

# LTER IMC Community of Practice: A Learning Environment

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## What are communities of practice?

“Communities of practice (CoP) are formed by people who engage in **a process of collective learning** in a shared domain of human endeavor, e.g., a group of engineers working on similar problems, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope...” (Wenger, 2008).

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. A community of practice is not merely a group of people having the same job or a network of connections between people.

### Three crucial CoP characteristics are:

**1. The domain:** the CoP identity is defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a **commitment** to the domain, and therefore a **shared competence** that distinguishes members from other people.

*LTER Case:*

Research domain: ecology, information science, computer science **sociotechnical or human-computer interactions**

Practice domain: informatics

Development domain: systems design

Communication domain: communication studies, science & technology studies, infrastructure studies

**2. The community:** Members build **relationships** that enable them to learn from each other through engaging in joint activities and discussions, and information sharing.

*LTER Case*

relationships: working groups, LTER Information Management Committee, site-site, site-network, LTER Network Information System Advisory Committee

activities: annual LTER IMC meetings. best practices, collaborative design of modules & tools – **training**

**3. The practice:** A community of practice is not merely a community of interest. Members are practitioners - they are **engaged in doing the work.**

*LTER Case:*

data gathering, data organizing, data describing, data preparing, quality control, data analysis, data synthesis, data exchange, data processing, IT evaluation, informatics research, technology development, assessment, informatics research, federation inquiry, community-building, remote sensing, site-network coordination

And more:

working groups, module development, prototyping, articulation, negotiation, knowledge mediation, standards-making, infrastructure-building, informal and formal communication facilitation

## Why our community of practice is important!

We have an organizational structure and a way of working that supports communications, a social organization for mentoring, a learning environment, a strategy for standards building, a mechanism for comparative analysis of experiences, a group identity... **and more!**

**With this foundation, how do we approach cyberinfrastructure and change?**

### References

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