# A Community of Practice as a Quality-Enhancing Feature in an In-house Translation Team

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## Abstract

The goal of this article is to analyse the quality benefits of communities of practices (CoP) in the context of in-house translation teams. The article seeks to answer two research questions: Can CoPs develop as part of an in-house translation team and how do they affect the quality of translation on the levels of the individual translator, the in-house translation team and its mother organisation?

The article presents findings from the analysis of interviews with members of an in-house translation team. The interviews are analysed from the viewpoint of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). In the article communities of practice (CoP) are seen both as social learning environments and quality-enhancing environments for organisational knowledge management and team translation.

The article posits the hypothesis that an in-house translation team that functions as a CoP creates an environment beneficial for enhanced team communication, situated life-long learning and interaction with subject matter experts. It is further hypothesised that this would result in the improved quality of translations in both the short term and the long term. The findings could be beneficial for development of in-house translation units as well as translator education in university training programmes and life-long learning.

**Keywords:** community of practice, situated learning, translation quality, translator training, semi-structured interviews

## 1 Introduction

This article describes the results of a set of interviews conducted with members of an in-house translation team in a Helsinki area consultancy firm. The interviews were initially part of a larger research project involving three companies in the Helsinki area (Eskelinen 2019). When the transcripts were analysed, the researcher noticed that the interviews of one of the translation teams presented a different profile from the other two teams. This data was re-analysed from the viewpoint of the theory of communities of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). The analysis suggested the presence of such a community and prompted this research project.

CoPs as such are not a novel approach in Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS). One of the latest applications is to be found in a special issue of the Journal of Specialised

*Ritva Hartama-Heinonen, Laura Ivaska, Marja Kivilehto & Maarit Koponen (toim./red./eds) 2022*
*MikaEL*
*Kääntämisen ja tulkkauksen tutkimuksen symposiumin verkkojulkaisu, vol. 15, s. 9–24*
*Nätpublikation för Symposiet om forskning i översättning och tolkning KäTu, vol. 15, s. 9–24*
*Electronic Journal of the KäTu Symposium on Translation and Interpreting Studies, Vol. 15, p. 9–24*

Translation, in which Patrick Cadwell, Federico Federici and Sharon O'Brien (2022: 1–4) present an introduction of the theory. They conclude that researchers in TIS already consider CoP "valuable" theory (2022: 2). In their introduction to the special issue they review previous research and suggest a tripartite focus of CoPs in TIS: translator and interpreter education; knowledge sharing; and collaboration (Cadwell et al. 2022: 2). They list several earlier publications starting with the much cited special issue on situated learning by Maria González-Davies and Vanessa Enríquez Raído (2016). Based on an analysis of earlier works on CoPs in TIS they claim that their focus has often been on CoPs situated in academic (e.g. Berthaud & Mason 2018; Risku 2016) or professional contexts (e.g. Risku and Dickinson 2009; Yu 2019).

The focus of this article differs from the earlier study to some extent in attempting to ascertain how CoPs effect the quality of the translation process, albeit through individual and group learning processes and improved communication between various actors in companies that employ in-house translators. In this article, however, it undertakes to do so through a better understanding of the benefits of CoPs inside translation teams and their interactions with their mother organisations.

The article seeks to answer two main research questions: 1) can CoPs develop as part of an in-house translation team and 2) how do they affect the quality of translation on the levels of the individual translator, the in-house translation team and its mother organisation?

The article first describes the theory of CoP in general (Section 2.1), then focuses on how it has been used in Translation Studies (Section 2.2), especially in translator training and life-long learning. This is followed by a description of research methods and materials (Section 3) and the analysis of the material (Section 4) and closes with the conclusion (Section 5).

## 2 Community of practice

The concept of a CoP was introduced by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991 and further developed by Wenger in 1998. The theory has its background in sociology and, amongst others, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *practice* (Bourdieu 1972; Wenger 1998: 281).

Lave and Wenger (1991) first presented CoP as a social learning theory where legitimate peripheral participation in hierarchical professional communities in pre-industrial societies were seen as a learning environment. Wenger (1998) developed the concept into a more refined social theory of learning where the knowledge of the community was not controlled by superior members but instead constructed in a shared dialogue between peers on different levels of competence.

Wenger et al. (2002) further adapted the concept of CoP into a tool for organisational development and knowledge management. The refocused concept moved from social learning to that of fostering innovation through a CoP inside a company (Li et al. 2009). Researchers representing different fields such as education, knowledge management, organisational studies and translation studies (cf. Section 2.2) have kept adding to and developing the theory further. Despite these developments, CoP as a theory still revolves

around "social participation in which collective situated practices emerge from the pursuit of specific endeavours that are the property of a community created over time" (Smith, Kempster & Wenger-Trayner[1] et al. 2019: 66).

