of evidence would demonstrate nexus of multimembership? This study crafted interview questions, drawn from specifics of the Wenger
text, to get at the issue, but the interview data did not support this analytic component of the
Wenger framework. The second issue has to do with qualitative analysis and inference: Was
Wenger making guesses about reconciliation of identity across other areas of “his” CoP members’
lives? If so, how big an inferential leap between data and findings should there be?

Two other findings emerged from the interviews in regard to “multimembership.” The
first is the way in which interviewees saw their training role carrying over into other
groups. Lee and Taylor both find themselves serving as “trainer” for their respective
churches, while Devon sees himself playing the role of group facilitator for his son’s Boy
Scout troop: “I can see how TRAIN influences me there. I’ll volunteer to help with some
training, and I’m really good with asking and answering questions, interacting with the
kids, you know? I’m sure TRAIN had something to do with that.”

Wenger (1998) describes the second marker of identity, “identity as reconciliation”
(reconciling one identity across memberships) as something of a universal stressor or
challenge. The TRAIN data collected regarding multimembership did not confirm this;
however, the interviewees did report finding themselves typically playing the same role
regardless of the group they were with. Chris described himself as “the clown,” bringing
levity and humor; Robin saw herself as an “executor,” seeing things through; Dale said
whatever group she was with she always ended up being the secretary.

Overall the matter of nexus of multimembership and reconciling identity across groups,
unless this is taken to mean playing the same role across groups, did not emerge from the
TRAIN data as it did for Wenger. This is discussed further in “identity: summary” section.
Identity: Analytic Component Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally

Wenger (1998) notes that “an identity is not local to just that community… [and in the CoP]…we figure out how our engagement fits into the broader scheme of things” (p. 162). The only marker for this analytic component is one pulled from Wenger’s text: “local energy is directed at global issues and relationships” (p. 162). That is, identifying as a TRAIN member means being able to understand how “good training” fits into a broader experience of life. With just the one marker data for this analytic component was not extensive, but nearly every interviewee described some way in which their identity as trainer, or as a TRAIN member, played out in their day-to-day life. One interviewee, a T101 faculty member, recalls the experience of teaching her 15-year-old how to drive as the way of finally understanding the concept of “unconscious competence” and to tie it to his own knowledge of training design (to be effective, it is important for the trainer/designer to remember what it was like to not know how to do something). Another interviewee described the ways in which she regularly applied her understanding of “good” training to near-daily interactions with her own small child. An anonymous comment by a conference attendee was, “TRAIN gave me skills that can be applied in all areas of my life. It gave me ‘starting’ places.”

Identity: Summary

The overarching question of this study is, “Is the Wenger (1998) framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice?” Of the four aspects provided in the framework (meaning, community, identity, and learning), the
“identity” aspect proved most challenging in regards to data collection. Where interviewees were, for the most part, able to provide specific and often extended examples of ways in which they felt the CoP had generated changes in their practices, they provided much less information on the matter of whether, and how, the CoP had changed them. Data regarding identity can also be tightly intertwined with other information and can be harder to cull out than, again, that regarding the other aspects. Additionally, the matter of “the nexus of multimembership,” which Wenger describes as sweeping and significant, was nearly nonexistent in the data associated with the TRAIN study.

The challenges here point to a concern about the Wenger (1998) framework: whether the analytic components of the framework are universally appropriate for every CoP. Wenger’s CoP of interest – the only group he referenced in his study, and from which he extracted his framework -- was an intact work group of people doing the same work alongside one another all day, every day; the TRAIN CoP, on the other hand, formally gathers only quarterly. While contact does occur between TRAIN events, the dynamics of people working alongside one another every day, and the effect upon identity that might have, are certainly different than the dynamics of those participating in a CoP comprised of people who see one another perhaps every 3 months. It is likewise reasonable to assume that identity changes might be farther reaching and clearer among those, again, who are heavily involved in the CoP on a daily basis as compared to those for whom the CoP serves as something more akin to an ongoing influence. While Wenger acknowledges the fluidity of identity, it is not clear how dependent upon context that fluidity might be. In
examining the usefulness of the “identity” aspect of the Wenger framework there is also the similar matter of the “boundary” trajectory – a person bridging between groups, or brokering with different communities, with TRAIN interviewees unable to identify anyone on it — as more related to the workings of a CoP working within a specific organization. Individuals in a large in-house training unit, for instance, might have a member serving as a bridge between the organization’s training and information technology communities, or between the training community and management.

This problem is further evidenced by the amount of interview data gathered that was coded “identity: other,” information that, while related to identity, did not fit the existing analytic components. This, again, seemed more related to the matter of voluntary participation in an “outside” CoP (as with TRAIN) than requisite friendly relationships with coworkers (as with Wenger’s insurance claims processors). Many comments coded “other” fell loosely into the theme of “motivation.” For instance, many interviewees spoke of motivation to “belong” to TRAIN not only due to seeing it as a resource, or a place to share, or even a chance to spend time with like-minded people, but out of the hope to someday be like the other members. Jess and Mel described their first TRAIN meetings and their assessment of the members there. Both used the phrase “high achievers,” as did Chris; Mel described them as, “Really smart people who expected you to operate at their level.” In describing his first presentation for the TRAIN group, Mel said, “They were supportive, but I was in such awe, and held them in such high regard, that I felt I had to live up to this,” a sentiment that seems broader than that categorized as “accountability to
the enterprise.” This, too, may speak to matters of motivation. Additionally, the repeated
comments about central members being “high performers” and, in Jess’s words, “people
who like to enjoy their work” also beg the question: is there a particular type of performer,
or are there certain personality characteristics, that drive more active membership in a
CoP? This will be further explored in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”

While Wenger (1998) discusses non-participation, he does not tie this to an identity
issue that came up repeatedly in interviews for this study: TRAIN participants who
explicitly avoid the identity of “trainer.” A number of interviewees noted this as a problem
among some infrequent meeting attendees and “takers,” those who perhaps participated
without ever being engaged. Several of these individuals were discussed, in somewhat
discourteous tones, because of their explicit refusal to identify with the role of “trainer,”
always introducing themselves by saying, “I’m not really a trainer, I’m just the agency’s
training coordinator”; “I’m not really a trainer, I mostly do employee relations work but I
do presentations sometimes.” Frankie, describing her perception of this, said, “If you’re in
a training role but still saying ‘I’m not really a trainer’ after several years, then you need to
switch jobs.” Pat was clearly irritated by the behavior and summed it up rather succinctly:
“Well, fuck ‘em. They’re just taking up space.” “Chapter Five: Discussion,” provides
further comment on this issue and offers some suggestions for refining the Wenger (1998)
framework in regards to the identity aspect of a CoP.

To conclude this summative section on identity, one final finding is presented here
under the subheading “Identity: In the Eye of the Beholder?” This final finding points to a
limitation in Wenger’s (1998) framework as it deals with how individual members understand their own identity vis. the CoP. This finding is further developed in the last chapter of this dissertation.

Identity: In the Eye of the Beholder?

As noted earlier, interviewees tended to take conversation about identity in one of several directions. For some, “identity” was stated in terms of a choice to acquire and enact a professional identity: “I’m a train-er”; “I’m a competent professional.” For others it addressed the role they tended to occupy across groups, such as, “I’m the caretaker,” or, “I’m the secretary.” Pat and Alex spoke in different ways of the identity they enacted within TRAIN that seemed, in interviews, a reflection of the identity they were choosing to project – how they wanted to be seen – even when such self-description conflicted with other data available.

For instance, Pat identified herself as a sage, mentor, and “a wise old trainer.” One of the earliest members, she talked extensively in her interview about what she had done for and brought to TRAIN, never alluding to having learned anything from other members or from TRAIN activities or events. She found the relationships “energizing” and the opportunity to mentor “meaningful,” but her entire experience was framed in terms of what she had given to the group. (One criticism of another member she considered “marginal” was that he had never asked her for any help or advice.) Pat’s need to identify with the role of expert trainer came out in a conversation regarding the first iteration of the T101 course, which she helped develop. Pat described an activity in which learners in the course were
told to bring in a piece of policy — “the driest, most boring, most tedious thing they could find” — and in 24 hours she and another instructor would give them back “a dazzling, engaging 15-minute piece of instruction.” This conflicted with T101 course artifacts as well as a different version told by Chris, who was also present during the development of the course:

For their final presentations the learners were given 2 pages of Medicaid policy that had to be turned into training. It was dull, boring stuff, and they were supposed to come back with something that was engaging, memorable, understandable, all of that. It was excellent practice for them, because so many times that’s the position a trainer is really in.

[Note: In a subsequent interview this perception of self — from Pat and another member, one not interviewed — came up as a tension in the group. Two other interviewees described the positioning of self-as-expert as manifesting itself in authoritarian, directive behavior at odds with the CoP’s enterprise of helping one another learn. This is discussed further in the “learning” section of this chapter.]

Alex, by contrast, offered several lengthy anecdotes regarding his view of his identity vis a vis TRAIN that may speak to Alex’s perception of self, or the way he wished to be perceived by others. For instance, in talking about his entry into and subsequent participation with TRAIN, Alex described his early days at work following his hire several years ago. He said he had rapidly become something of a leader among his coworkers, who had been in their training roles in the same agency for a number of years. He explained that
he was the first in the training department to have sought out professional development specific to training and had served as the catalyst for generating interest and participation in TRAIN among his coworkers. Alex described bringing the staff along to TRAIN meetings, and after “a couple of years” feeling they were finally ready to present, an undertaking Alex said he’d initiated and managed.

While Alex clearly believed this was an accurate representation of his work group’s involvement, and his role as a leader in that group, the story conflicted with other data available. The coworkers had in fact been very active TRAIN members long before Alex was hired. One is mentioned repeatedly in TRAIN meeting minutes going back as far as 1992, and over the years two different coworkers provided several meeting and conference presentations, including one the year Alex was hired and at which, as evidenced in photos, Alex was present.

Alex offered an additional example in discussing the way of members helping one another, an element of “community.” During a meeting the member presenting was having equipment trouble, and Alex described at some length his role in getting up to help and remaining in proximity to the presenter for the rest of the session. This, Alex said, was just another example of the way in which TRAIN members supported one another. While the story does indeed illustrate “community,” and is consistent with other examples provided by interviewees, it again conflicts with other data. The researcher was present at that meeting and recalled that another member, not Alex, had provided assistance; photos taken at several points during the presentation confirmed the researcher’s recollection.
While the details may not really matter much — Alex’s anecdotes support the overall concepts of involvement and a sense of community, and are the sort of things that could have happened -- the stories may have something to say about Alex’s identity and the need to be perceived as a leader, helper, and integral member of TRAIN. Curiously, if Alex in fact has that need, he is well-liked by the TRAIN group, as evidenced by comments made about him by several other interviewees, and would likely be welcomed into a more central, active role if he chose to pursue that. A final possibility: it may be that in providing these examples, Alex wanted the researcher to perceive him as leader and central member.

As this section has demonstrated, the data for the TRAIN CoP illuminated some key limitations to using Wenger’s (1998) framework to understand identity as it relates to membership in a CoP. This finding may offer some exciting challenges to future CoP research, and will be discussed later in Chapter Five. The next section offers the final of the four aspects of practice in Wenger’s framework.

Findings for the Learning Aspect of Practice

Table 4.6 provides the analytic components and marker for the “learning” aspect of practice.
### Table 4.6

*Analytic Components and Markers for the “Learning” Aspect*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect of practice</th>
<th>Brief description of analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td><em>Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement:</em> (p. 95) : how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95)</td>
<td>Members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td><em>Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise</em> <em>(p.95)</em></td>
<td>Aligning engagement with the enterprise learning to become and hold each other accountable to the enterprise “Defining the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final aspect of Wenger’s (1998) framework is “learning”; that is, what the CoP itself has learned. The analytic components for “learning” examine the mediation of time on the other aspects (meaning, community, and identity). In developing the strategy for coding data in regard to “learning” it was necessary to revisit the Wenger text to parse the finer points of differentiation. The concept of “enterprise” appears, for instance, across the framework. Where in the community aspect the CoP enterprise is negotiated, and in the identity aspect individuals develop accountability to it, the learning aspect examines the ways in which that enterprise evolves, or is tuned, over time.

Where interviews and observation formed the foundation for much of the findings related to the meaning, community, and identity aspects of practice, the abundance of
TRAIN artifacts proved invaluable in developing a thorough understanding of TRAIN as it related to the learning aspect. The availability of extensive artifacts reaching back to the early 1990s supported the construction of a history of TRAIN’s “learning,” particularly regarding evolving interests and approaches over time. Interview data also proved important; not surprisingly, however, interviewees who were among the longer-term members had more information to offer about what TRAIN had “learned” in its history.

Learning: Analytic Components

In addition to tuning the enterprise the other analytic components of “learning” are evolving forms of mutual engagement, or learning the subtleties of relationships, and developing their repertoire, the renegotiation of elements and the transmission of practice across membership and time. Within the analytic components Wenger does not offer what this study has referred to as “markers” so much as definitions, which have been broken into key phrases serving as markers.

Learning: Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement

The first analytic component of the learning aspect of practice is “evolving forms of mutual engagement.” The only marker for this is “members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships.” TRAIN data relative to this include evidence of moving from forming relationships and engaging in collaborative efforts to a CoP-wide awareness of the subtleties of relationships, the particular talents and peculiarities of members, and an understanding of ways to work together effectively.
According to interviewees, observation, and artifacts, over time talents and special interests had become well-known throughout TRAIN: one member is gifted at creating games; another is particularly talented at thinking up mnemonics, especially songs and rhymes. One member completed her master’s thesis on the work of David Kolb, while another has exceptional talent at using props in training. Some members are known for a highly developed ability to facilitate group discussions; another for his deep capacity for empathy and effectiveness at teaching topics related to domestic violence and homelessness. Interviewees, except for the three with low involvement, were able to quickly rattle off names and talents.

Likewise, challenges in relationships, with experience and time, become more evident. Interviewees were also able to quickly name particular members who have many ideas but poor execution, who are inconsistent about answering email, and who don’t always keep promises. In this case as well as with the instances of “who is good at what,” the knowledge does not exist just among members who happen to have relationships with one another: it is, rather, known community-wide.

Learning: Understanding and Tuning Their Enterprise

Tuning the enterprise includes the work of the group, across time, in aligning engagement with it, learning to hold one another accountable to it, and negotiating and reconciling what it is about. These definitions were used as markers in managing the TRAIN data. For the analytic component “tuning the enterprise” the markers are “aligning engagement with the enterprise,” “learning to become and hold each other accountable to
the enterprise,” and “defining the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about” (p. 95).

The first marker in the analytic component “understanding and tuning the enterprise” is “aligning engagement” with it. Interviewees who joined TRAIN after its earliest days felt that TRAIN, collectively, had had to learn ways in which to engage with trainers outside the tight-knit circle of the founding members. While the early members interviewed felt no exclusion had ever been intentional, they admitted they were very close and could perhaps be perceived as insular. Additionally, several interviewees recalled an intentional effort to overcome an emerging problem with what they called “hero worship” to develop a more inclusive, welcoming atmosphere — and a new approach to mentoring:

Jess: That’s something, I think, that has evolved. When I first came… it seemed like that inner circle was the in-group, and everybody should aspire to hang with the cool kids. The people on the periphery were sort of in awe of [names several founding members], who were big personalities, and it seemed like some hero worshipping, and you want them to ask you to go to dinner… recently that isn’t as prominent. To be in, all you have to do is open your mouth and raise your hand. I think the wall was thicker before.

Pat, herself one of the founding members, described an issue related to TRAIN’s intentional alignment of engagement to the enterprise. She recalled the problems with “hero worship” (with the founding members cast in the roles of “heroes”), said it had been
recognized and was a concern among the early members, and admitted it had been a huge lesson learned by the CoP:

The hero worship came this way: we presented at the meetings so they saw us train, they learned from the training, but we did one thing wrong: trainers are supposed to behave in such a way that the trainee says, “I believe I can do that,” but instead they said, “Whoa, I could never do that” and so that’s where the hero worship came. So we had to cross a boundary and say, “Well of course you can.”

Pat’s comment reveals the early members’ recognition that they were (unintentionally) presenting training to new members in such a way as to be intimidating, violating their own stated mission of “stamping out bad training.” Pat then described a shift in TRAIN’s approach toward newcomers to the group and individuals new to a training role. This was an intentional effort to avoid this intimidation (making newcomers feel, “I could never do that”) and preclude the development of hero worship when new members joined. TRAIN consciously developed an approach she called the “Gandhi Principle.”

We started treating people as if they already were what they wanted to be.

When [another interviewee] joined, she was a brand new trainer, she used to tell a story about going to TRAIN and how she was a nervous wreck and didn’t know anything at all. All of us were experienced trainers and so we decided to act as though she was one, too. And just by pretending, just by
blending in, she became an experienced trainer in large part by pretending she was.

The member in question, another interviewee, confirmed the effectiveness of this approach, recalling the experience in detail although it happened twenty years ago:

I was naive, had been in my job a very short period of time to realize what I was biting off, not realizing the full complement of training literature and how you train and all of that. I volunteered to help with the first T101 course. I’m embarrassed at my first efforts, looking back, I really am. But I’m an information junkie…so I started plowing through the literature that was available then on how you do training. [Two other members and I] worked up the training methodologies piece, and I helped deliver it, and I learned training methods by doing this (laughs). People DO learn by doing!

Further alignment in this regard took place upon the change to a new TRAIN communication lead/coordinator in the early 2000s (upon the retirement of the prior one), the first who had not been a member of the original TRAIN group. Sam, Jess, Mel, and Chris all spoke of the group since becoming more welcoming and making it easier for new members to feel safe in stepping up to present. While the group was never described as “excluding” others, the TRAIN era beginning in the early 2000s is described as providing more intentional, conscious efforts at inclusion and encouraging new members to fully join. As Mel said, “We’ve made the path for newer people a little easier over time.”
Parker, a learner in a recent T101 course, saw a clear way in which engagement is aligned as she spoke of being impressed with the unanimity and consistency of the 8 faculty members involved in that particular offering of the course, all of whom work in different organizations, some in remote locations of the state: “Even though you all have very different training styles, you all have the global view in mind, all of you, every one, exhibited the concept of learner first, passion for training, and the desire to make training better. I saw that all of you want people to really learn.”

