Academic Communities of Practice as a Response to Institutional Tensions

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Teaching is the older and more institutionalized purpose of universities, whereas the relatively newer and significant purpose in terms of funding and reputation over time is research (Kleimann 2019). Role conflicts for academic staff already torn between research performance and coping with teaching loads (Kleimann, 2019) are exacerbated as the push to valorize research findings has also become a key performance indicator, not only in requests for funding but also in promotion decisions (Wickert et al., 2021). Academics now also need to have a convincing answer to the question "What is the impact of your research?" (Wickert et al., 2021). While these tensions bring on feelings of resentment and rejection on the part of some academics, paradoxically many end up complying with the rules and policies imposed on them (Fleming, 2019; Soin and Huber, 2022). Even though teaching remains an important function of universities, amidst these dynamics, sustaining the development of teaching skills of academics risks being dropped in priority.

Our study aims to contribute to the higher education literature by unpacking how academic Communities of Practice (CoP) support development of teaching as a professional skill despite the context being increasingly shaped by neoliberal policies overlooking the education aspect of academic life. An important aspect of CoP is the emphasis given on situated learning process and a type of "Social Learning Space" (SLS) where learning takes place through social interaction (Nicolini 2012, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2020). SLSs assist four modes of learning process: generating, translating, framing, and evaluating value (or "meaning"), refering to an output of value geared towards making a difference. In other words, the domain or "caring to make a difference" through learning is the reason members interact. Therefore, an academic CoP can be a tool for like-minded academics to share not only their knowledge and learning, but to also get organised around their teaching values. We argue that a social learning space can be a tool not only for partly allaying the tensions brought upon academics by increased university hybridity, but also for advancing the practice of business and management education by transferring and sustaining learning of teaching skills.

In this study, we focus is on a series of case teaching and writing workshops conducted in Turkey for business and management scholars. The workshops in question were initiated by a small group of academics in one of the top-ranking universities in Turkey and were held using university funds, sponsorships, various grants from the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey and Erasmus+ Strategic Alliance Project funds. The purpose of the workshops was to enhance the usage of case studies in business and management education at the university level in Turkey. With the awareness that one of the obstacles to this goal was the lack of locally developed case studies, the workshops also included sessions on case writing. The workshops took place in larger Turkish cities (that housed universities) depending on funding availability, from July 2013 to June 2022, and the majority were supported by international experts. Even if academics (both faculty members and graduate students) had attended previous workshops, they were encouraged to attend upcoming ones for the opportunity to participate in one-to-one feedback sessions with case writing experts. In this way, an ongoing support mechanism and a sounding board were provided to new case writers who may have hit a writer's block or may not be sure if their case is developing into useful course material. Out of the hundreds of Turkish academics who attended the workshops, a small group came to most of them to show their updated work and receive guidance from case experts and each other in the backdrop of the actual workshops.

The data for this study were collected via semi-structured interviews from a theoretical sample among participants of case workshops who succeeded in completing the authorship of at least one teaching case and its associated teaching note (Table 1). In other words, these participants not only took the time to travel to two-to-three day workshops, but they also invested time to develop and finalize at least one teaching case and its supportive material. We conducted interviews with five academics and present our preliminary findings in this paper. These interviews lasted around 1-1.5 hours, and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Three authors are insiders to the community and the fourth one is an outsider who attended few workshops but did not engage in the practice of case writing. Community event feedback forms

as archival data and visual records collected throughout these years in different case workshops are being analysed to show the social interactions within the events as well as development of community throughout the years.

Our early findings reveal that these workshops sowed the seeds towards the development of an academic CoP, where social learning and knowledge transfer occurred through group interaction. CoP are activity systems functioning through a shared understanding among members to design and implement action-oriented behavior (Cox 2005) and have three main dimensions: a domain of knowledge, a community of people, and common practices (Wenger et al. 2002). For our CoP, case teaching and writing is the *domain* of knowledge, given the large accumulation of know-how on case teaching and writing methods which have been utilized and built upon since the first book of written cases appeared in 1921 (Heath, 2015). The dimension of *community* in our study is observed through our interview participants identifying themselves with "the community," having stories to tell about the meetings they attended, and their recognition as the "case person" in their respective academic environments. Core community members, i.e., the organizers of these workshops, strive to get grants to sustain the interactions of the group so as to maintain the momentum of trust relationships, feeling of camaraderie and belonging, and the continuous transfer of knowledge on case teaching and writing to generate outputs. The following quote demonstrates the community feeling and identity gained by social relationships and friendships:

> *"…I gained the [friendship] of you and Nesli[1] [one of the organizers of the workshop]. That's the part [of these workshops] I love the most [laughing]. [Interviewer: Thanks.] You're welcome. But it is not a lie. Really; for example, Melike, Fidan. Great, great gain; I gained people I really love very much. That is the first point…That's definitely placed at number one. It is very very very meaningful, especially for my world of meaning."*

As for *practices*, the know-how on case writing and teaching comes to life in these workshops, with examples and suggestions being shared on common challenges. As an example, how to get Turkish students unfamiliar with the case method to engage in case discussions, or how to lead case discussions such that theories are derived from the case discussion instead of being

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

spoon-fed are some of the locally-relevant practices our participants mentioned that were built up through within this CoP.