In this article CoP is seen both as a theory of social learning and identity development (Wenger 1998) and as a tool in organisational development (Wenger et al. 2002).

In the following CoPs will first be described in general (section 2.1) and then their applications in TIS (section 2.2).

## 2.1 What is a Community of Practice?

Lave and Wenger (1991) described CoP as a community which a novice joins and then gradually conforms to with the competence as defined by the community. Wenger (1998) later defined competence as generated through the interaction of different individuals or experiences, maintaining the idea of less experienced individuals gradually moving from the periphery of the community towards the core. The theory also notes that individuals may partake in the community on the periphery but do no become full members of the CoP (much like a university student may be a part of a research community before graduating). One should note that membership in a CoP is not defined formally but by involvement in the practice of the community.

Wenger's (1998) theory combines practice and community. He argues that the concept of practice should be understood as a discourse in which the meaning of the practice is jointly constructed (1998: 72). He further considers three dimensions crucial to associating community with meaning: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire.

Mutual engagement with a practice acts as a source of coherence for the community and defines members in the CoP. Thus, a CoP is not simply a group of people who work at the same company. Their membership is rooted in their shared practice, the actions whose meanings the members negotiate with each other (ibid. 73). Initially CoP formation was assumed to be spontaneous and self-regulating and that it is not easy to build and maintain a CoP or integrate it with the rest of an organisation (Wenger & Snyder 2000: 140). Later this view was criticised and it is understood that the formation of a CoP may be supported and given direction by a mother organisation (Brown & Duguid 2001: 57). Mutual engagement also need not take place physically, although Wenger (1998: 74) suggests that the interactions can be helped by geographical proximity.

Joint enterprise in CoP is not simply a goal given by superiors to a team, but a source of mutual accountability that forms an integral part of the practice. The enterprise is "defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it" (Wenger 1998: 77) where the members assess their situation and negotiate a response to it.

Shared repertoire in CoP refers to a collection of resources the members have created to negotiate the meaning in the practice. According to Wenger (1998: 82) these resources can be physical or cognitive tools, work routines or shared terminology and they are further developed by the community.

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[1] Etienne Wenger changed his name to Etienne Wenger-Trayner after marrying.

CoP elucidates the progress of an individual within a community. CoP members are seen as active participants in the practices of the community and constructing identities in relation to the community (Wenger 1998: 5). The progress begins with the individual as a novice and continues as long as that individual is part of the community. It is thus applicable to professional education and lifelong learning in general. Although CoPs have been criticised for their inherent risk of stagnation and blocking of innovation (cf. Ferlie et al. 2005 on overly controlling and protective CoPs), Steven Pattison, David Preece and Patrick Dawson (2016:1) also suggest in their meta-analysis on CoPs that "they may align with organizations in enabling rather than constraining innovative capabilities".

Research on knowledge management and organisational studies also inform the importance of CoPs for their mother organisations. Sitalakshmi Venkatraman and Rama-nathan Venkatraman (2018: 3) see knowledge in itself as an important asset for organisa-tions and divide this knowledge into explicit and tacit knowledge (cf. Polanyi 1962; Collins 2010). Explicit or otherwise externalized knowledge is relatively easy to store and retrieve in its various printed or electronic forms and transfer to other persons or reposi-tories. Tacit or internalised knowledge, however, is more complex and a challenge to manage. It is stored as embodied expertise in the individual members of the organisation and transferred to others in "the form of stories, coaching or apprenticeship" (Venkatra-man & Venkatraman 2018: 10). They (ibid. 3) go so far as to claim that the internalised expertise is "the most valuable asset to organisations as it could be difficult for competi-tors to imitate". According to Jennifer Preece (2003: 2) CoPs support knowledge exchange of tacit and explicit knowledge but they have a "special role" in the transfer of tacit knowledge due to interaction patterns common to CoPs. This is due to often naturally occurring informal types of communication: "storytelling, anecdotes, impromptu com-ments and opinions" that are often limited in more hierarchical interactions of formal organisations. Wenger (1998: 125) describes this interaction as one of the indicators that a community of practice has formed "local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter".