Taylor’s comments illustrate the idea of “alignment” with the enterprise as it describes the phenomenon of 8 instructors, providing different training on different days, from disparate organizations, who rarely see one another outside of TRAIN meetings, providing a common view of “good” training even as their individual styles and approaches differed.

The second marker for tuning the enterprise is reconciling “conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about” (Wenger, 1998, p. 95). Interview data, supported by evidence in the artifacts, shows interpretation and adjustments to the enterprise in a number of ways. The first, which came early in the TRAIN history, was the decision to develop the T101 course. Mel recalls this as the moment at which, “TRAIN turned to service.” Although Wenger’s description of “conflicting interpretations” may imply a more contentious process, the decision did involve a good deal of in-depth discussion about the focus and purpose of TRAIN. Chris recalled the conversation: “…at some point we decided we wanted to influence training across the state. That resulted in
T101, so that was a major transformation for us as essentially we were saying, ‘We feel like we’ve gained a lot, we have a lot to offer, we’d like to give it back.’”

The issue of TRAIN’s growth to include members from other agencies (the original members were all from state and county department of social services offices, generally referred to as “DSS”) was also recalled as the subject of a good deal of conversation. In some cases, members who had joined while employed by DSS had moved to other jobs and wanted to remain active in TRAIN. Others had heard about TRAIN and asked to be included. Most interviewees saw this expansion and diversity as positive, bringing fresh ideas and interesting people to TRAIN. Some, however, particularly those involved in TRAIN’s early days, were wistful about the loss of intimacy of the “old” group even as they said the growth was, ultimately, a good thing. Jess felt adjustments to -- the “tuning” of -- the enterprise were an indication of the maturation of the CoP:

I think as a group we’re smarter now. TRAIN has a broader focus than before, certainly adult learning is still a huge piece, but because of technology, of e-learning, because there’s more literature out there for us… and because we are more diverse in terms of our job responsibilities…and we’ve tuned ourselves a little bit, too, to an overall willingness to mentor newer trainers. I think that’s been a gradual change over the years.

The TRAIN CoP is still learning to manage conflicting ideas about the enterprise. One issue that emerged during interviews included concerns regarding the CoP’s failure to keep up with the uses of technology for training applications. While several interviewees, and
artifacts, indicated the adoption of new presentation technologies – such as moving from flip charting to using PowerPoint in delivering training – some interviewees felt the CoP overall was not keeping in step with new ways of delivering training even when it would benefit TRAIN, for instance, using technologies such as the virtual classroom to facilitate additional connection and networking. One interviewee suggested that this indicated more of an instructor-centered focus than the CoP would like to believe it has, and joked that perhaps the mission statement should be changed to “stamping out bad classroom presentations.” (The comment is in keeping with a warning issued by Wenger [1998], who noted that in attaching so closely to the enterprise a CoP is always in danger of becoming too insular. Additionally, Thompson found with the sample in his 2005 study, such insularity can put the CoP at risk of placing too much distance between itself and market reality.) Interviewees who saw the failure to embrace technology as a concern all felt that this was heavily influenced by several core and founding members, who had publicly expressed their feelings that only face-to-face forms of gatherings were valid. The response to this has been the formation of a subgroup interested in e-learning and use of virtual technologies, which may result in members of the subgroup, due to time constraints, leaving the larger TRAIN CoP. Interviewee Lee was feeling TRAIN’S deficits in regards to technology most strongly. Her new job required a good deal of work with e-learning products, and while she found individual members helpful, she was increasingly finding that TRAIN did not meet her needs.
Another matter relating to conflicting ideas of what the enterprise is about, noted by two interviewees, was a concern that the CoP is similarly not keeping pace with research in training and development, and is choosing to remain focused on craft-based rather than evidence-based practice. While the T101 course shows evidence of attempts to implement current thought in, for instance, constructivist teaching, these interviewees described some items in the repertoire as outdated, suggesting that although repertoire is the result of ongoing negotiation an item, once in the repertoire, can be difficult to discard. Devon, for example, commented on a frequently-cited item from TRAIN’s repertoire, a reference to an old training adage that “people remember 10% of what they hear, 20% of what they see…95% of what they teach” which has been discredited by current literature, and which has been the topic of some discussion at several meetings. It was documented as having been referenced 3 times at the 2008 TRAIN conference and also exists as a handout in pre-1999 versions of the T101 course materials. Another interviewee expressed concern about the number of CoP members who were “enamored” of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (personality type instrument), which has been criticized in academic literature for its lack of construct validity and predictive value but, as the interviewee noted, “has enormous vendor money and pretty brochures behind it.” Artifact review supports this perception of focus on craft- rather than evidence-based practice: few meeting or conference presentations are based on theory, research, or training literature, and those that have been offered were all provided by the same three members. As far as can be determined only one session, a presentation at a conference several years ago, ever focused on evaluation
strategies, and that is remembered as being “too academic.” Artifacts confirm the craft-based focus, showing group interest over the years has tended to gravitate toward, for instance, popular business and trade books rather than research-based material. For instance, Grenny’s *Crucial Conversations* and Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* have repeatedly been featured at TRAIN events.

The focus on craft- versus evidence-based practice may have its roots in the influence of TRAIN’s earliest members. Pat, for instance, repeatedly described “good training” as “entertrainment” (as did Mel), spoke of her love for teaching presentation skills, and described her lack of interest in including instructional design basics in the first T101 course:

[Member] especially wanted to include stuff on how to design training.

Give me a break! We’re going to spend a whole day on writing objectives? Well snooze-ola call me when you’re done! And how are we gonna measure it? Yada yada yada yada yada. That’s when we decided we would break the course up and give different people different parts, because I could not be less interested in that.

Devon, discussing his concern with what he perceived to sometimes be indifference to evidence, asked, “Are we really interested in stamping out bad training? Or in being fabulously entertaining presenters?” This, again, points to ongoing conflicting interpretations about the enterprise. As some TRAIN members have completed graduate study in training and development or instructional design, or as some new members have
entered with such credentials, there is increasingly discussion in the group about craft- v. evidence-based practice, part of the ongoing “reconciliation” of interpretations of what the enterprise is about.

The final marker for “understanding and tuning the enterprise” is learning to hold one another accountable to it. As seen earlier, the concept of accountability threads throughout the Wenger (1998) framework, from accountability to one another in the “community” aspect to accountability to the enterprise itself in the “identity” aspect. In this, the “learning” aspect, the analysis examines how the CoP members hold one another accountable to the enterprise itself. Interviewees offered several examples of this, indicating that it was less a matter of confrontation so much as influencing one another. Lee, for instance, recalled conversation in the late 1980s about the rationale for offering the T101 course, a departure from the original enterprise, as an issue related to accountability:

> There was no real argument or controversy about it, we just couldn’t decide whether it was what we were about. We finally said, “Well, if you’re going to stamp out bad training then you’re going to have to show people how to do it right.”

As did some of the other interviewees, Mel spoke of the loss of intimacy that occurred as the group grew. He assessed the growth and diversity as the greater good, and described it in terms of holding one another accountable to the enterprise:
We realized we can’t both be an intimate group of 12 and really have much influence on training on a bigger scale. If we are going to meet our goal of developing and mentoring younger trainers, then we have to give up some intimacy to make room for them.

Chris spoke of some difficulty in learning how to hold one another accountable, particularly in the way of addressing concerns with member behaviors. He recalled issues with two members who sometimes, Chris felt, came to meetings to show “how wonderful they were,” to show themselves off rather than help other people:

Sometimes we responded ineffectively because we just talked about it after the meeting—you know, the parking lot meeting. Eventually we learned to quietly…maybe, I… we talked to the individual, or said, “What’s our focus here?” We reined people in a little bit. We have some people, you know, who have lots of experience. So when something comes up we have a tendency to say, “Oh, this is how you handle that.” But we’ve learned sometimes we have to hold ourselves back. I was once in the position of saying to one of my dearest friends, I said, “Maybe we need to hold back a little bit, and let people figure it out for themselves.” We saw that a little with [another member], too, you know, someone would have to say, “Let them figure it out. Let them wrestle with it.”

For some, accountability to the enterprise was as simple as ensuring that meetings were effective:
Jess: I think we’ve learned the value of having meaty topics or meaty sessions in the conferences, that for TRAIN to continue to have credibility and be taken seriously, we’ve got to take what we present seriously. So it’s got to have great value. It *is* a great value! It’s cheap and it’s great content… So I think that’s been a big thing for us, is to keep that standard.

Ideas connected to accountability to the enterprise also came out in interview comments related to the perceived need for TRAIN to be viewed as a credible professional organization. Chris, Lee, and Jess described the CoP’s recognition -- operating as it was outside of the purview of any employing organization, and without traditional structures like administrative boards -- of needing to appear organized, focused, and credible. Lee said, “We knew we had to be legitimate. We were always very careful to have agendas and make sure everything was always above-board.”

Jess: I think some people, people outside of TRAIN, would be surprised at the level of organization and structure. I mean, you think about it, we go to the mountains for 2 ½ days [for the conference], that could easily turn into wasting time and hanging out and enjoying the scenery, and people—probably more than other conferences I go to – people go the sessions, they don’t bail out on the last session of the day. Which is what happens when you pay big bucks and go to a hotel for a conference. At least I bail out at
those but I don’t bail out at TRAIN. So I think it’s almost surprisingly organized and respected.

(Note: The TRAIN group appears to have achieved legitimacy early on. A 1992 memo from the state division training office, announcing a sponsored workshop on curriculum development, was disseminated to 3 addressees: Section Chiefs, Regional Directors, and “TRAIN Members.”) Sam provided the final word on the idea of “tuning the enterprise”: “I think that most of us walk it, but I think we don’t always have the straight line. We are always working on it.”

Learning: Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses

The final analytic component for “learning”, developing their repertoire, styles, and discourses, examines the ways in which tools, artifacts, and recollections are adapted and renegotiated. Evidence indicates evolution and renegotiation of repertoire occurring in concert with group interests and developments in the training and development field. An early lesson, according to Pat, came with the implementation of the “Gandhi principle” approach: expecting new trainers to do well proved to often be a self-fulfilling prophecy — they did do well. This extended TRAIN’s understanding of the already-reified notion of “learner first.”

The TRAIN artifact review unearthed an abundant amount of detailed data illustrating the evolution of TRAIN’s repertoire over time, with documents illustrating, for instance, adaptations to existing tools and approaches. Table 4.7 shows a brief overview of TRAIN interests across the years:
Table 4.7.

*TRAIN CoP Interests Across Time.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active learning</td>
<td>Mind-mapping</td>
<td>Cognitive load</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult learning</td>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>Business etiquette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icebreakers/Openers</td>
<td>Situated learning</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Blanchard</td>
<td>Stephen Covey</td>
<td>Joseph Grenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flipcharting</td>
<td>Effective overheads</td>
<td>Effective PowerPoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Quality Management</td>
<td>Diversity (race)</td>
<td>High-performing employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating star performers</td>
<td>Diversity (generational)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Particularly useful in examining evolution to the TRAIN repertoire was the availability of complete sets of participant materials for 3 different iterations of the T101 course. This provided insight into the evolution not only of the T101 course but also of TRAIN group and member interests over time as well as the ways in which advances in thought, theory,
and literature in training and development were being incorporated into the CoP’s repertoire.

One such example of developing repertoire over time is a comparison of the “Key Principles” component of the T101 course, in which learners are provided an overview of what TRAIN views as the cornerstone of “good” training: (1) Learner first, situation second, content last, (2) You choose when you sweat, (3) If what you’re doing isn’t working, try something else. In the 1992 version of the course learners, upon arriving for the first day of class, were divided up among 3 tables, with each table given a different poster-size picture to color with crayons. According to an instructor helping with the course at that time, this was offered by way of providing “active learning,” a topic of interest to TRAIN in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Once the coloring was complete the instructor reviewed the Key Principles and explained the meaning of each. The images provided to the learners are shown in Figure 4.1:

Figure 4.1. Key Principles of Training from T101 Course circa 1992; learners were asked
to color.

The 2007 T101 materials, while retaining the Key Principles verbatim, offer the instruction in another way, based on more recent understanding of learner-centered instruction. Prior to class learners are asked to complete an online “visual fluency” tutorial. Upon arriving for class an instructor provides a quick overview of the Key Principles as critical to “good training.” Learners are then asked to place themselves at one of 3 tables, provided with paper and markers, and are asked to work together to apply their understanding of “visual fluency” in creating an effective visual (in the form of a poster) to represent “their” Key Principle. Once these are complete they are presented to the whole group, hung on the wall for the duration of the course, and adapted into a single-page handout provided to each learner as a takeaway. The activity, in addition to putting learners in the “driver’s seat” also serves in part to evaluate whether learners can apply the basics of visual fluency. Figure 4.2 shows the Key Principles handout created by a 2007 T101 class.

Figure 4.2. Key Principles charts created by T101 learners, 2007.

This example demonstrates the evolution of “repertoire, styles, and discourses” through retaining the reified “Key Principles” while utilizing updated approaches for teaching them
to new trainers.

Wenger (1998) notes that another form of change in repertoire includes changes in routines. A significant shift in what might be considered “routine” came with the advent of email. Where communication from 1985 through 1999 had taken place largely via hard copy “snail mail” or telephone, email opened up much more rapid conversation, allowed for copying in different members on conversations and far more requests for help as needs arose. It also provided a means for sharing electronic files such as meeting handouts and training materials. This change was more than cosmetic, as noted by Jess: “Technology has affected how we communicate with one another, and how we share information. You know in the old days we didn’t send each other files or say, ‘take this, modify it’. It was all paper, hard copies of things.” According to interviewees this change was double-edged: on the one hand it helped to include more members in more communications but, being easy and free, also meant the inclusion of many non-members and “takers.” In the days when meeting announcements were sent via hard copy, requiring postage, the TRAIN mailing list had fewer than 75 names. Messages now, since the advent of free e-mail, go to a list of approximately 250 people from whom, according to interviewees, “real” membership is perhaps 45 to 60.

Wenger (1998) also notes that “tuning the repertoire” involves “remembering and forgetting” (p.88). Throughout interviews a common theme, particularly with long-term members, was “what gets forgotten.” In discussing “meaning,” TRAIN’s impact on the practice of individual members, Jess spoke about another member’s influence in helping
her see training as akin to hosting a party, creating a welcoming atmosphere for learners. Reference to this idea appears in meeting minutes from the mid-1990s; the researcher herself recalls a presentation, years ago, in which the member similarly discussed the importance of “dressing the stage” prior to a training event. The once-very active member, however – one of the group’s founders -- rarely attends any longer, and most of the newer members have likely not even met her, perhaps not even heard of her, and the “hosting a party” analogy hasn’t been mentioned in years as far as interviewees can recall.

Another marker for “developing their repertoire, styles, and discourses” deals with the process by which practice is transferred from one member to another: “practice is not handed down but is an ongoing social and interactional process.” The TRAIN data, in fact, surfaced the opposite. TRAIN is often quite deliberate about handing down practice: the T101 course is an ever-evolving strategy for that, and meeting and conference agendas provide additional examples. At times the process is less transparent, with interviewees freely admitting they sometimes have no idea where they picked up a particular training trick or tool.

In his discussion of the CoP’s “learning” Wenger (1998) includes the concept of generational discontinuity, asserting that the arrival of new members causes discontinuities. As he devotes a section of his book to this, saying the generational encounters affect the CoP’s shared learning, it was included as a marker for “developing their repertoire, styles, and discourses.” In contrast to Wenger’s findings the TRAIN interviewees did not sense discontinuities as arising from generational issues so much as
those forced by advances in the training literature and evolution of training technologies. Those who had been regarded as CoP experts on flip-charting in TRAIN’s early years, for instance, were gradually eclipsed by those with expertise in PowerPoint – who were not necessarily among the newer or younger members.

Some interviewees discussed “generation” in terms of its value in bringing diverse perspectives, rather than in discontinuities, and younger ones valued learning from those who’d been present in earlier days. Taylor, a younger member, felt the similarities among members were greater than the differences: “I think we’re so accepting of each other because no matter how old you are, well, you’re still a trainer. And we learn so much from each others’ experience.”

While it is plausible that the issue of generational discontinuities is present in most CoPs, little evidence of it was found in the TRAIN group. As often as not, as evidenced by interview, artifact review, and observation, shifts in group interests to a new topic (such as generational diversity or emotional intelligence) were not the result of a generation” but a single member interest, when someone read a book (as with Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*), or became aware of a new topic (such as ethics) or was interested in what was happening in the business world or their workplaces (as with generational diversity). While a single member could generate excitement about a new topic, however, it was clear from interviews and artifacts that the arrival or departure of one member was not a revolutionary change; as Wenger (1998) noted, the community adapts and flexes in order to accommodate the change.
Learning: Summary

What has TRAIN “learned” in 23 years? The accessibility to so many interviewees with a longitudinal view of TRAIN’s history, supported by the abundance of documentation, enabled the construction of a rich view of TRAIN’s “learning” across time. Evidence of evolving forms of mutual engagement included verbal near-catalogs of various member interests, talents, and skills, and identification of the intricacies and challenges of working with one another. Over time TRAIN had undergone intentional growth from a small group wanting to share materials to a somewhat larger group focused on stamping out bad training; the decision to develop the T101 course marked a shift to service or “giving back.” The tuning as often as not took the form of conscious decisions regarding accountability (“If you’re going to stamp out bad training then you’re going to have to show people how to do it right”). TRAIN’s scope has changed from original small membership coming entirely from social services agencies to a large mailing list of trainers from all sectors of the state’s government agencies.

Among the lessons learned across time were the effectiveness of the “Gandhi approach” to mentoring, the value of diverse membership, and the still-challenging means of finding solutions for dealing with disruptive member behaviors. TRAIN shows evidence of trying to practice what it preaches -- “stamping out bad training” -- most clearly evident through the evolution of the materials from the T101 course.

The Wenger (1998) framework appeared to be adequate as a foundation for gathering and analyzing data related to the “learning” aspect. The exception: Wenger’s perception of
generational discontinuities creating change was not as evident in TRAIN’s experience, although this may, as with issues connected to other aspects, be connected to TRAIN’s status as CoP of volunteers from disparate organizations rather than an intact work unit or organization-based CoP.