For our participants, the "caring to make a difference" aspect is observed in teaching with case studies and the production of cases for the Turkish business and management education context where the case method is still not widespread or familiar. One of our participants, Melike, notes that she resolved the tension created in higher education between being a prestigious researcher and an ordinary instructor by developing her case teaching skills. She emphasized that it is mainly teaching that brings meaning to her academic life. Therefore, for her, "caring to make a difference" is getting expertise in teaching. She reflects that the case workshops transformed her academic identity and provided a meaning to her life ("applied value"):

> "To be honest, it is the teaching aspect that nurtures me; the part where I find meaning in my job. Like when I put my academic publications on one side of the scale and a course I am teaching on the other, and if you ask me which one nurtures me the most? Teaching nurtures me more... my academic publications are not great yet…So I do not feel satisfied with this side (research)…but at the moment what connects me to being an academic is teaching… When I use cases, communication increases, students benefit more…When I feel they learn more, I contribute to them more; this increased my motivation towards cases. It created a leap in me [when she started using cases]; I was seeking for something to to, it was a period when I was bored of myself [her teaching].

In addition, the learning process in these workshops demonstrates some of the learning modes in CoP from other contexts. Table 2 defines and presents examples of the different learning modes identified in this academic CoP. One participant gave this example for the "realized value" mode of learning, when she was assigned to mentor novice workshop participants in case writing:

> "…It was 2019. You…asked us to mentor groups [of scholars practicing writing a case from told stories.] [Interviewer: Yes.] At that moment, I understood that I had learned how to write a case. Because me and friends in the group listened to an entrepreneur's story. They were going to turn it into a case. They experienced what I had experienced, actually. They got all lost, they did not know where to start. Finding the crux of the story, finding triggering points, the data, reorganizing the relevant data…It was not a perfect mentoring [that I provided] but that day I saw…with the questions I asked them, by my guidance, you know, I am not bad, I actually learned [case writing]."

Elif, serves as an example of "transformative value", as she thinks by using the methods she has learned, she is contributing to the education of future generations and citizens. She goes on to note how the case workshops achieve "framing":

> *"…academics from many different universities all over the country attended these workshops and after they returned, talked about it in their environments. An awareness developed. No one had such an issue on their agenda before this…Since the workshops went on for a few years, it created an agenda and also a curiosity. This is one of the most important contributions [of the workshops]…for example, Nesli [one of the organizers of the workshop] came to our university…It echoed here. I explained it to my colleagues who were also searching for some novelties in their teaching. It was like a mini workshop here…therefore they [case workshops] had a positive impact of diffusion and awareness building."*

Our preliminary findings from this work-in-progress research is planned to be developed by two means. We plan to continue collecting data from case workshop participants, especially the ones who were not visibly engaged in any of the four modes of learning or did not demonstrate ongoing participation. Also, we are retrospectively identifying key phases of the development of the academic CoP under study using the documents and archives kept during the activities. We hope to contribute literature by demonstrating social learning processes in CoPs support development of teaching as a professional skill.

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Tables

Table 1: Informant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Education	Previous Work Experience	Current Position	University	Department
Bilge	Phd	Instructor	Part-time instructor	Public university (Research university)	Business Administration
Elif	PhD	Research assistant	Assistant Professor	Public university (Local and teaching orientation)	Business Administration
Melike	PhD	Manager in a private dompany	Assistant Professor	Public university (Local and teaching orientation)	Business Administration
Demir	Master's degrees in sociology and philosophy and left PhD	Specialist in a social innovation center of a university	Part-time instructor	Private university	Business Administration
Fidan	PhD	Manager in a public institution	Assistant Professor	Public university (Local and teaching orientation)	Education

Table 2: Four modes of learning observed through the case workshops

MODE OF LEARNING	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Generating Value		
	Immediate value: Direct experience of engaging in the social learning space.	Participating in a learning activity where members discuss with mentors the work-in-progress cases they wrote. Participants mention the joy they get from restructuring their cases after this mentoring.
	Potential value: New insights coming up as a result of interaction as a creative process.	While members were chatting during a social meal in city X in Turkey (a trip for a workshop), insights on writing or teaching a case emerged; such as, an idea on what to write in a case teaching note or how to introduce a protagonist in a case.
	Applied value: Using the insight back home, adopting the insight.	Applying a case teaching note idea when developing their own case.
	Realized value: A difference made; a change towards reaching the difference.	The teaching note constructed better after a few attempts and being satisfied with the result.
	Strategic value: Quality conversations with stakeholders, to develop and maintain productive relationships with them, ensuring stakeholder understanding of goals.	Entrepreneurs were invited to tell their stories for participants to generate cases. Barrier: University administrations do not include case writing in their promotion and evaluation criteria.
	Enabling value: The network's resources and their experience in organizing.	Grants are limited but our group is experienced in organizing workshops to sustain this learning community.
	Orienting value: Broader understanding of the issues, players, projects, and relevant practices as a key ingredient in the design and success of an activity.	Some participants are critical about their university's promotion and evaluation criteria that excludes case writing. Limited numbers of grants and grants having different aims and scopes, making funding a challenge.
	Transformative value: Transformation in their lives, identities, or broader societal effect.	Some informants being known as the case person in their academic department. Others note that the cases they wrote are known globally since their publication by The Case Centre.
Translating Value	Taking something of value and doing something with it. Coming up with an idea and the shaping of a new practice to help implement it. A flow where one type of value is translated into another. Seeking funding for implementing that idea would be an example of flow.	Not only teaching how to write a case, listening to stories of entrepreneurs and working on writing their cases on-site is novel. The case development process from scratch is a new practice generated by this new idea. Seeking funding from grants to continue the workshops.

Framing	Reflecting back to the experience in the social learning space.	Core members of the community; i.e. organizers suggesting having more frequent meetings.
Evaluating	Evaluating if the learning is making a difference or not.	Organizers using feedback surveys after workshops to measure the satisfaction of the participants. Follow-ups on a colleagial basis.