Venkatraman and Venkatraman (2018: 10) lists eight key benefits of employing CoP as a knowledge management strategy. Several of these can be seen as relevant to in-house translation teams, their interaction with the company that they are part of and the organi-sation itself. The nature of CoPs facilitates networking and provides opportunities to contribute in problem solving, which may increase cross-pollination of ideas and helps members to stay informed of community and company developments. The flow of tacit information (cf. above) builds organisational memory, which may help in organisational decision making. Information flow also diffuses best practices amongst community mem-bers and facilitates professional learning, which in turn may offer a competitive edge against other organisations.

## 2.2 A Community of Practice in Translation Studies

The first reason for selecting CoP as an explanatory theory was the researcher's familiarity with CoPs through earlier research projects (e.g. Eskelinen 2019: 78–79). Another reason was this article's involvement with peer and situated learning (cf. González Davies &

Raído 2016), since CoP is a social learning theory (Wenger 1998: 3). Situated learning is similar to Lave and Wenger's concept of "legitimate peripheral participation" (1991: 14), i.e. a learning process where "learners become involved in a 'community of practice' where the student advances from 'novice', at the periphery of this community, to 'expert', at its centre." (González-Davies & Enríquez Raído 2016: 8). CoP is thus well suited to explaining peer learning to the extent that Berthaud and Mason (2018: 397) argue that "CoPs, and a thorough embedding of reflection in the curriculum, present an opportunity to provide adaptable learning to postgraduate translation trainees for lifelong learning".

Risku and Dickinson (2009: 51) summarize that although CoPs can have stated goals, their main purpose is not to create products, but to engage in social learning and knowledge sharing. Ian Mason (2014: 42), on the other hand, focuses on learning as an identity-forming process. He views the necessity of active participation in the community ("negotiation of meaning") as central to the learning process.

Cadwell, Federici and O'Brien (2022: 2) note that CoP's have been used in TIS in the analysis of interactions between various actors. Mason (2014: 39) employs the concept in an "exploration of the links from the outer context to individual translator decision making and the crucial role of discourse in these processes".

Another concept in CoP theory, that of constellations of practices (Wenger 1998: 126–133), was also deemed important for this article especially in analysing the advantages CoPs offer for interaction between translators and subject matter experts. Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov describes similar interaction between communities by referencing Itamar Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory (Even-Zohar 1990). She associates Even-Zohar's repertoires with both "communities and (poly)systems" envisaging the field of translation and interpreting as a social polysystem of smaller communities constantly in interaction (Taivalkoski-Shilov 2017: 15).

As Wenger (1998: 77) Risku and Dickinson (2009: 51) contrast CoPs with other groups such as workgroups or teams. The latter are often formed by company decisions from individuals deemed suitable for the achievement of a certain goal, whereas CoPs are usually self-forming, although they can benefit from company support and recognition.

Workplace researchers in TIS (cf. Risku, Rogl & Milosevic 2017) analyse questions similar to this article, but they do so in order to "grasp a specific work-related practice, workplace research explores how practitioners experience it in an everyday work context" (ibid: 4) thus often observing the translators in situ in their workplace. Their focus is also primarily on "the connections between work activities and the technological systems that feature in them" (ibid: 5).


## 2.3 Indicators of the existence of a Community of Practice

In order to study a CoP, one must first identify one. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002: 41–43) draw a clear distinction between CoPs and other groupings such as project teams, etc. This distinction is based on the purpose, form of belonging, boundaries, longevity of the community and reasons to remain as one (ibid. 42), i.e. mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise of the members of a community.

The column heading abbreviations in Table 1 stand for mutual engagement ("ME"), shared repertoire ("SR") and joint enterprise ("JE").

**Table 1:** Indicators of a CoP (Wenger 1998: 125–126) and their categorization by dimension of CoP (Li et al. 2009)

| Indicator | ME | SR | JE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual; | x | | |
| 2) Shared ways of engaging in doing things together; | x | | x |
| 3) The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation; | x | | |
| 4) Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process; | x | x | |
| 5) Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed; | x | x | |
| 6) Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs; | x | | |
| 7) Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise; | x | x | x |
| 8) Mutually defining identities; | x | | |
| 9) The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products; | | x | |
| 10) Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts; | | x | |
| 11) Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter; | | x | |
| 12) Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones; | x | x | |
| 13) Certain styles recognized as displaying membership; | x | | |
| 14) A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world. | x | | |

Wenger (1998: 125–126; 2012: 293–294) lists the above 14 as indicators that "a CoP has formed". They mainly describe the interactions within a CoP and relationships between the members. Li et al. (2009: 5) aligned these indicators with Wenger's three dimensions of a CoP: mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise (Wenger 1998: 78). Li et al. note (2009: 5) with interest that ten of the indicators seem to focus on mutual engagement and seven on shared repertoire (four to both of them) but only two focus on the third dimension, that of joint enterprise. Those two are also both combined with one of the other dimensions. This indicates an undervaluation of joint enterprise as an indicator for a CoP, although one would surmise that it is intrinsic to any shared endeavour.