Findings: Other

The data gathered for this study of the TRAIN CoP produced a number of findings coded “other.” Some of these fit Wenger’s framework in terms of broad “aspect” but did not seem related to any of the markers and have been noted in context of the respective aspect. For instance, interviewee discussions about the effect TRAIN had had on employing organizations and, ultimately, the overall quality of training in the state was something of the inverse of the idea that enterprise is indigenous and influenced by the organization, so was included in the findings there.

A number of other findings surfaced that do not fit the framework and may be tied to the matter of motivation, and seem noteworthy not only for their presence as “other” but for their pervasiveness and apparent significance to interviewees. These are related to the member’s relationship with his or her supervisor, means of entry into the CoP, the relative importance of years of membership versus engagement, and the respective roles of competence and passion in learning.

The first of these additional findings ties to the nature of the member-supervisor relationship. Several interviewees spoke of supportive supervisors who trusted employees to their own self-development and encouraged participation in TRAIN. Frankie, for
instance, said she was lucky to have “a manager who trusted staff to get what they needed, go to TRAIN if it met needs, and be productive.” She noted that this was “lucky” because not everyone has such a supervisor.

Two members described supervisors who were unsupportive. Taylor reports having to “fight” and in one instance go over her supervisor’s head to attend even a few meetings, of being told to go out of pocket for twenty 2-page handouts for her presentation at a TRAIN conference, and of having to take vacation time to help with the T101 course. This was, she felt, largely due to jealousy: when the supervisor was promoted from trainer to HR supervisor, Taylor stepped into, and excelled at, the training role. Devon’s supervisor was not supportive of his participation but did not interfere; he was careful to plan his calendar around the meetings. He was not always allowed to attend conferences, which incurred travel and housing costs, and he was not allowed the time to help with the T101 course. He attributed the supervisor’s lack of support to her overall satisfaction with his job performance and to her own “uber-introversion: she just can’t imagine wanting to go hang out and talk with a bunch of other people.” At times the lack of supervisor support limited participation for both Taylor and Devon. As Devon said, “Sometimes it just isn’t worth the fight.”

Several interviewees mentioned lack of support from the designated training coordinator for one of the large state agencies. Even those who had never been associated with the agency described what one called “legendary” problems with this person, someone on whom that agency’s trainers depended for information and support, including training
materials. The behavior as interviewees described it extended beyond failing to communicate with agency trainers to engaging in concerted efforts to block effective performance by the trainers. One interviewee described this coordinator as the “human speed bump” and said if it were not for the TRAIN group the interviewee felt she would have no support at all.

Perhaps the most startling finding — and it came up in interviews over and over again -- was that those who felt they were “good trainers” described their on-the-job performance as being at a level higher than that expected by management. The TRAIN members generally had full discretion over designing and delivering training as long as the assigned topic was covered. A common statement, offered in several slight variations, was: “They don’t really care what I do as long as the training gets delivered.” (And, as expressed by Devon, without the expectation “that anyone will learn anything.”) Throughout interviews managers were, rather, described as more interested in controlling and prescribing work practices and processes (such as length of training, who would be required to attend, and whether snacks would be provided) than with quality or design of training. For these interviewees, TRAIN was more than a way of making a job more “habitable.” As they described themselves (and other central members) as “high performers,” they found TRAIN a place to excel and feel valued for it – a place to actually perform at their fullest. Of the 14 interviewees, all but 3 mentioned having taken initiative to develop a training program/topic entirely at their own discretion, based on their own interests. These programs were not assigned, not supervised, not part of employee’s annual performance
evaluation, and in some cases activities of which the supervisor was not even aware. (Chris offered the example of the development of the T101 course, a voluntary project he described as so large that it seemed “like a second job.”)

Interviewees offered two possible explanations for management’s indifference to performance. The most popular attribution was that it was the “government way,” where mediocrity was the standard and pushing for higher performance created work for the supervisor. (This seemed to be something of a trickle-down phenomenon, with some interviewees noting that the supervisor was not expected to perform, either.) Others felt the problem was related to management’s lack of understanding regarding training. One interviewee said, “At least my boss thinks I’m competent and, while she doesn’t really understand what I’m doing with training, she doesn’t interfere.”

Another finding, possibly tied to the issue of weak supervision, relates to entry into the CoP. Wenger’s (1998) group of insurance claims processors all entered the CoP the same way: by being hired. This is not the case with TRAIN, where trainers not only have to somehow get word that the organization exists but also find their way to it. (The pool of potential members, as defined by the job title “trainer,” spreads across 30 state agencies, 16 universities, and 100 counties.) With the exception of the founding members and a handful of others, most members came into TRAIN as novice trainers. A few had some experience as elementary school teachers, and Parker had been delivering what in retrospect she described as “presentations.” Most of the interviewees described motivation to join, at least in part, for the purpose of role clarification and, although this was more tacit than explicit,
a search for their identity in this role of “trainer.” Many interviewees, again, said
management did not really understand training and was able to provide little direction or
support.

A finding that may be of some note is that engagement in the CoP appears to matter
more than years of membership. Interview transcripts consistently show the lack of
specificity provided by the three interviewees who had been less involved. For instance,
Taylor, a member for only 2 years but heavily involved in community maintenance and the
T101 course, and even with a supervisor blocking her participation, could provide far more
detail about TRAIN’s history and repertoire than the longer-term, but less engaged,
interviewees. Likewise, due to a job change Frankie had left TRAIN for some 10 years, but
had been very active in the early 1990s. During her interview she recalled in great detail a
complicated training activity that another member had done at a meeting. The less-
involved Jamie, meanwhile, could not recall events or names of people who’d been at the
conference three weeks before. This may have implications for better understanding who
“learns” what inside the CoP.

A final finding: while the Wenger (1998) framework is focused on developing practice
and making meaning, a word that came up repeatedly during interviews was “passion.”
Most interviewees came to TRAIN as novice trainers; several described the moment at
which they felt competent. But during their interviews they also said they were now
“passionate” about training and “loved” it, and felt most of the central membership – most
of whom also had entered TRAIN as novices – were “passionate” about training.
(Wenger’s own definition of CoP includes the word “passion.”) When does competence become passion? What moves a person from competence to passion? Is competence a requirement for passion? What connection is there between “passion” and transfer of learning?

These additional findings will be further explored in “Chapter Five: Discussion.”

Findings: Summary

Overall the data gathered for the TRAIN study showed a dynamic, inclusive community of practice adept at capturing and passing along tacit knowledge, at supporting and mentoring novices, and at providing “a place” for high-performing training practitioners to gather and share interests, problems, solutions, and fellowship. In addition to enhancing the skills of its members, the CoP has generated a vast library of artifacts, ranging from the evolving 200-plus page T101 participant manual to complete training packages to assorted job aids and reference tools.

This study sought to answer the question: “Is Wenger’s framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice (CoP)?” The Wenger (1998) framework proved useful as a vehicle for gathering, organizing, and analyzing data. The framework proved a workable tool for constructing interview questions and establishing guidelines for observations and review of artifacts. Most data seemed to align with one of the four aspects (meaning, community, identity, and learning), as it did, for the most part, into relationship with one of the analytic components and often with the accompanying markers. Of the data provided by the fourteen interviewees, that
offered by the 3 somewhat less-involved interviewees proved more challenging to code beyond the “aspect” level. Developing the coding scheme raised a number of challenges typically related to semantics and Wenger’s often-overlapping use of words (for instance, the concept of “accountability” is used in terms of accountability to the enterprise, accountability to one another, and the way the CoP learns to hold one another accountable to the enterprise). These required considerable revisiting of the Wenger text and parsing of meaning.

Some findings did not fit neatly into any of the aspects. These are primarily related to issues of individual member motivation to participate in the CoP. Additional concerns with the framework relate to the difference in Wenger’s (1998) CoP of interest, an intact work group, and the TRAIN CoP, a group of volunteer members working in separate organizations. A final concern is the evolution of a novice practitioner to not only a competent but a “passionate” one. It is likely that other frameworks for analyzing motivation would do a better job at generating a rich description of how motivation matters in a community of practice. This is a possible limitation to Wenger’s framework that was found in this study.

While some issues with definitions and gaps in exist, the framework, overall, did prove “useful” in surfacing data regarding the internal dynamics of this TRAIN CoP, particularly in the aspects of “meaning,” “community,” and “learning.” As noted earlier, ‘identity’ was problematic in terms of application to the TRAIN CoP. Findings here suggest that Wenger’s (1998) treatment of ‘identity’ offered limited effectiveness to understand
‘identity’ for the TRAIN CoP. Like motivation, the findings suggest that other frameworks of identity and identity formation would likely be better for understanding how identity matters to a CoP. “Chapter Five: Discussion” offers further exploration of these matters as well as suggestions for a revised framework and further study.
Vignette Three: Community

50 people are gathered at 4 different clusters of tables at the closing plenary session of the annual 2 ½ day TRAIN conference. They are from government agencies from all over the state and are, for the most part, seated with their old TRAIN friends and new friends they’ve made at this year’s conference. A few attending with coworkers stay in proximity to them. Two presenters, colleagues from a county training office, ask if conference participants feel challenged in trying to provide good training in technical and programmatic content. Many heads nod and one presenter asks what kinds of topics participants work with. Several people call out “Medicaid,” a couple of others say, “HR Policies,” while others singly call out “ADA compliance,” “No Child Left Behind,” “safety Compliance,” and “payroll and timekeeping.” The other presenter asks the group why they find this material challenging. Again, a number of answers are called out, including “It’s too dry,” “It’s too complex,” “It’s nearly impossible to make it interesting,” “There is way too much information that isn’t really relevant to their jobs,” “There’s nothing interesting or engaging about it,” and “My agency thinks if we sit people down and just tell it to them that they should be able to go back and do it on the job.”

The presenter says he and his work team have found that using game-show games in programmatic training can improve delivery of content, help to ease boredom, and make the training more engaging. He asks, “When do you think you would want to use a game?”
Answers are again called out, and include such solutions as, “To review material,” “To serve as a test,” “To serve as a pre-test,” “To provide another way of presenting content,” and “To break monotony.” The presenters nod in agreement with each one and say yes, they use the games for different purposes.

“Today,” one of the presenters says, “We’re going to ask you to work together to design a game with your group, and then you’ll actually play the game using people from other groups as your participants. Make sense?” Heads nod. “I know you don’t all teach the same material, so decide in your group what topic or content you want to cover. We (indicating the other presenter) will be coming around to get you started. While you’re working, pay attention to what you learn about the process of creating games, like how you create the questions and what kinds of rules you realize you’ll need. We’ll want you to share that at the end of the session.” He smiles. “Because people don’t argue with their own data, you know.” The group laughs: this is one of TRAIN’s oldest adages.

Group members chatter as they wait for their assignments. Each table is tasked with creating a different game: Jeopardy, Pyramid, Windowpanes, and Family Feud. A presenter provides the groups with materials like construction paper and markers, explains details of the game and expectations about the final product, and lets the groups go to work. With groups so large—there are at least 10 people per table—the room quickly fills with a happy, energetic noise.

After half an hour groups are ready to show off their creations. Delegates from each group serve as hosts for the game they created, with members of other groups serving as
participants. There is a good deal of activity; at some points all 50 attendees get up and move to the area of the room where a game is being played. Because games deal with specific program topics, the game players often have no idea about right answers. One of the presenters says that doesn’t matter, to just to try their best, and to remember this is how a learner might feel when playing this game in a “real” class. During “Medicaid Pyramid” one first-time attendee, who has not spoken out loud to the group during the entire conference, suddenly starts to shine: shouting out one answer after another, it’s clear this is an area in which she has enormous knowledge. All the games are fun, but the Family Feud game, “5 Ways of Finding the Non-Custodial Parent,” brings down the house. The category “Top 5 Reasons People Give for Not Paying Child Support” is especially eye-opening to those who do not work in Social Services, as the Number One reason given is: “I was in jail.”

When all the games have been played people return to their seats. One of the presenters asks, “So what did you learn from this? What tips can you share?” Several people comment on their group’s failure to consider the specifics regarding rules (for instance, whether participants during the Jeopardy game were required to frame responses in the form of questions, as happens with the TV show), realizing only once the game play started that they needed to clarify this. Another discussed how surprisingly challenging it was to create good questions; someone else followed up this comment by comparing writing game questions to the difficulty of creating good test questions. The presenter then said, “I know a lot of you already use games in training. Do you have any lessons learned you can
share?” Several participants raised hands. These comments focused on issues regarding facilitation techniques (several agreed that even though games were intended to be “fun,” learners often took them very seriously and the facilitator needed to provide clear rules as well as, sometimes, serve as arbitrator); some best practices (i.e., when using a game you created in the past, be sure to review your questions and answers ahead of time to ensure that the information is still current; if you plan to use a game to review content, then be careful of skimming or cutting material during class — be sure to cover the content that the game will address). Others had suggestions for actually building games, with one participant saying that an erasable whiteboard makes a wonderful tool for creating a Jeopardy game board. Another mentioned that many templates for creating PowerPoint based versions of the games were widely available on the Internet and could be found in Google searches. Someone else said there was a good book on using game show games in training, I’ll Take Learning for 500, available from Amazon.

The presenters then asked, “How can you use games back on your jobs?” Attendees shouted out ideas, ranging from “program training” to “replace a paper quiz” and “review content” that one presenter captured on chart paper.

One of the presenters concluded by saying, “This is the first time we’ve done this workshop, and we’ll be doing it again soon at a national conference. What suggestions do you have for us?” One of the attendees said, “Now you know how we do this. What do YOU think is the best thing you did, and why?” The presenter answered, “Being clear about instructions and helping the groups do the activity.” The attendee then asked, “If
you did this again tomorrow, what would you do differently?" The presenter said,

“Probably plan on spending much more time setting up the room and preparing the props
for groups to use.” The presenter then said, “Now, what suggestions do you have for us?”

The conference attendees indicated they had no other feedback for the presenters, although
several said the session was fun and another thanked the presenters for sharing their work.

The session ended and the conference organizer stood up to make closing remarks.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This instrumental case study used the TRAIN community of practice as a vehicle for answering the question: “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in helping to understand the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice?” Wenger’s framework for examining a community of practice is built around four aspects and their accompanying analytic components; these formed the basis of this study. “Meaning” was examined via the components participation, reification, and the duality of the two. “Community” was examined via joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and the use of a shared repertoire. “Identity” was examined via negotiated experience, membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multimembership, and belonging defined globally but experienced locally. Finally, “learning” was examined through the analytic components evolving mutual engagement, tuning the enterprise, and development of repertoire.

In beginning the discussion of the findings and implications of this study it may be helpful, as a reminder to the reader, to trace the developmental path of the Wenger (1998) framework. Wenger offered the four-aspect model of practice (learning, meaning, community, and identity) in his *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* in 1998. From that text Storberg-Walker (2008) distilled the analytic components that form the “building blocks” (Storberg-Walker, p. 563) of a CoP, which she provided in graphic form. This was adapted and presented in this paper as Table 2.1. In planning this study, however, it became apparent that the framework of aspects and analytic components would not be sufficient to meet the demands of rigorous qualitative inquiry. The analytic
components, taken from the Wenger text, utilize overlapping terms, such as “accountability,” and include vague language, as with phrases such as “social complexity,” and in a number of other ways lacked the specificity necessary for valid coding. In designing this study the researcher therefore further refined the framework by examining the Wenger text for additional specification and definition of the problematic terms and concepts. From this examination she generated a list of specifying concepts, “markers,” associated with each analytic component. It is critical to note that, as with the analytic components identified by Storberg-Walker, the markers were distilled from the Wenger text and were not new ideas or concepts invented by the researcher. This framework of aspects, analytic components, and markers is presented as Table 3.1 and formed the working framework for this study.

Chapter Four reviewed the findings from the study using this working framework, including areas in which the framework proved less useful in understanding the TRAIN CoP. This chapter offers further discussion of these matters and provides a new, revised framework of aspects, analytic components, and markers developed from the findings from this study. This final, revised framework is provided as Table 5.5.

While much of the working framework proved useful in studying the TRAIN CoP there are areas in which it is lacking, either in specificity or clarity, or in failing to incorporate issues that appear to be critical to understanding the internal dynamics of TRAIN as one example of a CoP. It may also be so complex and so large, with analytic components often existing in interplay with others, as to prove unwieldy or daunting to
researchers seeking to utilize it in framing future studies. The addition of markers taken from the Wenger (1998) text (as shown in Table 3.1) to the original framework (Table 2.1) proved helpful in acquiring, coding, and managing data, and have been refined and included in the final revised framework (Table 5.5). This chapter provides a discussion of the framework’s adequacies and inadequacies and offers a revised framework for the study of CoPs. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and for future research.

Assessing the Framework

In many ways the framework proved useful in understanding the TRAIN CoP, particularly in regards to documenting the central features of this CoP and the ways in which it operates. The framework also provided structure in understanding what Wenger (1998) describes as the three dimensions of a community of practice: mutual engagement, how the CoP functions; negotiated enterprise, what the CoP is about; and repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time, the capability the CoP has produced. The framework additionally proved useful in outlining interview questions, structuring observations, and organizing artifacts.

In other ways, however, the framework proved ineffective or incomplete. This study found three key areas that represent possible limitations or weaknesses to the Wenger (1998) framework. These are introduced briefly below, then discussed in more depth in the discussions of each aspect of the framework.

First is the matter of terminology and specificity. Wenger’s analytic components include a good deal of overlap in terms of both words and concepts (for instance,
“accountability”). As noted by Storberg-Walker (2008), validity requires that this overlap be eliminated, with each analytic component unique. Developing a strategy for coding data, with each code a discrete item, involved much revisiting of the text and parsing of the terms; more than once, the researcher had to step back to ensure that data was in fact being coded to the framework, without the framework being altered to make coding easier.

The second limitation was the question of whether the framework is applicable to all CoPs. For instance, Wenger’s (1998) intact work group of claims processors who daily worked alongside one another seemed to experience different dynamics – including conflicts, tensions, and politics – than that of the TRAIN CoP, whose members voluntarily gather perhaps four times a year.

This problem speaks as well to the role of the individual member, which is the third limitation discovered by this study. Although Wenger (1998) is clear that his unit of analysis is the CoP itself (macro level), an examination of “internal dynamics” by necessity must include some attention to the individual member (micro level). For instance, motivation to join is fundamentally different for individual members of the TRAIN CoP, who join voluntarily, from those in Wenger’s CoP, who all “join” by dint of being hired.

Discussion of these issues in relation to the four aspects (meaning, community, identity, and learning) follows.

Discussion: Meaning

For this study of the TRAIN CoP the Wenger (1998) framework was adequate in representing elements that constitute “meaning.” Examples of the duality of participation
and reification were plentiful, with artifacts providing a clear record of how TRAIN has “produced meaning”-- what TRAIN has done -- in its 23-year history. Artifacts associated with the various iterations of the T101 course, for instance, show many examples of what Wenger (p. 59) calls “an understanding given form.” Interviewees clearly recognized the existence of participation and reification and viewed them as occurring in interplay, not in isolation or on a continuum. As Lee said, “We don’t stand up all the time and say we’re here to stamp out crappy training. Everything we do is an example of that.” Several interviewees asserted that “learning,” in the sense of translating new knowledge to practice, required both the physical materials needed for performance (such as a lesson plan) as well as seeing a good performer actually perform (watching a skilled trainer deliver the lesson plan). While they did not adopt practices in the strict sense of mimicking, they did find it helpful to see practice modeled. Robin, for example, said she valued watching one of the senior members while adding, “I don’t want to be her, but I say, ‘I can take bits and pieces of that and better myself’.” This may serve to extend our understanding of how tacit knowledge is transferred, and speaks exactly to the value of the CoP at capturing what a database or process manual cannot: as Wenger notes, putting everything in writing is not always the answer. Seeing a seasoned performer at work was, to the TRAIN interviewees, a valued vehicle for learning. Within the activities of the CoP this was supplemented by the opportunity to practice skills in a safe environment among supportive peers, an idea that came up repeatedly in interviews. The opportunity to engage
in “dry runs” and receive constructive, helpful feedback from peers likewise proved invaluable to interviewees in developing their own practice.

It was the first pass for coding elements of “meaning” that initially surfaced the matter of engagement as more important than length of membership: the three interviewees who only participated in the CoP, but rarely engaged with others on more than a social level, were able to offer far fewer specifics about activities of the CoP, their own practices, or the ways in which practice had developed or they had “learned.” In interviews, time after time, those who were more engaged with other members were also the ones who provided extended, detailed examples (for instance, Jess’s anecdote of seeing the trainer’s role as that of “hosting a party”). On a surface level this may only indicate that the CoP had little influence on the practice of these 3 individuals, and it is not a stretch to consider something of a relationship between low engagement and low transfer. It is also entirely likely that one could “learn” and transfer something to practice without necessarily being engaged. But the 3 less-engaged interviewees were generally unable to provide any specifics regarding their own practices, regardless of any connection to TRAIN. There may, then, be an indication that that those who are less engaged in the CoP are also less mindful and intentional about their practice. The question of whether engagement encourages mindful, thoughtful practice might be one worth future exploration, as is the matter of whether this may be tied to motivation to engage within the CoP.

An area tied to making meaning that may be less explicit in the Wenger framework is something Orr (1990) describes: the role of the community as helping the individual learn
not only how to *do things* but how to *get things done*. For instance, a critical experience for one interviewee was an impromptu discussion with several TRAIN colleagues, more experienced government trainers, about obtaining funding to attend an out-of-state conference. The interviewee said she learned from her TRAIN friends that this had “nothing to do” with the paperwork and standard requisition forms. “Meaning,” in the sense of knowledge acquisition, here was not related to the practice of training, or in memorizing the process of filling out the right forms, but knowing who to speak to, and when, and how to present justification for the request. This again speaks to the CoP as offering informal, even serendipitous means for the transfer of tacit knowledge.

One area of interest in the “meaning” section of the framework is the matter of “participation.” Wenger (1998) often blurs the distinction between “participation” and “engagement,” and his text proves challenging in this regard. The researcher anticipated difficulty in gathering data and coding for this. Interviewees, however, were quite clear on the distinction (engagement includes meaningful interaction with other members; participation may not), even when not asked about it, and even defined something of a subset of “participant” which several described as the “takers.” This lack of clarity is partly due to Wenger’s (1998) tendency to use the words in overlapping ways, pointing to a suggestion for refining the framework. While Storberg-Walker (2008) rightly noted that it is “probable” (p. 573) that Wenger’s *intent* was to synthesize broad concepts, in actuality, with the TRAIN interviewees, this did appear to be a level of analysis issue: in many ways it reflected differences in the individual (participation) v. the collective (engagement).
Overall the Wenger (1998) framework seemed adequate in providing the means of analyzing “meaning,” defined as understanding what the TRAIN community does and what the individual takes from the community back to practice. Suggestions for refining the framework include delineation of the difference between “participation” and “engagement” and the concept of “making meaning” as not only performing the actual job (how to do things) but in gaining understanding of how to get things done. A suggestion for future study is an examination of the relationship between engagement in a CoP and mindfulness of practice. Table 5.1 shows revisions to the original working framework with changes from the original, Table 3.1, noted in italics:

Table 5.1

*Meaning Aspect with Changes Noted in Italics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic aspect</th>
<th>Analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Meaning      | Participation: living in the world, acting, interacting | *Participation is defined as individual actions and individual’s way of making meaning*  
Participation can occur when member is not with the group  
Mutual recognition  
Participation is symbiotic |
Table 5.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Reification: forms, points of focus, documents, monuments, instruments, projection</th>
<th>Creates points of focus Final product <em>may differ</em> from intended use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Duality: interplay of participation and reification</td>
<td>Participation and reification transform each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Community

In terms of the research question, “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice?”, the examination of the “community” and “learning” aspects from Wenger offered the most insight into the TRAIN CoP’s norms and interaction patterns. However, in gathering data about “community” the framework proved useful if incomplete. The analytic components “joint enterprise” and “shared repertoire” provided direction in understanding the ample interview, artifact, and observation data gathered. The “mutual engagement” component likewise seemed appropriate and useful once clear distinction was established between “participation” and “engagement.”

In terms of organizational structure the TRAIN community is largely horizontal; even in discussing “core” members, or those involved in maintenance tasks, there was no mention of perception of hierarchy, authority, or power. Interviewees talked at length of an
open, welcoming community, with supportive peers and a spirit of inclusion for, as a number of interviewees said, “anyone who wants to be included.” While power in any community most certainly exists, issues did not surface in the course of conducting this study. It would be natural to expect cliques to form, but there was little evidence of this in the traditional sense (i.e., “clique” as implying a group with some individuals included in it while others are excluded). Some members described the earliest days as being cliquish in terms of newcomers wanting to be invited to sit with the “big kids” at dinner, but as TRAIN grew from its early group of some 12 members, what might best be called fluid “clusters” rather than cliques, came to emerge. (This idea is supported by Huberman & Hogg, 1995, p.6: “A group of individuals engaged in cooperative problem solving seldom settles into a fixed structure. Rather, the group is always characterized by interaction patterns that are constantly fluctuating.”) It is unclear whether this finding indicates that there are no power issues in TRAIN, or the framework is inadequate in helping to surface them.

Much conversation during the interviews centered around the notion of “meaningful engagement,” and per the interviewees this was often what differentiated the “community” from other systems such as “associations” or “clubs.” Jess, for instance, spoke of the TRAIN members’ commitment to sharing, pointing out that people in a “network” may have other motives for participating. She described another professional association to which she belonged in which sharing was decidedly not encouraged. Sam felt it was the
absence of formal structure that helped to support the “community” structure: “Once you have bylaws and boards, you become something else.”

Markers of the framework associated with mutual engagement include “enabling engagement,” the importance of being included in “what matters” and in the work of community maintenance. These are ideas that, again, were borne out in the data collection. Several interviewees described their commitment to developing and serving as faculty for the T101 course; Sam and Mel both spoke of feeling “flattered” when they were first encouraged to present at a meeting. Evidence of member contributions to community maintenance was wide, ranging from stuffing gift bags for the conference to helping with meeting planning to working on a celebration of a member’s retirement.

Joint enterprise, too, was evidenced in several ways, particularly in community response to conditions – the development of the T101 course, for example – and the ways in which boundaries of the enterprise were gradually extended beyond the original, with the CoP moving from a small group gathering to share materials to a larger group of mentors providing service and interested in “giving back.” Wenger (1998) describes the idea of “enterprise” as unique to the particular CoP: it is a response to the conditions of the members, and is therefore their enterprise. Apart from the desire for fellowship and sharing, interviewees described the ways in which TRAIN’s enterprise had evolved to function as a response to their conditions. While the overarching goal of TRAIN is to “stamp out bad training,” and focuses largely on training- and presentation- related skills, the enterprise also includes working to develop skills and a sense of support while
reporting to indifferent supervisors (and the desire to become better in spite of this indifference), strategizing ways to make training more credible in organizations in which training is misunderstood or not valued, and recognizing and helping peers who are struggling. The enterprise additionally works to help TRAIN members find what Wenger (p.80) calls “local ways of working,” for instance, providing workshops on ways to be more influential with one’s management.

The framework additionally proved useful in examining basics of interpersonal relationships. Data showed ample evidence of TRAIN members making useful connections with others, developing a sense of collegiality and comfort in calling upon the talents of others, and asking for help when needed. Eleven interviewees described the development of close, lasting friendships. There was additionally a strong sense of mutual accountability, with many comments reflecting the expectation of providing a supportive, encouraging climate for one another, as well as knowing that one can be confident that help will be forthcoming when requested.

The final analytic component of the community aspect is the existence of a shared repertoire. Ranging from simple points of reference to formal documents, the TRAIN data showed dozens of examples of items that provide TRAIN members with a common discourse that clearly associates the members with the community (see Appendix F: Glossary of Repertoire). Interviews, artifacts, and observation notes were sprinkled with the same acronyms (“FIDO”) and other points of reference (“learner first”; “PowerPoint is kudzu”; “the 20%”).
While in some ways the Wenger (1998) framework proved useful in better understanding “community,” gaps did become apparent. The first ties, again, to the generalizability of Wenger’s framework, extracted from one study of an intact work group, to a CoP such as TRAIN. While the business of working alongside another CoP member day after day would be expected to generate an amount of tension, stress, and conflict, this was much less evident in the TRAIN group, with volunteer members who get together only a few times a year. Most of the interviewees described having developed friendships with other members, and described their eagerness to see one another at meetings. The typical day-to-day conflicts, personality clashes, and “politics” one might see in a work group simply did not appear to exist within TRAIN. If such issues do exist for TRAIN, the framework did not prove useful in identifying or discussing them. For the most part, interpersonal conflicts were dealt with by simply avoiding the person with whom one had differences.

Another issue less germane to Wenger’s (1998) CoP of interest, compared to TRAIN, relates to the individual motivation for joining and engaging. (As noted earlier, Wenger’s insurance claims processors essentially joined the CoP by being hired.) This came up time and again in the interviews, but the framework provides no clear place for it. In looking over this data it seemed most appropriate to examine it as part of the community aspect, as essentially the interviewees discussed, often at some length, the role the community played for them.
Jesse, Taylor, Jody, and Jamie described the CoP’s role in serving as a buffer for the isolation they felt, whether from being the only trainer in an organization, the trainer working for the indifferent supervisor or within the organization in which training is not valued, or the trainer who is the only member of a training unit interested in improving practice. Several said they initially joined in part to help them reconcile role confusion: what does a trainer do, and how does one know if one is doing it well? Some additionally spoke of the CoP as a vehicle for meeting a basic social need to make connections with others or to talk shop with colleagues; one spoke of the intellectual stimulation she found from being with the group; some described their need to find and leverage resources. Devon and Pat both spoke of feeling the need to give back to the community as their reason for continued engagement. Interestingly, only one interviewee, Chris, said his motivation for belonging was “to learn,” perhaps an indication that members view learning as a byproduct, rather than the purpose, of engagement. (It may be significant that the TRAIN motto is, “to stamp out bad training,” not “to learn to stamp out bad training.”)

This matter of motivation is somewhat distinct from what Wenger describes as a CoP’s capacity for making a job more habitable, an idea that did carry over into the TRAIN study. Several interviewees, for example, discussed the role of TRAIN in helping them cope with the stress of frequently trying to communicate with management asking them to provide training when it was not indicated and would not solve the presenting problem. A suggestion here is to extend the concept of making the job habitable: motivation for joining the CoP includes the need to make the job habitable. This has been added to the revised
framework as a new marker for mutual engagement, “sense of community and engagement are symbiotic” (the community satisfies motivation needs/makes job habitable”). Table 5.2 shows revisions to the original working framework, with changes from the original, Table 3.1, noted in italics:

Table 5.2

*Community Aspect with Changes Noted in Italics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Analytic components (Wenger 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Joint Enterprise: negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response</td>
<td>Enterprise is different from the original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual accountability (<em>to one another</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enterprise is indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Mutual Engagement: engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance</td>
<td><em>Engagement differs from participation in that it requires being involved with others in meaningful ways</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enabling engagement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being included in what matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contributing to community maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formation of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sense of community and engagement are symbiotic: community satisfies motivation needs/makes job habitable</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2 continued

| Community | Shared Repertoire: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts | Repertoire functions to further negotiate the enterprise via history and ambiguity |

**Discussion: Identity**

Analytic components for the identity aspect are: negotiated experience, membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multimembership, and belonging defined globally but experienced locally. While it occupies the bulk of his 1998 text, and includes five analytic components (the other aspects each include only 3), this aspect of the Wenger framework proved least useful in providing understanding of the internal dynamics of the TRAIN CoP. Once again, this may be partly attributed to the difference in the groups under study. The participants in the Wenger study were in constant contact with each other; TRAIN members formally gather only a few times a year, with intermittent contact within clusters of members occurring informally. Apart from specifying moments of transition (Frankie: “I was a train-ER”), interviewees frequently had difficulty in differentiating identity development uniquely tied to TRAIN from that associated with enacting their daily work roles. Few explicit statements regarding “identity” could be obtained; rather, the interviewee’s view of self often had to be culled from within the context of other conversation. The concept of multimembership proved especially challenging, with most interviewees saying they did not belong to any other communities of practice.
The first analytic component for “identity” is “negotiated experience.” This includes the ongoing negotiation of self. Wenger (1998) says that in negotiating experience CoP, participation is reified and participants recognize their own markers of transition. This was borne out in the TRAIN study. Interviewees were clear about the ways they choose to label themselves as well as the way they do not. Some took pains, for instance, to clarify that they were not just disseminators of information but facilitators of learning. Several mentioned an item from the TRAIN repertoire, a caveat about being just an “order taker”; that is, defining oneself as a performance consultant and partner to management, helping to identify root causes of performance problems and appropriate interventions. This is in contrast to the “order taker” who provides any training management happens to request even when it is not indicated and in fact may do harm. The most common example of this offered in conversation at the conference was the trainer providing a “teambuilding” workshop when the real problem was the manager’s reluctance to deal with the one poor performer on the team. The idea of redefining themselves as performance consultants, and seeking to educate management and others in their work settings, was an important issue for TRAIN interviewees. Similar findings on the need to redefine the self were reported by Davis (2006, p. 7), citing Fortune (2000), who described the problem of a professional “accepting an identity imposed on them,” a situation that can prove overwhelming to new practitioners. Davis further offers information that again parallels findings from the TRAIN study: rather than find such imposition of identity discouraging, TRAIN
practitioners saw it as an opportunity to engage in leadership and/or educational roles, and to challenge beliefs affecting perception of the training discipline.

Most interviewees recognized their own markers of transition, usually in remarkable detail. While Jess recalled the moment at which she first felt competent -- from a novice trainer saying, “Oh, crap, what have I gotten myself into?” to after a few months on the job saying, “I can do this” -- others remembered moments more closely tied to TRAIN. For Parker and Sam it was first being encouraged to present at a TRAIN event; for Taylor, being asked to join the T101 faculty; for Lee, being included in the development of the original T101 course and, later, realizing that faced with choice of concurrent conference tracks she would self-select to be in that aimed at more seasoned trainers. Parker, Taylor, Frankie, and Mel all said, essentially, that the moment of transition was realizing they had assumed the identity of “trainer.”

The second analytic component for the identity aspect is “membership.” As defined by the interviewees, one is not a member only by appearing on the mailing list, or even participating in the occasional meeting. Wenger’s (1998, p. 152) assertion that membership involves competence holds true with TRAIN, as those considered “members” are expected to exhibit the dimensions of competence: mutuality of engagement, accountability to the enterprise, and negotiability of the repertoire. Wenger’s additional belief that these dimensions of competence become dimensions of identity were also borne out in the TRAIN data: Interviewees discussed their evolving identity as measured by their ability to engage with the community through developing competence. They additionally choose to
project a certain persona associated with member, that of “walking the talk” of the CoP. While Wenger does not discuss this at much length in his 1998 work, the data here reflect his earlier work (1991) with Jean Lave on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, in which he describes the novice not learning from talk but learning to talk competently about practice. Because there is so much of the choice of the individual in this analytic component – from the labels one chooses to use to the persona one chooses to project – it is recommended that the framework be revised to include the additional marker “membership satisfies identity needs” as a way of informing future research.

Data around the identity aspect surfaced yet another issue tied to the matter of type of CoP and relates to the concept of membership. The participants in Wenger’s (1998) study become “members” of the CoP upon being hired. While two chose to be slightly less involved, for the most part every employee in the job was a member of the CoP under study. This is not the case with the TRAIN group, in which membership is entirely voluntary. Additionally, the word “member” is less clear within TRAIN than with Wenger’s group, in which member is essentially analogous to job title. Many of the interviewees in the TRAIN study commented that everyone who happens to be affiliated with TRAIN is not a member. A suggested revision to the framework would be inclusion of (or, more precisely, attention to) Wenger’s marker of “membership” defined as exhibiting the dimensions of competence.

Wenger’s (1998) ideas regarding learning trajectory, the third analytic component, were clear and appeared to parallel the experience of TRAIN members. Of the five
trajectories (peripheral, insider, inbound, outbound, and boundary), only that of boundary, on which the member links communities, was not available for study. This, again, may be attributed to the contextual differences in Wenger’s study of an intact work group and the TRAIN group, which is comprised of individuals from disparate organizations. In a CoP comprised of individuals working for a single employer it is not hard to imagine a member serving as, for instance, liaison between the CoP and management or other departments such as Information Technology.

The researcher had initially planned to use additional markers taken from the Wenger (1998) text for the “learning trajectory” analytic component, but found that these were not needed: “trajectory” proved fairly easily identifiable and was useful in coding data. The revised framework therefore uses the five trajectories as markers.