Although most of the indicators seem somewhat abstract (Li et al. 2009: 5) they were selected for the analysis of this research project's interviews. It seems that they are applicable for detecting themes (cf. Section 3.1) related to CoP in the interviews and will be discussed in more detail in the Section 4.

## 3 Research material and methods

### 3.1 The interviews

Four translators from an in-house translation team of a consultancy company were interviewed between August and September 2019 using a qualitative semi-structured inter-

view protocol. The protocol had four main themes which were further divided into several sub-themes (cf. Eskelinen 2019: 78).

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Finnish and were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Excerpts from interviews reported in this article were translated into English by the researcher.

The semi-structured interviews were analysed qualitatively with a particular focus on arising themes that may be common to the interviewees (cf. Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010). The interviews transcriptions were examined closely in order to detect these "themes" or repeating patterns or features (Luborsky 1994: 190–191; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010: 173). Qualitative study of themes places the experiences of the interviewees in the foreground and can provide insights into the beliefs and values of the individuals (Luborsky 1994: 190). Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010: 173) stress the similarities or common themes in a group of interviewees. They also note that, especially in semi-structured interviews, the themes that arise in addition to the themes from the structure of the interview may be more interesting than those pre-conceived by the interviewer in the structure. Themes can be used both qualitatively and quantitively when they are coded in standardised categories. Or – as in this research undertaking – in dual capacity where the themes the were coded following Li et al.'s categorization of Wenger's indicators of a CoP (cf. Table 1).

An example of a "theme" and the qualitative analysis is a situation in which an interviewee was recounting an occurrence during team translation where a member of the team asked a question about a term in the text being translated and the others were able to provide the answer without asking for a context. This was classified as "Indicator 4 Absence of introductory preambles". It is important to note that due to time constraints the analysis and categorization was carried out by the researcher, who recognizes that doing so may affect analysis reliability.

## 3.2 The interviewees

The interviewees (A1–A4) are in-house translators at the same company. All use translation memory tools, document archival and process management systems and refined translation workflows. They are native speakers of Finnish, some with bilingual backgrounds, and all have a degree in translation or linguistics. All have several years of work experience as translators.

The company in question is a medium-sized consultancy company that deals mainly with international business and legal matters. The translation team is a small independent unit that offers translation and linguistic services mainly to the other units of the company.

According to the interviews the formation of the translation team (and presumably also the CoP) began over 10 years ago. A1 and A2 had been working at the company for some years and were involved in multilingual communication and translation tasks. They started to discuss the translation processes and methods employed by the company with a third employee and eventually came up with a proposition for their superiors to create a unit responsible for translation. The proposition won support and the team was set up. During the following years the team honed their working routines, created procedures, acquired translations tools that suited their routines, and built networks with the other

teams and departments within the company. More translators joined the team and some left. (A1 & A2)

In addition to codified routines and procedures there seems to be a large amount of tacit knowledge within the team. This knowledge includes routines of the team and knowledge on the preferences of the key players in the other departments, the company business cycles and typical projects that will often end up involving the translation team. There are also backchannels for information, which are based on the personal relationships of the team members. (A1 & A2)

Interviewees A3 and A4 are relative newcomers to the team, but both have a background in translation and have worked in the field for several years.

## 4 Analysis of the interviews

The analysis is divided into two main parts. Section 4.1 analyses the interviews from the perspective of the existence of a CoP, i.e. it aims to establish that the interviewed translators are members of a small community of practice. Section 4.2 analyses the content of the interviews in order to identify the benefits a CoP.

## 4.1 On the existence of a CoP

Wenger (1998: 125–126) presented fourteen indicators that point to the existence of a CoP. These were described in greater detail in Section 2.3.

## 4.1.1 Membership in the CoP

Wenger (Wenger 1998; cf. also Section 2) listed 14 indicators that a CoP has formed. In order to analyse the benefits of a CoP for its members, the community and its mother organisation, a tool is needed to identify membership. Ten of the fourteen indicators indicate "mutual engagement" or strong commitment to a CoP.