Of all the analytic components of Wenger’s (1998) framework, the idea of “nexus of multimembership” proved the least relevant to the examination of the TRAIN CoP. Data provided by interviewees did not confirm the idea that reconciling identity across groups, including the identity of “good trainer,” was difficult. While Wenger describes this nexus as the space where we must negotiate the different groups to which we belong, only in the sense of the CoP serving to make the job more habitable (for instance, in coping with indifferent supervisors or unsupportive organizations) did interviewees describe a strain in enacting their roles as trainers. Interviewees did, however, see their role of “trainer” carrying over to the other groups to which they belonged (as with Devon’s example of
serving as facilitator for his son’s Boy Scout troop) and some recognized that they tended to play the same role (for instance, recording secretary) in each group.

Both of these phenomena (the role of trainer as evidenced in participating in other groups and playing the same role across groups) seem more closely tied to the final analytic component “belonging defined globally but experienced locally” which includes not only the way in which one enacts one’s role but also an understanding of the way one’s role (in this case, training), ties to a bigger picture or intersects other areas of life. The revised framework eliminates the concept of “nexus of multimembership” as too vague and overlapping the concept of the relationship between global and local. Storberg-Walker (2008) also found the matter of “nexus of multimembership” as additionally problematic for combining two “fuzzy” (p. 568) concepts — nexus and multimembership — which, while at face value seeming to make sense, on further analysis failing to prove useful. The analytic component “belonging defined globally but experienced locally” now includes the marker “identity related to the CoP may be replicated in other locales.”

As this aspect is the most involved, with five analytic components, and as this discussion introduces several revisions to the framework, a recap of this discussion of the identity aspect is offered here. The analytic components negotiated experience, learning trajectory, and belonging defined globally but experienced locally proved useful in the TRAIN study. There was evidence of emerging and evolving identity, paths of “motion” or learning that members take at different times, and connection of practice to a “broader constellation” (Wenger, 1998, p.162) The component “nexus of multimembership” and its idea of strain
in reconciling ideas across boundaries simply was not present in the TRAIN data. Data here (such as occupying one role across communities) did, however, seem more closely aligned with the idea of practice spanning boundaries. Therefore it is recommended that the analytic component “nexus of multimembership” be removed from the framework. Additionally, data regarding “membership” reflected a good deal of choice on the part of the individual member, such as the label one chooses to use and the persona one chooses to project. The marker “membership satisfies identity needs” has been added to the framework to reflect this as it was so pervasive in the data. Table 5.3 shows revisions to the original working framework with changes from the original, Table 3.1, noted by italics and strikethroughs:

Table 5.3

Identity Aspect with Changes Noted by Italics and Strikethroughs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Analytic Component</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Negotiated Experience</td>
<td>Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151). Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151); Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.3 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Membership “…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership includes competence: mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership satisfies identity needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Learning Trajectory “not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are five trajectories:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outbound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarity of identity is not linear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally “In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community” (p. 162).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local energy is directed at global issues and relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity related to CoP may be replicated in other locales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, on the matter of identity: Although this study focused on Wenger’s (1998) work, it was impossible not to notice during the examination of the “identity” aspect that the TRAIN CoP more closely mirrored Orr’s (1990) group of copier repairmen than Wenger’s insurance claim adjusters. While Orr’s group members were under the management of a single employing organization, they did not work alongside one another but were out in the field for much of the day, choosing to gather during lunch or after hours. They likewise were not as subject to the day-to-day dynamics and politics of a group housed within one office area, as with the insurance claims processors, might be. Management expected machines to be repaired only as the manuals and documentation allowed; a machine un repaired, if documentation was followed, was not perceived by management as failure on the part of the technician. But Orr’s repair technicians perceived a broken machine as a personal challenge, with failure to repair it a poor reflection on them, and sought to fix machines despite low management expectations. Failure to fix a machine was taken as a personal affront: They operated from what Orr described as the identity of “heroic troubleshooter” rather than any sense of obligation to their employer.
In interviews the TRAIN members similarly expressed their identification with the idea of a great trainer on a quest to stamp out bad training. Such identification was often described as outside the scope of their work, and even at odds with the desires of their supervisors (Parker: “They tell me to just read the PowerPoint to people and get everybody trained.”). Throughout interviews, artifact review, and conference observations, there were many instances of projects taken on entirely at the initiative of members, from single-topic presentations to extensive development work and delivery time devoted to the T101 course. One member must use her own vacation leave to attend meetings; Parker must use vacation leave to help with the T101 course. In a stance similar to that exhibited by the copier repair technicians, it is as “great trainers” that the TRAIN members are willing to do what they do, even in the absence of pressure to perform. As Contu and Willmott (2003) said in discussing Orr’s repair technicians, the TRAIN members appear to operate from a desire to “enact skillful work” (p. 292).

In this regard there are elements of Orr’s (1990) work that are more applicable to our understanding of how a community of practice (or, in this case, what Orr called “an occupational community) “works” than that provided by Wenger (1998). There has been no study comparing the two works: as Orr deals more heavily with the individual member in the community, and Wenger deals more with the construct of the community itself, there may be an opportunity for future thinking regarding such comparison.
Discussion: Learning

The final aspect of the Wenger (1998) framework, learning, provided a tool for obtaining rich data about what TRAIN has “learned” in its 23-year history. Asking for an examination of the evolution of the group over time, the analytic components include tuning the enterprise, evolving forms of mutual engagement, and developing the repertoire. Interviewees were enthusiastic, even eager, in discussing the evolution of TRAIN over time, and the abundance of artifacts both confirmed the oral history and provided the means for constructing a timeline of evolving interests and approaches. Data gathered reflected exactly what Wenger had found in his own study: within a CoP a good deal of negotiation and tuning occurs over time.

Although his overlapping use of the word “engagement” required some parsing, Wenger’s (1998) framework rightly recognizes the difference between casual social encounters and a deeper, longer-term fine-tuning of relationships. All but the least engaged of the interviewees were able to describe quickly, and in depth, the assorted talents and limitations of many members, in an understanding that develops as one achieves a history with the CoP.

Study data revealed a considerable amount of tuning the enterprise: aligning engagement with it, learning to hold each other accountable to it, and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what it is about. There were several instances in which TRAIN recognized a need to recalibrate. For instance, older members, even as they said they enjoyed their closeness, admitted that they might be viewed as insular and worked to
overcome that, a process evolving even now. Members, rather than be seen as heroes, wanted to overcome the emerging hero worship phenomenon. Additional tuning came with the acknowledgement that meeting the mission of stamping out bad training meant offering training in how to do that; meant making room for those who needed to develop; meant mentoring. In interviews, the conversations related to this tuning of the enterprise were those that tended to include the most emotion, with interviewees quite vocal about some issues involved in tuning. Jess noted that the tuning was, in her view, a testament to the TRAIN CoP’s process of maturation. Data gathered here also showed that the process of tuning never ends, with, for example, the current conversations about TRAIN’s position on technology in training and its acknowledgement (or lack thereof) of evidence-based practices.

The framework was also useful in surfacing not the conflicting interpretations themselves but the challenges members faced in learning to deal with them. With a group of volunteer members, to whom many felt something of a mutual debt, the process of challenging or critiquing one another proved very difficult. (This is complicated by the idea that the community aspect sets up an expectation of “not making life harder” for one another.) Some of this lies in the nature of the CoP: A group without a board cannot replace officers with whom they are displeased, and nonexistent rules cannot be enforced. Learning to manage problem participant behaviors — from concerns of “diva” attitudes to disruptive behavior — is an ongoing challenge for TRAIN. An issue of accountability that surfaced relates to the group’s awareness of and proactivity toward the need to self-
manage. Members are acutely aware that TRAIN is an unusual animal in the generally heavily-managed world of government. Cognizant of the scrutiny such an entity might face, they are careful to create sound agendas, produce quality products, and use their meeting time efficiently.

The final analytic component for “learning” is developing repertoire, styles, and discourses. Review of TRAIN artifacts, including the comparative examples from different iterations of the T101 course, showed ample evidence that such elements had indeed evolved over time. Per Wenger (1998) changes in repertoire can also include shifts in routines; in TRAIN’s case, the dynamics changed considerably following the widespread implementation of email. While on the one hand phone calls to a few members were replaced by large-scale email messages to the entire group, perhaps marking some loss of intimacy, technology also allowed for the quick sharing of materials and inclusion of more members in interactions.

A good deal of conversation centered around what has been forgotten over the years, with formerly prominent people unknown to younger members, and the real purpose of favorite activities from the “old days” largely forgotten. The one element of the “learning” aspect that did not prove useful in the TRAIN study was in regards to generational discontinuity. While the conversations of tuning the repertoire, and the review of artifacts, showed a number of shifts resulting from discontinuities, it was rarely tied to a generational issue. For example, newer members did not necessarily drive any change, but new technologies (such as the introduction of PowerPoint, available to most members by
1997) often did. The marker “generational discontinuities” in the original framework has been replaced with “discontinuities may be caused by arrival of new members or advent of new technologies” in the revised framework.

One matter with TRAIN that differed from Wenger is the way in which practice is transferred: while Wenger found with his group that practice was an ongoing social and interaction process, TRAIN does at times undertake the intentional handing down of practice. This may be related more to the fact that TRAIN is comprised of trainers, who would, it seems, naturally take a training approach. This marker proved useful as a point around which to gather data that conflicted with it. Further studies with CoPs having other business might better serve to confirm or disprove Wenger’s assertion that practice is not handed down. Table 5.4 shows revisions to the original working framework with changes from the original, Table 3.1, noted in italics:

Table 5.4

*Learning Aspect with Changes Noted in Italics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Analytic components (Wenger 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement: how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95)</td>
<td>Members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aligning engagement with the enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning to become and hold each other accountable to the enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Defining the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Learning       | Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses: “renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts, representations; recording and recalling events; inventing new terms and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines,” (p. 95) |
|                | Discontinuities may be caused by arrival of new members or advent of new technologies |
|                | Practice is both “handed down” and an ongoing social and interactional process |
Revised Framework

By and large Wenger’s (1998) framework did prove useful in understanding the internal dynamics of the TRAIN community of practice. Definitions of abstract words sometimes required considerable parsing, and as noted by Storberg-Walker (2008) the business of applying academic standards of research, such as linear words, paragraphs, and, ultimately, discrete units of analysis, proved challenging in working with concepts Wenger vigorously asserts are intersecting and interacting in processes that are iterative. In some cases the parsing appeared to prove less difficult for the study participants than the researcher. For instance, interviewees on their own recognized the existence of both participation and reification in making meaning, were able to clearly distinguish the two, could articulate them as of necessity occurring in duality, and provided examples of such interplay within the CoP.

In offering this revised framework the author adds some advice to future researchers: absent the markers, initially developed while designing this study and offered in revised form below, this study would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct. Data collection, coding, and interpretation would likely have lacked validity and the analysis would certainly have been less trustworthy. It is therefore recommended that future researchers employ the markers in framing their own work. It is hoped that this will both shore up validity as well as provide the researcher with an easier path in navigating the complex Wenger (1998) narrative.
In the revised framework the matters of definition (i.e., participation, engagement) have, it is hoped, been resolved. The concept of “nexus of multimembership” has been altered and placed within the analytic component “belonging locally defined globally”; the aspect “identity” as also been reduced to include what is relative to identity in terms of the CoP of interest, not a broader concept of identity or identity to include other communities. A change that proved helpful to this researcher is separating what might be considered collective, macro-level aspects (community and learning) from the individual, micro (meaning and identity) level. While Wenger’s interest in the CoP is as a collective, it is the individual that makes up the collective, and matters related to individual motivations and perceptions were pervasive in the data for this study of the TRAIN CoP. Viewing the aspects as concerned with macro or micro issues helped with reducing confusion over interwoven concepts and repetitive terminology. Markers have likewise been revised and included as offering further insight into data collection and interpretation.

shows the revised framework of original aspects (Wenger, 1998), the analytic components distilled from the Wenger text (first offered in table form by Storberg-Walker, 2008), and the markers added to create a working framework for this study, now revised in response to the study’s findings. Changes from the original working framework used in this study (Table 3.1) are noted with italics and strikethroughs:
Table 5.5

Revised CoP Framework Based on Key Findings

Changes from Original Noted by Italics/Strikethroughs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro Level Aspects</th>
<th>Analytic components (Wenger 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Joint Enterprise: negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response</td>
<td>Enterprise is different from the original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual accountability (<em>to one another</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enterprise is indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Mutual Engagement: engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance</td>
<td><em>Engagement differs from participation in that it requires being involved with others in meaningful ways</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enabling engagement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being included in what matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contributing to community maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formation of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of community and engagement are symbiotic: community satisfies motivation needs/makes job habitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Shared Repertoire: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts</td>
<td>Repertoire functions to further negotiate the enterprise via history and ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement: how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95)</td>
<td>Members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</td>
<td>Aligning engagement with the enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses: “renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts, representations; recording and recalling events; inventing new terms and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines,” (p. 95)</td>
<td>Discontinuities may be caused by arrival of new members or advent of new technologies Practice is both “handed down” and an ongoing social and interactional process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic aspect</td>
<td>Analytic components (Wenger, 1998)</td>
<td>markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Participation: living in the world, acting, interacting</td>
<td>Participation is defined as individual actions and individual’s way of making meaning. Participation can occur when member is not with the group. Mutual recognition. Participation is symbiotic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Reification: forms, points of focus, documents, monuments, instruments, projection</td>
<td>Creates points of focus. Final product may differ from intended use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Duality: interplay of participation and reification</td>
<td>Participation and reification transform each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>Analytic Component</td>
<td>Markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Negotiated Experience  Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151). Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151); Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154).</td>
<td>Participation becomes reified. Participants identify their own markers of transition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Membership “…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152).</th>
<th>Membership includes competence: mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire. Membership satisfies identity needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Learning Trajectory “not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154).</td>
<td>There are five trajectories: Peripheral, Inbound, Outbound, Insider, Boundary. Identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving. Temporarity of identity is not linear. Identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally “In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community”</td>
<td>Local energy is directed at global issues and relationships. Identity related to CoP may be replicated in other locales.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This revised framework serves several purposes. First, as with the example of engagement as compared to practice, it offers a further parsing of meaning and clarification of overlapping terms. For the researcher wishing to undertake study using the Wenger framework it is hoped that the revised framework will help to smooth the way for clarifying ideas and especially for designing a research approach, conducting data collection, and coding data gathered. Finally, as this study was interested in “usefulness,” it is hoped that the framework is now more useful in helping make sense of how a CoP works.

Implications for Practice

Much of the data gathered from the TRAIN study confirmed the findings of other researchers: the CoP is comprised of individuals seeking, typically at their own initiative, to get better at what they do; the group is successful at self-management; and imposition of structure or oversight would likely damage or destroy the TRAIN CoP. The study surfaced several new findings that may prove useful to management and should supplement the extant literature. The first of these are the means of transferring tacit knowledge, an area that current business literature identifies as one of particular interest to organizations. Most
of the interviewees described the value of both having reified material as well as seeing a good performer use it; for instance, both having the lesson plan and seeing a good trainer present it. While capturing knowledge in process manuals or databases was useful, the TRAIN study indicates that it is incomplete absent seeing a performer work with it. This strategy of providing modeling is one that might be adopted by organizations even absent a CoP itself, for instance, via mentoring or peer-to-peer training situations, or within classroom or on-the-job training sessions.

TRAIN has additionally developed its own means of tacit knowledge transfer: the T101 course is a deliberate, structured attempt at capturing what the CoP “knows” about good training, and intentionally means to pass that on. While TRAIN members, being workplace trainers, may be uniquely suited to this endeavor, it may be an approach that other organizations might consider. Organizations need to be cautious, however, in approaching the CoP about this: Thompson (2005) found that the organization explicity trying to harness the CoP’s knowledge was met with suspicion. Encouraging CoPs to capture what they know, not in terms of handing material over to management but in terms of letting the CoP show off or teach others, might prove a very effective means to kill the two birds of harnessing the CoP’s knowledge while also passing it to other performers.

Data also indicated possibilities for organizations to replicate some activities of the CoP (and, it is hoped, their outcomes) even if a CoP is not in place. Interviewees described the usefulness of being allowed to practice in a safe setting before performing back on the job. Even those trainers who were experienced still found value in first doing a dry run of a
new training topic. Providing such a safe place for practice, even if outside the purview of a CoP, is a strategy that likewise might be adopted by organizations seeking to support new hires or employees taking on new job tasks. A number of interviewees also spoke of finding a mentor upon joining TRAIN; while the idea of mentoring is not new to the workplace, it may be important that the TRAIN interviewees chose their own mentors from a large pool -- the whole CoP -- rather than had a mentor assigned to them. This allowed them to work with someone with whom they identified and sought to be like, in addition to someone they perceived as a credible expert. This, too, may prove of worth as an approach to structured workplace mentoring programs.

Interview data also showed that the preponderance of the most engaged TRAIN members were what interviewees called “high performers” or “high achievers,” individuals who wanted to improve practice for its own sake, learn for its own sake, and work on projects on their own initiative and sometimes on their own time, simply because members felt the projects needed doing and wanted to do them. Several interviewees were among the highly engaged, and whom others described as high performers; they spoke of how energizing and inspiring they found the TRAIN gatherings. Thus, rather than view the CoP simply as an ecosystem that may produce knowledge of use to the organization, organizations might consider the CoP as a motivational “space” for high performers -- including both novices and experts -- to find peer support, validation, encouragement, and energy. As founding member Chris said, “We needed a place.” Perhaps the organization satisfied with providing that place, rather than just with the explicit expectation of
improved performance or captured knowledge, will find the CoP a means of motivating and retaining its high performing staff.

Findings that, it is hoped, will be of interest to management also include the interviewee reports of their work situations. Interviewees expressed frustrations with being hired, or placed, into positions for which they admitted they did not feel qualified or were inadequately prepared, described their feelings of isolation, and reported what seemed a shocking indifference about their job performance on the part of their supervisors. While the CoP may serve as a source of support and respite, the findings point as well to the need for more thoughtful hiring, structured mentoring, and attention to the quality of supervision provided.

Those working in fields such as education, adult education, and training and development/HRD may find the findings of interest in learning more about trainer motivation, the reality of the trainer’s life, and strategies for designing train-the-trainer courses. For instance, the finding related to the importance of a trainer needing to have both access to the lesson plan and to see that lesson plan delivered by a good trainer may be a new idea for those involved in trainer development efforts.

The study should prove beneficial to CoPs seeking to better understand how they “work” or how to improve those “workings.” This study offers some insight for those engaged, for instance, the business of helping to develop novices -- such as TRAIN’s development of the “Gandhi” approach to mentoring -- and ways of establishing credibility in the wider organization.
Finally, it is hoped that the members of the TRAIN CoP will find this study useful. It in many ways it likely confirms many things that the group already knows: TRAIN members are enthusiastic, willing to work, and willing to share, and they love training. Findings regarding the perceptions of tensions might offer new insight. The study did produce, as hoped, something of a history of TRAIN and some documentation of tools and repertoire. Perhaps TRAIN will find something here to help enhance and sustain it for another 23 years.

Implications for Future Research

The TRAIN study revealed areas that may prove of interest to future researchers as well as practical suggestions for approaching future studies. While this study informed certain revisions to the framework, additional research into the matter of whether the framework is universally applicable to all types of CoPs (defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”) is indicated. Many questions were raised regarding the applicability of the framework to the nature of the CoP under study; Wenger’s (1998) intact work group was in a number of ways different from the TRAIN group of volunteers from disparate organizations. A comparative study, to perhaps include a third type of CoP — the one that exists entirely virtually -- may help to answer these questions and inform further refinement of the framework to make it more applicable across all CoPs.

Another area of potential interest to researchers comes from an offhand comment made during Lee’s interview. She described joining the group as a novice – brand-new to her
first training job – and happened to say, “I was lucky. I didn’t start out doing bad training and then have to go back and learn to do it better.” Parker, by comparison, came to TRAIN with a good deal of experience as a trainer that she felt she had to “unlearn.” She mentioned this in her interview and said, “I was willing to change, I wanted to change, but I don’t know that others in my situation would feel that way. There may be only so many new tricks you can teach an old dog.” This may indicate that timing of entry into a CoP may have bearing on individual learning and affect on practice and identity, and may be worth further inquiry.

Data regarding those most engaged in TRAIN indicated that they were among those described as “high performers.” This may indicate the usefulness of a study seeking to assess whether there is in fact a certain type of performer, or perhaps personality characteristics, that correlate with higher engagement in the CoP. In a similar vein, throughout the TRAIN interviews it appeared that those most engaged were also those who were most articulate about their own practices. Does engagement in the CoP lead to increased mindfulness about practice? Or is the inverse true: is the mindful practitioner the one more likely to be engaged in the CoP? These questions might prove interesting to future researchers, and the answers could prove of value to management.

The interview process also raised questions about another area that might lead to engagement or “learning” in the sense of enhanced practice. It is the matter of “passion,” a word used by several interviewees and, in fact, by Wenger in his definition of CoP. While many interviewees described entering TRAIN as novices, often with some lack of clarity
about their role or trepidation about their ability to perform, they typically described active TRAIN members, and the present-tense view of themselves, as being “passionate” about training. This raises the question, “At what point does ‘passion’ begin?” Jess and Sam both said it was the moment when they felt what they were doing as workplace trainers had really made a difference, when they could see that their “good training” had indeed helped a learner learn something. Interviewees did not tie “passion” to development of expertise, but, rather, simply feeling effective. If “passion” does not grow out of expertise, is it perhaps what drives the desire to become more expert? The matter of becoming passionate about one’s work might be of interest to researchers, even those not particularly interested in the study of CoPs.

A final issue that might point to future study also speaks to transfer of “learning” to practice. During interviews the word “confidence” came up repeatedly as something of a condition for both ability to learn and ability to implement that learning (performance): eight interviewees said they had developed confidence by participating in TRAIN. Working with TRAIN, seeing more experienced trainers work, and being able to engage in “dry runs” and get feedback helped them not just gain skill but confidence in applying new learning. For some this also provided the confidence needed to move into a larger arena: Jess, Mel, Parker, and Lee all spoke of providing presentations at national conferences, with the confidence gained from TRAIN as an enabler for that. The concept of confidence as it emerged in interviews also applied to feeling competent and credible as a contributing member of the CoP. Questions for future research might include: Is “confidence” a
condition of “mastery?” Is “confidence” a product of participation in a CoP? While Wenger (1998) decidedly stayed away from any discussion of confidence as important to learning (perhaps because it tends to reside in the area of psychology rather than the socio-cultural theories of learning that interest Wenger) its importance was inescapable in reviewing interview data. Future study might examine whether, and if so in what way, “confidence” affects transfer to practice; if found to be important, additional future study might seek to understand the ways in which the CoP can support development of confidence.

Also -- this was noted in Chapter Three as a limitation of the study -- Wenger’s framework invites only exploration of success: how meaning is made, how learning occurs. His acknowledgement that every moment in a CoP is not harmonious does not fully address this. Further study of interest might include what people do not learn, why people chose not to join or participate, and why some so intentionally choose not to identify with a label, for instance, coming to TRAIN meetings while saying, “I’m not a trainer.”

Finally, the TRAIN study also surfaced issues related to methodology. The first is the selection of the interview pool. Interviewees for this study were chosen based on their years of membership in the CoP. Except in matters of exploring group history, as the CoP’s “learning,” the length of membership proved less important in terms of quantity and quality of data obtained than the individual’s level of engagement in the community. A sample using a pool based on trajectory, position in the CoP, or degree of “engagement”
for instance, might produce different results. This presents still another challenge: it is clear from interviewee comments that one’s position within the group is a matter of self-definition. One who attends one meeting a year might call himself “involved” while another “marginal”; Dale, mentioned by nearly every other interviewee as a core TRAIN member, did not see himself that way. Considerable attention will need to be paid to definitions and parameters of membership in choosing a pool to use in a study based on trajectory rather than years of participation.

Then there is the matter of interest in Wenger’s (1998) work as it relates to theory-building research. While it is not an objective of this TRAIN study, a current interest of HRD researchers, including Storberg-Walker (2008) and others, is to develop an applied theory of communities of practice. As noted earlier, this was not a goal of Wenger’s, and his resulting framework, while useful for understanding internal dynamics of a CoP, is too broad and abstract to move directly into the realm of applied theory. It is also, as noted above, an extensive and cumbersome model with which to deal, and could prove daunting to the researcher attempting to apply it to a specific objective such as extracting an applied theory from it. Researchers interested in moving Wenger’s work toward an applied theory might wish to consider Storberg-Walker’s suggestion of developing separate theories around each of the four aspects of practice (meaning, community, identity, and learning) as they relate to the community of practice. This would help to meet the standard. As she notes:
… only after the four aspects of practice are better understood, then the next step to be taken would be to understand how the four aspects of practice can be integrated into one overarching CoP applied theory. The next step would possibly generate a fully operationalized CoP theory with the specified levels and definitions sufficient for applied theory (p. 575).

Conclusion

For the most part the Wenger (1998) framework did prove useful in helping to understand the internal dynamics of the TRAIN CoP. The aspects of meaning, learning, identity, and community were certainly in place, and the analytic components, with only the exception of “nexus of multimembership,” indeed proved something that might be regarded as the blocks from which TRAIN is built. Issues related to learning, in terms of development of practice, to the CoP’s experience of learning over time, and in terms of the way tacit knowledge is managed, were largely surfaced through approaching them via the lens of Wenger’s framework.

Wenger’s exclusive focus on the collective of the CoP may have caused him to overlook some issues more specific to the individual, or to interactions among individuals. There is little to support exploration of, for instance, matters of power, politics, or conflict, issues that, perhaps not coincidentally, did not seem of much interest to Wenger. While there was little of this present in the TRAIN group, in retrospect the researcher wonders what she would have done with the data if it had surfaced. The framework is likewise thin in
offering direction on some matters that were clearly important to individual members of the TRAIN CoP, such as motivation for joining and the need not just to share knowledge but to have a place that allowed one to perform at full capacity. It is hoped that future researchers will further refine and extend the framework to better inform these areas.

A final question: if the researcher had not been using the Wenger (1998) framework in approaching this study, would it have emerged? Had some TRAIN members just been asked to tell their stories, and asked to share artifacts for review, and been observed during a gathering, would the researcher have discerned areas of “meaning” (what individuals learn and apply), “community” (what happens inside the group), “identity” (how the group changes individuals), and “learning” (evidence of group evolution over time) as comprising “practice”? I believe, yes, this essential structure would have emerged, and I hope I would have been sharp enough to see it. (This is not just the researcher’s ego: this study of the TRAIN CoP sought data to better understand the CoP as an entity unto itself, where other researchers have tended to examine the relationship of a CoP to its employing organization or the effect of certain phenomena, such as mandated participation or the imposition of organizational control.) It was not Wenger’s intent to create a theory of CoPs; rather, his interest was in developing new thinking about learning as a socio-cultural phenomenon, learning as situated, and learning in work. While his resulting framework may be too complex and sometimes clumsy, with gaps here and there, Wenger appears to have developed a framework that may be viewed as a work-in-progress to those working toward a theory of communities of practice.
Vignette Four: A Note from the Researcher

I have had the good fortune for many years now to be part of an active, vibrant community of practice, comprised of some of the most committed, competent, highest-performing training practitioners anywhere, that meets Wenger’s own criteria of people “who share a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.” TRAIN has been a source of great professional and personal support, and validation and inspiration, and also delight and friendship, for me through three jobs, a difficult boss (see the TRAIN repertoire, Appendix J, for “Rumplestiltskin”), three books, one dissertation, the development of two huge training curricula and many new workshops, my first national speaking event, my first international speaking event, the deaths of my father, a brother, a nephew and my godmother, my wedding, and nine years of graduate school. While admittedly, after completing two advanced degrees in training and development, I no longer find that TRAIN gives me much new to take back to my practice, I have found new energy in being much more involved in developing and supporting newer trainers and those who are struggling to “enact skilful work.”

I worry that my own experience with TRAIN is an opportunity most other professionals never have: There don’t seem to be very many other TRAINs around. I worry about those who, it seems, work against all odds trying to deliver even the most basic developmental opportunities to the staff they are charged with training. I worry that many good trainers leave training, some because they realize it is not something they can commit to as a lifelong pursuit, but others -- too many others -- because they feel they can’t
continue working for indifferent managers and organizations that do not value training. I worry when I hear that others are not allowed, or must use personal time, to participate in TRAIN.

As I was preparing this manuscript, members of my advisory committee asked me to include something on my own epistemology, which appears in Chapter Three under “Researcher Biases and Beliefs.” In that section I talk about my belief that different sides of one story can all be “true,” and in making our stories “true” we look for data that will confirm or disconfirm them. And here is my last worry: I worry that even as managers and organizations say they want to learn more about communities of practice that they will only look for what will make their stories “true.”

I know managers – among them one of my own former managers -- who simply cannot believe that some people like their work so much that they’ll go off on their own and do more of it. They are incredulous that some people so crave self-development, and so want to become expert and skilled, that they will pay out of pocket to attend a conference in a non-resort location, drive their own cars there, and stay in a room at a somewhat primitive retreat center with no TV or internet connection. And they are disbelieving when told that such people can organize and manage themselves and work long hours and be productive without anyone supervising them or assigning work or putting measures in place to evaluate their “performance.”

I wish I could just bind the TRAIN interview transcripts and hand them over to these managers. Then again, I’m afraid that in needing to keep their stories “true” they would
just disregard the nearly 300 pages of often deeply personal reflections on loving what you do, the exhilaration you feel in doing it well, and the deep satisfaction in finding a place in which you’re allowed to do it. This isn’t the only data that might be disregarded:

Thompson’s (2005) study, among others – peer-reviewed, sound inquiries – proves that too much oversight and too many attempts to control a community of practice will destroy it. Yet organizations continue to ask how they can oversee and control CoPs. It is the nature of organizations to control things; that something could succeed without this control therefore doesn’t fit their story as “true.” I had a manager some months ago tell me he was going to make one of his staff attend TRAIN meetings as part of her performance evaluation plan. I told him about the Pastoors (2007) study, which offers evidence that forcing people to participate in CoPs tends to have a negative effect on the employees (who see mandated CoP participation not as a growth opportunity but just as more work) but he didn’t especially want to hear it. It wasn’t fitting into his “true” story.

While this study was focused primarily on Wenger’s (1998) framework, I hope that in reporting the findings that I have added to the existing literature additional convincing proof that a group of unsupervised employees can perfectly well manage themselves, want to enhance themselves, and, left to their own devices and given a “space,” can be remarkably committed and productive. I hope I have provided a new view on the need for people to feel supported and valued in enacting their work. In presenting the TRAIN data I hope I have conveyed some of the sense of pride and deep satisfaction the members report finding in their work and their community, and captured some of the sense of reward
members find in engagement with other skilled practitioners. I hope that this study that sought to “understand” the TRAIN CoP will in some small way help organizations and managers revise their own “true” stories into new, truer, ones.
REFERENCES


York: CRC Press.


Lave, J. (1997). The culture of acquisition and the practice of understanding. In D. Kirshner & J.A. Whitson (Eds.), *Situated cognition: Social, semiotic, and...*


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me about TRAIN.

2. Aspect of practice: Meaning (questions as needed)
   a. How do you participate in TRAIN? In what ways are you involved outside of the regular meetings?
   b. What are the areas of focus of TRAIN, as you perceive them?
   c. How would you say TRAIN looks to an outsider? What would that person say we do? Would that person’s view agree with what TRAIN would say it is or does?
   d. Do you feel TRAIN has made a mark on the world, or created a legacy? How?

3. Aspect of practice: Community (questions as needed)
   a. TRAIN has existed for over 20 years now. What would you say sustains it?
   b. How do you see people in TRAIN working together?
   c. What would you say is your place in TRAIN? Do you feel “included”? Would you describe yourself as a core member, someone more on the edges, or somewhere in between?
   d. Would you say TRAIN members share similar goals and values? What are they? How do they influence TRAIN activities?
   e. Can you talk about a project you’ve seen TRAIN members take on together? How did it start and end?
   f. What kinds of conflicts exist? How are they managed?
g. What expectations do TRAIN members have of each other? What are “rules” for participating?

h. What are some famous TRAIN stories or in-jokes? Acronyms?

3. Aspect of practice: Learning (questions as needed)

a. How has your own practice changed as a result of your TRAIN participation?

b. TRAIN has members with a wide range of ages and varying years of experience and TRAIN membership. Do you see any “generational” issues? If so, what are they?

c. Please tell me about relationships. How long have you been a member? What kinds of relationships have you developed with other members? How have those relationships changed over time?

4. Aspect of practice: Identity (questions as needed)

a. What other groups do you belong to, including groups of coworkers, professional associations like ASTD, or even church or community groups? How are you “different” depending on which group you’re with?

b. Would you say TRAIN has changed who you are? In what ways?

c. TRAIN members get together quarterly, and at the annual conference. Does TRAIN affect a broader arena? What more global issues does TRAIN seek to address?
APPENDIX B: IRB APPLICATION

North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
SUBMISSION FOR NEW STUDIES

Title of Project: The Wenger Framework and Communities of Practice

Principal Investigator: Jane Bozarth
Department: Adult & Higher Education

Source of Funding (required information): No funding
(if externally funded include sponsor name and university account number)

Campus Address (Box Number)
Off-campus: [redacted]

Email: [redacted] Phone: [redacted]
Fax: [redacted]

RANK: ☐ Faculty
☒ Student: ☐ Undergraduate; ☐ Masters; or ☐ PhD
☒ Other (specify): Ed.D.

If rank is other than faculty, please list below the name and email address of the faculty sponsor of this project:

Faculty sponsor: Julia Storberg-Walker; Diane Chapman Email: [redacted]

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator:

Jane Bozarth (typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal investigator of record.

Faculty Sponsor:
In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

A framework published by Etienne Wenger (1998) describes the concept of “community of practice” as having four aspects of practice, learning, meaning, community, and identity, distilled into 13 analytic components. This study seeks to test Wenger’s framework against an existing community of practice, the North Carolina Training Network Team (TRAIN) group.

This study is important as communities of practice are an important knowledge management tool; organizations can benefit from knowledge gained about the workings of this community of practice; scholarship will benefit from refinement of the framework proposed by Wenger.

It is important to note, as it relates to many of the answers below, that participation in the TRAIN group is entirely voluntary, and there are no membership requirements or fees. The group is self-managed and is not under the auspices of any employer or larger organization. It is reasonable to assume that members, by dint of their continued participation, find membership useful and enjoyable. Additionally, this study seeks to assess the validity of Wenger’s framework in terms of factors such as learning and meaning, and to document any products, such as lesson plans, that have been created by the group. Informal preliminary conversations with group members indicate willingness—even enthusiasm—to share experiences, stories, and outcomes of
their TRAIN membership, and founding members are especially interested in seeing the group history
documented. There is no anticipated risk or negative consequence to the subjects.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.
This study will satisfy the dissertation requirement for the Ed.D. in Training and Development, department of
Adult and Higher Education.

B. SUBJECT POPULATION
1. How many subjects will be involved in the research? 9 to 15 directly involved as
interviewees; observation of group meetings would involve perhaps 60.

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials
that will be used.
Participants will be selected by the researcher using purposive sampling. E-mail solicitation to the
group mailing list would ask for volunteers interested in describing their experiences as members of
this community. The email will state that participation will require a 60-to-90 minute interview, and
perhaps a follow-up interview. Interviewees will also be asked to share any artifacts (such as lesson
plans) that they have developed as a result of participation in the group.

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including
those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.
Individuals who describe themselves as “members” of this group; definition of “membership” is
determined by the individual. Group participation is voluntary; as subjects are on the mailing list
they have at least asked to be included in communications. Sampling will strive for interview
subjects that span a range of years of membership and self-described levels of participation. Should
a large volunteer pool exist, it will be explained via email and volunteers will be asked to self-select
out of the pool; however, every effort will be made to meet with every volunteer. Additional
exclusion could occur if the scheduling of face-to-face meetings proves difficult.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.
Group membership is overwhelmingly female, balanced fairly evenly between Caucasian and
African-American members, and spans a range of ages from 24 to 67. As sampling strives to obtain
subjects across a range of experience and participation levels it is not anticipated that any group
might be excluded.

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student;
employer/employee.
The researcher is a member of this group but there is no employment or reporting relationship
between researcher and
subjects.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study: NONE
   minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the
   parent/guardian signature
   fetuses
pregnant women
persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
persons with physical disabilities
economically or educationally disadvantaged
prisoners
elderly
students from a class taught by principal investigator
other vulnerable population.

If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of participant and description</th>
<th>Type of participation</th>
<th>Time commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual group members</td>
<td>1-2 face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>2.5 hours total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group members in large (50+ people) meeting setting</td>
<td>Observation of activities and interactions; documentation of discussion topics and questions answered and asked</td>
<td>None; will occur in the course of meeting participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher will meet in person one-on-one with volunteers who will be asked to describe their participation in the group: why they joined, what they felt they have gained by participating, ways in which their approach to practice and perception of themselves as practitioners may have changed as a result of participation, and why they continue to participate. Interviews will be audiotaped. Subjects will additionally be asked to share any materials or tools (such as lesson plans) they have developed that they link to their membership in the group. The procedure is largely one of capturing the stories of members.

Group meetings include training presentations by one or more members. Observations of group meetings will be conducted and will document agenda items and summarize group discussions. Notes will include any materials, such as handouts or powerpoint shows, shared with the group. Documentation will be anonymous (ie, “a first-time attendee asked for some tips on developing PowerPoint shows”); names appearing on meeting artifacts such as agendas will be removed or changed. The goal of the observations is to document the overall functions and activities of the group, not behaviors of specific individuals.

Artifacts developed by the group, such as lesson plans and job aids, will be compiled, as will elements of group process such as meeting agendas.
Data gathered will be analyzed by first coding for the items in Wenger’s framework, then again for items that the framework may have excluded.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?
   60 to 90 minutes for initial interview, with the possibility of a shorter follow-up interview.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS
1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

   No risk is foreseen.

2. Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

   No

3. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

4. Participation in this community of practice is voluntary; it is assumed, then, that participants find it a positive, useful group. There is no anticipation of degradation, offense, threat, or embarrassment for subjects.

5. How will data be recorded and stored?

   a. How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials? Interview subjects will be given fictitious names. Any materials directly associated with a subject (such as a lesson plan) will be identified with the same pseudonym; materials ascribed to ‘the group’ will have any identifying information removed. No participant will be identified by name in the study.

      Consent forms and recorded data will be stored separately.

   b. How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described? Individual responses will be transcribed verbatim into Word documents.

5. If audio or videotaping is done how will the tapes be stored and how/when will the tapes be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed upon approval of the dissertation.

6. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

   No
E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This does not include any form of compensation for participation.

1. What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

Group members will have access to the findings and will be able to utilize the information as documented group history and a catalog of artifacts produced. Findings may also inform the members of ways to enhance, strengthen, and ensure continued existence of the group.

F. COMPENSATION

1. Explain compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.
   There is no compensation. All participants may freely withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

2. If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.
   No class credit.

G. COLLABORATORS

1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on Cover Page) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number. None.

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.

Participants will have access to their own interview data at all times during the study.

H. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.

   Potential interview questions attached.
   Instructions/example of discussion mapping format (for use in group observations) is attached.

2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.

   Attached.

3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.
   Interview volunteer recruitment letter: attached.
Dear TRAIN Members,

Hello, and I hope this finds everyone well. I have reached the dissertation phase of my doctoral program and am planning a study on communities of practice with TRAIN as the focus. My research plan includes interviews with 12 to 15 TRAIN members with assorted years of membership and levels of involvement in TRAIN. It is hoped that this study will extend the understanding of communities of practice for use by businesses, other researchers, and other communities (particularly of trainers). I hope that the study will benefit TRAIN as well by providing a documented history and, perhaps, some insight into what has helped to sustain our community over the years.

If you are interested in meeting with me for an interview I would need an hour to ninety minutes in a fairly quiet location (due to the need for audio recording) and could come to you at your convenience. There is a possibility of a shorter follow-up interview. In the final report your identity will be protected with a pseudonym. Any information that could potentially identify you will be omitted or masked. You will be given the opportunity to review a transcript of your interview prior to its use. You may opt out of participation at any time, and ask that your recording not be used in the study.

I hope you are interested in participating in this study. I am especially looking for 3 to 5 members who joined TRAIN in each of the time periods 1985-1993, 1994-2001, and 2002-present. Please contact me via reply email or via telephone at 919-452-8712 if you would like to participate and are available, or if you would like more information before volunteering. While I do know most of you, it would be helpful when you contact me if you could include the approximate date that you joined TRAIN.

MANY thanks for your time and interest! I look forward to hearing back from you, and to seeing many of you at the upcoming conference.

Best,
Jane
An Informed Consent Statement has two purposes: (1) to provide adequate information to potential research subjects to make an informed choice as to their participation in a study, and (2) to document their decision to participate. In order to make an informed choice, potential subjects must understand the study, how they are involved in the study, what sort of risks it poses to them and who they can contact if a problem arises (see informed consent checklist for a full listing of required elements of consent). Please note that the language used to describe these factors must be understandable to all potential subjects, which typically means an eighth grade reading level. The informed consent form is to be read and signed by each subject who participates in the study before they begin participation in the study. A duplicate copy is to be provided to each subject.

If subjects are minors (i.e. any subject under the age of 18) use the following guidelines for obtaining consent:

- **0-5 years old** – requires signature of parent(s)/guardian/legal representative
- **6 – 10 years old** - requires signature of parent(s)/guardian/legal representative and verbal assent from the minor. In this case a minor assent script should be prepared and submitted along with a parental consent form.
- **11 - 17 years old** - requires signature of both minor and parent/guardian/legal representative

If the subject or legal representative is unable to read and/or understand the written consent form, it must be verbally presented in an understandable manner and witnessed (with signature of witness). If there is a good chance that your intended subjects will not be able to read and/or understand a written consent form, please contact the IRB office (919-515-4514) for further instructions.

For your convenience, attached find a sample consent form template that contains necessary information. In generating a form for a specific project, the principal investigator should complete the underlined areas of the form and replicate the bold areas.
North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study  The Wenger Framework and Communities of Practice
Principal Investigator Jane Bozarth  Faculty Sponsor (if applicable) Julia Storberg-Walker; Diane Chapman

We are asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to assess the validity of Etienne Wenger’s framework (meaning/identity/learning/community) against an actual community of practice (the North Carolina TNT group). Essentially, I want to understand more about how a community of practice “works” by hearing about your experience and stories with TNT: why people join, why they attend meetings, other ways they participate, whether and how the membership in the practice affects their work. This will also help us to record TNT history.

INFORMATION
You were selected as a participant because you describe yourself as a “member” of TRAIN. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, one-on-one with the principal researcher, for a period of 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will be recorded on analog audio tape. There may be an additional shorter follow-up interview. Interviews will ask you to describe your experience in, history with, and participation as a member of TRAIN. Also, you will be asked to share any products or tools, such as lesson plans, that you link to your participation in TRAIN.

I will use fictitious names to avoid identifying any participant. The TNT group will be described using a pseudonym. The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. The audio tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed upon approval of the dissertation.

RISKS
No risks are anticipated.

BENEFITS
In addition to contributing to the scholarly research on in terms of refining a model of communities of practice, this study will further inform the question of how organizations can harness and utilize communities of practice as a knowledge management tool. It will also serve to document the 23-year history of TRAIN.
CONFIDENTIALITY
Data will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator’s office. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

Your confidentiality will be maintained by the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to the data from your interview(s) before your name is removed. You will receive a copy of your interview(s) to review for accuracy before data is used for the study. Data will be reported using “made up” names to maintain confidentiality, and any demographic information that could indirectly identify you will be masked so you can’t be identified. This data will be published in a doctoral dissertation for North Carolina State University and possibly a journal(s) or conference proceeding(s).

COMPENSATION (if applicable)
There will be no compensation for participation.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT (if applicable)
N/A

Consent, Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time. Withdrawal from this research will not influence your relationship with the researchers or with TNT. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate in this research, and have read and understand the information presented in this consent form.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jane Bozarth, at [redacted], at 919 [redacted]. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. David Kaber, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-3086) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148)
PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed at your request.

CONSENT
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature________________________________________ Date
__________________

Investigator's signature________________________________________ Date
__________________
APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION MEMO

MEMORANDUM

From: Jane Bozarth
To: TRAIN Conference Attendees
Date: May 19, 2008

As you know, I am nearing the end of my doctoral studies at NC State. My dissertation topic is an examination of communities of practice with TRAIN as the focus. I am looking at several elements of a community of practice including how members of the group interact with each other: where folks sit, how people group themselves, levels of participation, in what ways people interact and work together, that sort of thing.

As part of this research study I’ll be taking notes during the conference. I’m looking primarily at overall levels of interaction and engagement. In my final report any identifying information regarding particular interaction will be masked, but in the interest of transparency wanted to make sure everyone knew I’d be taking some notes. I appreciate everyone’s support over my many years of graduate study and hope that this final project will result in a product that will be of value to us all.
APPENDIX E: CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

Yin (1994) recommends development of a research protocol, saying that reliability of a case study is increased to the degree that the protocol provides a detailed, explicit process that is easily replicable by other researchers. Yin provides five components for a case study protocol: 1) field procedures, 2) resources, 3) case study questions, 4) analysis plan, and 5) case study report. The protocol below is written in future tense as it outlines the approach planned prior to beginning the study.

Field Procedures: Gain Access to Case

Phone and email contact will be made with the member of the case under study responsible for group communications. Details about the study will be shared. The contact will then either a) send an email or b) provide the researcher with an email list for soliciting participants amenable to being interviewed. Purposeful sampling will be used to obtain an interview pool of group members with an array of experience with the group, in terms of both years of association with the group and extent of participation in the group. The principal investigator will follow all IRB guidelines and ensure full and informed consent of the research participants.

Resources: Outside Specialists

The researcher will seek the assistance and guidance of research specialists, as well as IRB specialists, at North Carolina State University in order to produce the best practices in design, method, and analysis.
Resources: Technology

Computers and computer software are available to complete this study.

Resources: Time

The data collection and interpretation phases of the study will require an extensive time commitment from the researcher. This research design is built to allow for flexibility in accommodating both research participant and researcher's contingent needs.

Resources: Money

While interviewees have not yet been identified, it is anticipated that some travel will be required in order to conduct face-to-face interviews. Although all potential interviewees are located within North Carolina, interviews could require the researcher to travel across the state’s 550-mile span, with accompanying expenses for auto travel and possible overnight hotel stays.

Case Study Questions and Sources of Data

This study seeks to answer the question, “Is Wenger’s (1998) framework useful in understanding the internal dynamics of an existing community of practice (CoP)?” The following questions and accompanying lists of data sources guide the researcher throughout the case study. These questions may be amended as necessary during the iterative process of data collection and analysis. The questions are based on Wenger’s (1998) framework of the four aspects of practice and accompanying analytic components (Table E.1; adapted from Storberg-Walker, 2008). Additional markers for each of the
analytical components have been drawn from Wenger’s text, as they occur in his discussion of each.

Table Appendix E.1

*Wenger Framework and Markers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Aspect of Practice</th>
<th>Brief description of Analytic Components (Wenger, 1998)</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td><em>Participation</em>: living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, mutuality</td>
<td>Mutual recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation goes beyond specific activities with specific people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation shapes both our experience and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td><em>Reification</em>: forms, points of focus, documents, instruments, projection</td>
<td>Creating points of focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final product differs from intended use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td><em>Duality</em>: interplay of participation and reification</td>
<td>Participation and reification transform each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td><em>Joint Enterprise</em>: negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response</td>
<td>Enterprise is negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enterprise is indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td><em>Mutual Engagement</em>: engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance</td>
<td>Enabling Engagement (being included in what matters; community maintenance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diversity and partiality (developing relationships)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Appendix E.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th><strong>Shared Repertoire</strong>: stories, artifacts, styles, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts</th>
<th>Repertoire functions to further negotiate the enterprise via history and ambiguity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Identity** | **Negotiated Experience**  
Identity emerges as “we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others” (p. 151).  
Identity exists “in the constant work of negotiating the self” (p. 151) as we give meaning to participation and reification (above). Identity “is not an object, but a constant becoming” (p. 154). | Participation becomes reified  
Participants identify their own markers of transition |
| **Identity** | **Membership**  
“…our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails” (p. 152). | mutuality of engagement,  
accountability to an enterprise,  
negotiability of a repertoire |
Table Appendix E.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Learning Trajectory</th>
<th>Identity is fundamentally temporal/evolving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion—one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (p. 154).</td>
<td>temporality of identity is not linear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are five types of trajectories: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, and boundary trajectories.</td>
<td>identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Nexus of Multimembership</th>
<th>Identity requires multimembership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“we all belong to many communities of practice…some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities” (p. 158). Identity entails the experience of multimembership and the “work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (p. 158).</td>
<td>Reconciliation is required to maintain one identity across boundaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Appendix E.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Belonging Defined Globally but Experienced Locally: “In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity—even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice—is not just local to that community” (p. 162).</th>
<th>Local energy is directed at global issues and relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Evolving Forms of Mutual Engagement: (p. 95) : how to engage, what helps and what hinders; establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with (p. 95)</td>
<td>Members gain CoP-wide awareness of subtleties of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Understanding and Tuning their Enterprise (p. 95) aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about.”</td>
<td>Aligning engagement with the enterprise learning to become and hold each other accountable to the enterprise “Defining the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about,” (p. 95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table Appendix E.1 continued

| Learning | Developing their Repertoire, Styles, and Discourses: “renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts, representations; recording and recalling events; inventing new terms and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines,” (p. 95) | Generational discontinuities: arrival of new members causes discontinuities. Practice is not “handed down” but is an ongoing social and interactional process. |

**Case Study Questions and Sources of Data for Aspect of Practice: Meaning**

Interviews, observation, and review of artifacts and elements of repertoire will be employed to explore whether, and how, participation and reification occur, as well as other ways CoP members make “meaning”.

**Case Study Questions and Sources of Data for Aspect of Practice: Community**

Interviews, observation, and review of artifacts and elements of repertoire will be employed to explore whether evidence indicates the existence of shared enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. Additionally, data will be sought to determine in what other ways, if any, that “community” is manifest in the CoP.

**Case Study Questions and Sources of Data for Aspect of Practice: Learning**

Interviews, observation, and review of artifacts and elements of repertoire will be
employed to determine the existence of evolving forms of mutual engagement, understanding and tuning enterprise, and developing repertoire, styles, and discourse, as well as other ways “learning” occurs.

Case Study Questions and Sources of Data for Aspect of Practice: Identity

Interviews, observation, and review of artifacts and elements of repertoire sought to examine the ways in which “identity” develops through membership in the CoP. This included exploration of whether identity changes via negotiated experience in the CoP, the types of trajectories that exist for learning in the CoP, and whether the identities developed in multimembership have been reconciled into one identity across boundaries.

Case Study Questions and Sources of Data for Additional Aspects of Practice

The goal of the study was to examine the adequacy of Wenger’s framework (1998). Interviews, observation, and review of artifacts and elements of repertoire were utilized to determine what, if any, aspects of practice exist in addition to meaning, community, learning, and identity.

Members of the CoP under investigation are employed by disparate organizations. As outside, contextual events could affect the validity of the study these were sometimes examined as well.

Observation Protocol

It was hoped that observations will provide the opportunity to gather data regarding the community aspect that might prove difficult to discern from interviews, for instance, the nature and nuances of relationships, mutual engagement in group activities, and the
interaction of members with one another. Observations may additionally provide the opportunity to extend information provided by interviewees. As much as possible, individual comments specific to training, group activities and interactions, relationships, identity, and practice will also be documented.

Observations will be conducted during TRAIN conference presentations. This will include the two plenary sessions. There are also 3 periods of two concurrent presentations available for observation, offered in adjoining rooms. During each period of concurrent presentations the researcher will observe the session with the greatest number of attendees in hopes that this will offer the greatest opportunity to observe group dynamics and interactions. Observations will also be conducted during group gatherings outside of conference sessions, such as breaks and meals, both located in a common area. After-hours activities will be observed as opportunities are available and as the researcher was invited/welcomed.

Each observation will include the following:

1. Brief description of context. For conference sessions: topic of presentation, presentation strategies used (lecture, discussion, small group work, games, etc.), room setup, whether participants were assigned to seats or to groupings or allowed to choose their own, tools or documents used. For informal gatherings: situation, setting, length.
2. Photographs showing seating arrangements.
3. Discussion mapping diagram (during conference sessions). As many observations will be done during conference presentations, mapping will be done primarily during periods of
group discussion or activities (not during lecture portions of presentations) to reflect where and among whom interaction is occurring. (Note: discussion mapping is used commonly by members of this group. A volunteer helper will create the discussion maps in order to free up the researcher for other documentation tasks.)

4. Reportage of verbal comments, as much as possible, spoken to the entire group, such as questions asked and answers provided and topics that spark discussion. Also, documentation of the gist of conversations within small groups, as much as the researcher could access this. References to tools and elements of repertoire were recorded as well.

In planning observations to gather data relevant to the Wenger (1998) framework, and in justifying the protocol to the researcher’s advisory committee and the University Institutional Review Board, it was anticipated that data emerging from observations might include examples such as those shown in Table Appendix E.2.

Table Appendix E.2

*Examples of Data Expected from Observation*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(note: Wenger defines this as ways in which the individual makes meaning/ ‘learns’))</td>
<td>How, how much, and in what ways people interact with one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of information presented in conference sessions/descriptions of how information might be applied back on the job</td>
<td>Whether and how new members/first-time attendees/returning members appear to be welcomed/included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions asked during sessions</td>
<td>Behaviors or comments related to community maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of points of focus of the CoP</td>
<td>Evidence of conflict/resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments regarding effect of CoP activities on own practice, ways own practice has evolved/changed</td>
<td>Evidence of mutual engagement such as group projects or endeavors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence of shared repertoire, shared points of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New ideas emerge from shared repertoire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Appendix E.2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(note: Wenger defines this as the group’s learning)</td>
<td>References to membership in other CoPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments regarding group history, memories of events,</td>
<td>Description of self/ways of introducing self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared stories, in-jokes</td>
<td>Comments regarding self’s place/trajectory in this CoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information related to repertoire or tools</td>
<td>Comments regarding stress in reconciling membership in this community with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments regarding group mission or focus</td>
<td>Comments regarding evolving identity; ways in which identity has changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways in which members are regarded: who is asked for help, who is regarded as ‘expert’ on a topic</td>
<td>Comments regarding markers of transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of holding one another accountable to the enterprise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment of enterprise with engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments regarding group routines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments regarding groups’ future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Review of Documents**

It is not known what documents exist and will be made available to the researcher. It is anticipated that documents will include training materials such as lesson plans, community artifacts such as agendas and meeting minutes, and photographs of group activities. Documents will be sorted according to their respective aspect (meaning,
community, identity, and learning) and, where possible, with the corresponding analytic component. It is anticipated that documents and community artifacts will serve to confirm or disconfirm interview and observation data as well as support the construction of a history of group interests and activities over time.

**Analysis Plan**

This study will rely on the Wenger (1998) framework outlined in Table Appendix E.1. The aspects of practice, analytic components, and markers will guide the data collection plan, the actual collection of data, and the interpretation of the data. From the analytic strategy, the study will then use pattern matching and explanation building as the modes of analysis.

**Case Study Report**

According to Yin (1984), preliminary decisions about the case study report need to be made at the beginning of the research process. These decisions include 1) what is the structure of the report; 2) who is the intended audience of the report; 3) when to start writing; 4) what is the appropriate level of anonymity in cases; and 5) how to further increase the construct validity of the case.

**Case Study Report: Structure**

The case study will be structured in accordance with Wenger’s 4 aspects of practice and their accompanying underlying analytic components.

**Case study Report: Intended Audience**
Three potential audiences for this report have been identified. Depending on the findings and the demands for disseminating the information, one, two, or three alternative reports may be created. First, business leaders will benefit as the report will further understanding of the internal dynamics of a successful community of practice. The report will further understanding and inform approaches of those scholarly colleagues pursuing research on communities of practice. Finally, HRD practitioners and managers will benefit as the report will focus on the significance of the findings to the discipline of human resource development, to employee development, and to development of human resource development practitioners.

*Case Study Report: Writing Schedule*

The report will be drafted in six sections. The bibliography section can be completed after the literature review and updated as necessary. The methodological can be drafted after the procedures for data collection and analysis are designed. The section for descriptive data about the case being studied can be drafted after data collection and before analysis begins. The data analysis section can be drafted and redrafted as analysis proceeds. The findings section can be drafted after analysis section is complete, and the implications section will comprise the final section of the report.

*Case Study Report: Anonymity Issues*

For this case study, the individual participants will remain confidential and a case analysis will be presented. Gender-neutral pseudonyms (Pat, Chris) will be assigned to interviewees and specifics regarding employing organization and location will be omitted.
from the report. Names and other identifiers will be removed from any artifacts included in the final report.

Planned Schedule of Activities

Table Appendix E.3 outlines the projected timeline for completion of this study.

Table Appendix E.3

*Planned Schedule of Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Approximate Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Draft Proposal to Chair</td>
<td>February 25, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend Proposal</td>
<td>March 15, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise and Resubmit Proposal</td>
<td>April 15, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin Data Collection</td>
<td>May 3, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Data Collection</td>
<td>June 30, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Data Analysis</td>
<td>July 31, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Draft Dissertation to Chair /Grad School</td>
<td>August 18, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Draft Dissertation to Chair/Grad School</td>
<td>September 30, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend Dissertation</td>
<td>October 20, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F: CONFERENCE ATTENDEE COMMENTS

Transcription of posters showing attendee responses to questions. A photo of one poster is shown below in figure Appendix F.1.

1. How has TRAIN changed your practice?
   - Learner first!
   - Focus on experiential learning
     - Focus on outcomes
     - Focus on reducing lecture and improving materials
     - Finding my 20%
     - Choosing when I sweat
   - By raising my awareness of my training role and where I can improve
   - Think outside the box!
   - Validates my belief that training is important
   - TRAIN changed my practice because I will focus on giving my audience the 20% first
   - My training is more engaging and with a ‘learner first’ focus. I try to focus more on my trainees and less on my content. I no longer call anything ‘mandatory’
   - To KNOW, absolutely KNOW, that I can and will learn from anyone, regardless of experience
• Over the years we have become much less focused on presentation skills and much more on training and facilitation skills

• I give my full attention to the learners and try to design workshops that engage all of their learning styles

• I am doing a better job of not just being an order taker

• I use activities that are relevant and have meaning

2. How has TRAIN changed YOU?

• I see myself more as a performance consultant and less as an order taker

• I am now beginning to engulf my role and responsibilities as a TRAINER, not just someone doing any job

• Encouraged me to share and be more generous with resources, tools, …

• Confidence, get foundation I can build

• Through the years at TRAIN I finally discovered that the learner needs to be responsible for their own learning and that as a trainer I need to empower them to do so.

• TRAIN has changed me in that I have learned additional tools and resources to apply in my job

• TRAIN has changed my perspective such that I see myself as a true professional. TRAIN always provides me with the opportunity to learn something new and to continue to develop my skills & to develop myself as a person.
• TRAIN has allowed me to be proud of what I do!

• I am a confident trainer

• I feel I am a trainer who can train on anything

• I have gathered skills and techniques that I can incorporate within all the training that I do

• I found my passion: Training

• I am a facilitator, not the giver of information

• I am NOT an order taker!

• TRAIN gave me skills that can be applied in all areas of my life. It gave me “starting” places—stay structured and end like I started

• It is not about me

• Q-TIP

• I believe in the motto, ‘let’s stamp out bad training’

• I see myself as a trainer, not a social services trainer. TRAIN changed my career goals and plans. I see myself as a competent professional

3. Why (or not) is TRAIN a community, as opposed to ‘group’, ‘club’, or ‘network’?

• People move in and out. All are welcome and make a contribution

• I believe TRAIN is a community because there is a connection amongst the members of ownership in a common interest. We are protective, supportive, watch
out for the training, personal interest of others as you would if you were in a neighborhood.

• TRAIN is a community because it brings together individuals from different backgrounds that rely on each other for support, resources, and validation.

• TRAIN is a community in that we share everything and we have become friends

• TRAIN is a community because we have a shared interest, we seek to learn from each other and to help each other with our own development

• I see our TRAIN community as a group of mentors

• TRAIN members share interests but we are not just all talk. As a community and as individuals we get things done

• Clubs have a static membership, whereas TRAIN membership is very fluid

• We really do support one another and support training overall, and really have made strides in stamping out bad training. A rising tide lifts all the boats.

• I think it is a community because of the concept of shared learning. We share activities specifically so people can make them their own (steal). We share what we did well, what we would do differently—self exposure, learn from mistakes, learn from other’s challenges and victories

• We are a community because we are all lifelong learners committed to improving and helping each other improve
I have developed many close personal and professional relationships and find TRAIN an excellent support group. I feel I could ask anyone for help and get what I need.

It is very meaningful to be able to spend time with people who get what I do, share my passion for it, and who want to work together to learn to do it better.

4. What has TRAIN learned?

• How to accommodate trainers from all areas, not just DSS

• Expect excellence

• We have learned that less structure and administrivia leads to a more productive group. We have also learned to practice what we preach.

• Learned that there are more folks out there than DSS folks. By being more inclusive we have gained experience and insights

• As [redacted] would say, “Get over it…it’s about the learner, not you”!

Figure Appendix F:1 shows a sample poster. Questions were posted on the wall during the conference; conference participants were provided with large post-it notes and invited to add their comments. The real group name has been masked.
Figure Appendix F.1. Photo of conference attendee comments.
APPENDIX G: SPONTANEOUS CREATION OF METAPHOR

Wenger (1998, p.83) says repertoire “reflects a shared history of engagement”, and notes in particular that the “spontaneous creation of metaphors is a perfect example” of the kind of resource provided by a renegotiable history of usage.” One interviewee offered an example of a spontaneously-created metaphor:

We were at one of the conferences, talking about how PowerPoint was so abused, and had put bad training into more hands than ever before. Somebody said, “It’s become the kudzu of the training world,” and everyone cracked up. Then somebody else wrote it on a chart pad and left it there. Next thing you know people had gone up and started drawing vines and leaves on it, then someone else took a picture of it, [figure Appendix G.1] and then it turned up on the website. And now we just drop it into conversations all the time. It just sort of spread—just like kudzu!
Figure Appendix G.1. Spontaneous creation of metaphor at a TRAIN conference.
APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY MAINTENANCE ACTIVITY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members
FROM: Human Resource Division
DATE: August 21, 1992
RE: SURPRISE FOR

Some of you may know that is now . Believe it or not, entered wedded bliss August 1, 1992. If you are not aware, and her husband have been dating for about the last three centuries.

Anyway, I want to plan something special for at the next meeting September 11, 1992 in County . Please write an advice column for on married life. Make it funny. Embellish your paper with graphics or whatever you think will be interesting. If you don't want to give advice, then write out what your Grandmother told you, or give an old saying or proverb, or cartoon about marriage.

If you're having trouble thinking of something, just think of all the categories of things that affect relationships in marriage: who cleans the bathroom, which side of the bed to sleep on, what to sleep in, how cold or hot the room should be, who cooks and what, whose parents can visit, whose friends are cool or weird, who decides how to spend money and how much, what to do about socks etc. on the floor, things he/she never told you BEFORE the wedding, unpleasant habits, unexpected things....you get the idea so have fun. And don't forget that all time favorite topic SEX. That should give you something to think about ( - do you remember?).

Please keep your papers to 8 1/2 by 11 paper. I will punch holes to make a notebook for . If you have any ideas for additional things we could do, please call me at . IF YOU CAN'T ATTEND , MAIL IT TO ME BEFORE.

THIS IS A SURPRISE, SO DON'T TELL . Be sure to sign your contribution. THANKS FOR YOUR HELP ON THIS SPECIAL PROJECT.
APPENDIX I: REQUEST FOR HELP

---Original Message---
From: [Redacted] (Health and Human Services)
Date: Dec 7, 2007 15:41
To: TRAIN Group
Subj: Computer Orientation

Hi, all,
I am working on an online computer orientation for new hires (how to access network, which drives are for what, etc.) and wondered if anyone had already developed something similar?

REPLY:

From: [Redacted] (Another agency)
Date: Dec 8, 2007 8:57
To: [Redacted], TRAIN Group
Subj: RE: Computer Orientation

I've been asked to develop something quick on helping our staff understand how to use email tools, like creating filters, sending mail to folders, and general time management tips for email. Is that something that might fit in with your project? I think our staff could benefit from your 'orientation' as well. Want to work together on this?

Figure Appendix I.1. Example of asking for help.
APPENDIX J: GLOSSARY OF TRAIN REPERTOIRE

[Note: This document was originally created from items named in interviews as well as those that were mentioned during observations at the annual conference. The researcher typed up a list of these items and asked a table of TRAIN meeting attendees to review and edit them. This final document reflects their changes and clarifications.]

Mission:
To stamp out bad training

Mottoes/sayings:
There’s no such thing as boring training, only boring trainers: it is your responsibility to make training interesting and engaging. Do not blame your content, your situation, or your learners.

The way to become a good trainer is to hang out with good trainers.

No need to panic now, there’s plenty of time for that later.

The only people who like change are wet babies and busy cashiers.

Examples of Reification

“Find your 20%”

This phrase is discussed at some length in Chapter 4 as one that was pervasive in interviews and was mentioned several times at the conference. Literal reification of this concept has occurred as well: a graphic titled “Find your 20%”, attributed to “the founding
TRAIN members”, is included in the TRAIN-sponsored train-the-trainer course participant materials. Figure Appendix J.1 displays this:

Figure Appendix J.1. “Find your 20%”

“Learner First”

The reification of the first Key Principle (“learner first…”), also discussed in Chapter Four, and the idea of “finding the 20%” was further evidenced during the conference wrap-up, a whole-group “ABC Review” of key points attendees were taking away from the conference. The facilitators wrote the letters A through Z on a
chart pad and asked the group to shout out one item, something from the conference sessions, to go with each letter. While most items shown on the chart refer to new information provided at the conference, such as the reference to the “Generational Gumbo” workshop or the creation of a “window pane” game during the closing session, two items on the list are reified TRAIN concepts that came up at some point during the conference and were meaningful enough for those participating in this “A-Z review” to shout out, even though they were not topics of presentations or explicitly connected to conference activities. Figure Appendix J.2 shows the final product of this activity, with the reified items “learner first” and “20%” discussed above, highlighted by the researcher.

Figure Appendix J.2. Reified concepts appear across the TRAIN enterprise
References to training/practice and tools

Key Principles: Developed by the original TSD designers. Often referred to separately in interviews and at conference.

1. “Learner first”: part of the mission to stamp out bad training. Philosophy underlying good design is to consider the needs of learners first, then the situation (crowded room? Tables available? Mandatory topic—people forced to attend?), and the content, last.

2. “Choose when you sweat”: it is up to the trainer to decide whether to prepare and practice ahead of time, or put preparation off until the last minute, creating additional nervousness and risk of failure

3. “If what you’re doing isn’t working, try something else.” Be careful of getting so caught up in your content and lesson plan that you don’t provide an optimal learning experience. Sometimes plans must change on the fly. Do what works. (The example offered for this is the trainer who, detecting that learners aren’t ‘getting it’, just keeps going over the information again the same way.)

“CYA” training: “Cover Your Ass” training, typically described by interviewees as “just presentation,” delivered per management directive as means of documenting that the organization’s employees had been told about a particular law or rule, such as equal employment opportunity regulations.
“People don’t argue with their own data”: Idea underlying a constructivist approach: letting learners create their own answers, asking open-ended questions of learners, giving realistic problems to solve. Learners will be more likely to accept their own conclusions — data that they have generated — than those simply dictated to them by the trainer.

“Don’t be an order taker”: Reference to the problem of the trainer being pressured to deliver a given type of training (i.e., stress management, teambuilding, etc.) even when the trainer is aware that the training will not solve, and may even worsen, the problem. This undercuts the trainer’s effectiveness and the training department’s — and by extension the training profession’s — credibility. The alternative is to view oneself as a performance consultant: the trainer’s role should be to help the manager/other solve a problem, which may or may not involve a training intervention.

“Biscuitry”: An explanation of the idea of “unconscious competence” in designing effective training. As evidence that tacit knowledge and expertise is difficult to capture and relate to others, “biscuitry” uses the example of asking one’s grandmother how to make biscuits, as this rarely involves a recipe or even items like measuring spoons and cups. One would also expect the grandmother to have a difficult time articulating how she makes biscuits, as the task is so engrained and automatic that it is hard to explain to another.

“Attitudinal vitality”: Coined by one of the senior members to capture the spirit needed by
an effective trainer/quality of an effective presentation. Regardless of personality the
trainer should strive to convey a sense of presence, enthusiasm for the topic and the trainer
role, and a sincere desire to help learners learn. Supported by the affirmations: “I’m glad
I’m here, I’m glad you’re here, I know I know, and I want you to know.”

”If you want to be a great trainer, hang out with great trainers”: Saying used throughout
group’s history.

“PESTS”: Performance Enhancement Support Tools. Synonym for “job aids.” Introduced
at August 2007 meeting by group that coined it. Came up in conversation several times at
the 2008 conference.

“Check your BRA”: Overcome nervousness and deal with classroom challenges by
“breathing, rethinking, acting”.

“Never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time and you both get dirty. And the pig
likes it!”

“However” is just a “but” in a tuxedo: Phrase used by member known for her discussion
facilitation skills. Phrase means that “however,” as with the word “but,” often blocks
effective communication as the listener hears the word as an objection or argument.
“Big Bowl of Need” (BBON): If you’re going to be a professional speaker or conference presenter, you need to learn not to be a diva. Organizers have their hands full and don’t have time to deal with your lack of preparation or failure to let them know your needs in advance. Be prepared, have a backup plan, take care of your own presentation.

FIDO: Introduced by one member during a discussion on emotional intelligence; connected to the idea of letting problems go, getting over unfortunate events. Originated with the military “Fuck it, drive on.” Outside of TRAIN members restate it as “Forget it, drive on.” Sometimes abbreviated to “drive on.”

Q-TIP: “Quit Taking It Personally”

In-Jokes and Stories

One member once, in confusion, said her mission was to “stomp on bad trainers” (rather than the TRAIN mission to “stamp out bad training”). For years the group has joked about ordering t-shirts with a giant boot imprinted on them.

(Name of member’s) “big-ass chair”

Nickname: Diva Emeritus

Nickname: Dr. Heifer

Nickname: Sweet Potato Queen
Nickname/Reference “Rumplestiltskin.” Reference to one of the researcher’s former supervisors. A small, angry man known for his tantrums, he was put into the job of Staff Development Director with no background in education, adult education, HRD, or training and development. Most famous in TRAIN for once having called the researcher into his office to tell her she was no longer allowed to use flip charts as everything could just be put on overhead transparencies.

Nickname/Reference: “Ursula.” Short for Ursula the Sea Witch from the *Little Mermaid* film: Tall, imposing, difficult former supervisor of one of the prominent TRAIN members.

Story: (name of member) and the duct tape: one of the most vocal and fearsome founding members, who tended to treat all presentations as a one-on-one with the presenter, reportedly once found herself with her mouth taped.

Story: (Name of member) during another presenter’s session putting her hands under her breasts and speaking down to them: “Pay attention girls, he’s talking to us!”

Story: “Could be worse, could be raining.” Line from the film *Young Frankenstein* that one member and her husband frequently use with one another in response to adverse events, from burning biscuits to emergency open-heart surgery. Has become a favorite TRAIN catchphrase.
Story: “Glad she didn’t have a gong”: Reference to a disastrous 2007 conference presentation, the only outside/commercial presenter ever brought in to speak at a TRAIN event. Presenter spent what was remembered as far too much time setting up and handling a small gong she’d brought to use in signaling the end of activities.

**New points of reference from the 2008 annual conference:**

“Underground Railroad”: when asked to share examples of poor presentations, one attendee related a story of a presenter he’d once seen who mentioned Harriet Tubman’s underground railroad, believed it was an *actual* railroad, and proceeded to argue with his audience about it.

“Once you become a pickle you can’t ever go back to being a cucumber”: Phrase used in one of the breakout sessions that became something of a catchphrase among all the conference attendees.

“(another attendee) and I like to have sex before training”: The presenter was discussing reducing nervousness before presenting and intended this as a joke about sex as a relaxation technique. Her phrasing, however, also indicated that she and the co-presenter had sex with each other prior to training. This, too, became something of a catchphrase.
“Unitasking”: Word used by an attendee to mean she could only do one thing at a time; opposite of “multitasking.”