All four interviewees discussed themes linked to four of the mutual engagement indicators ("4 Absence of introductory preambles", "5 Very quick set-up of problems to be discussed" and "6 Substantial overlap in descriptions of belonging") several times during the interviews. This would indicate feelings and beliefs of belonging to the community.

Three of the interviewees (A1, A2, A3) also discussed two other mutuality indicators "7 Knowing what others know" and "14 A shared discourse". Only two of the interviewees (A1 and A2) discussed themes linked to all ten indicators (the above and "1 Sustained mutual relationships", "2 Shared ways of engaging", "3 The rapid flow of information", "12 Jargon and shortcuts to communication" and "13 Certain styles of recognized as displaying membership").

The number of indicators correlates with the background of the interviewees: A1 and A2 were the founders of the translation team, whereas A3 and A4 had been members for only a few years and were perhaps thus still in the periphery of the CoP. However, the shared views on indicators 2 and 6 would indicate that all four are considered and consider

each other and themselves full members of the CoP. The junior members also both described learning experiences or their advancement towards the core of the CoP.

With respect to the flow of information and efficiency of co-operation, all the interviewees viewed themes linked to indicators 4 and 5 identically. They stated that the team's professional interaction was quick, and conversations began without introductory preambles.

(1)     We are somehow on the same page right away and immediately understand the nature of the problem one of us needs the solution for. (A3)

They also contrasted the rapid nature of these exchanges when addressing similar problems with the subject matter experts of the company in general:

(2)     You had to spend more time explaining the problems and background to the specialist. (A3)

Indicators 7 and 14 were similarly answered by A1, A2 and A3. A4 was somewhat uncertain but leaned towards similar views on these indicators. The interviewees felt they recognized one another's competences and abilities to contribute to translation tasks and apparently shared similar views on the company, the team and their role in all three.

Interviewees A1 and A2 seemed to share a strong positive view on indicators 3, 12 and 13. This may – again – be due to their longer membership. A3 and A4 did raise similar themes in their interviews, but less often.

(3)     Yes, we talk about tools and (A1) encourages each other to share that kind of information in particular. (A3)

Based on the findings all the interviewees felt mutually engaged in the team, although the senior members, A1 and A2, expressed this feeling more often and more strongly. The junior members described trajectories that were drawing them more to the centre to the CoP. The analysis also supports the hypothesis of the existence of a CoP at the translation team.

## 4.1.2 Joint enterprise or mutual accountability

Mutual accountability is an important facet of teamwork and may improve the quality of the products or services a team provides. Two of Wenger's indicators, namely 2 and 7 point to this tendency.

Recognizing other team members' areas of expertise was often mentioned by all the team members in the interviews. Seeking the assistance of more capable team members was also frequently mentioned. This was reciprocal; the specialties of the team members did not fully overlap in their language pairs, special field knowledge or other skills areas.

(4)      If I have a difficult problem with [x] I send it straight to A2 or if it's with [y] I'll probably send it to [a team member not interviewed] or to A1. And I can always ask A4 about any problems with [z]. (A3)

This collaboration seemed built upon a strong shared responsibility for the quality they produce as a team. A1 and A3 also noted a healthy competitive spirit between the team members: each strives to produce excellent translations. Interviewees also felt pride in their role as linguistic specialists and the added value they could bring to the company. A1, A2 and A3 mentioned distrust of some of the specialists in the other departments towards the translators and the resultant impact upon the quality of texts the translators in general were able to produce when compared with[2] and felt that this in part demanded more from the in-house translation team.

## 4.1.3 Shared repertoire or tools to negotiate meaning

Shared repertoire or tools to negotiate meaning are the dimension of the CoP (Wenger: 1998). They describe the backbone of skills and knowledge i.e. translation competences shared by the team members which they require. Members of a CoP renegotiate these repertoires continuously to meet the changing challenges the community faces.

The main indicators for shared repertoire ("9 The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products", "10 Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts" and "11 Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter") had the greatest variety of response in the interviews. All interviewees seemed to agree fully that they share some specific tools and representations (indicator 10). This may again stem from the small size of the team and the amount and frequency of team translation. Three of them described "local lore to some extent" and team-specific communication in particular. According to research (cf. Section 2) this is important for communication and the flow of tacit information. Indicator 9 was mentioned often but only by A1 and A2. This might again result from their longer history with the in-house team or it might be attributed to the interview protocol.

(5)     We have this peculiar folder structure on the team's network drive that we also use as a tool of communication, so that any team member can use it to take the place of any other member in a project, if need be. (A2)

The multi-domain indicators for shared repertoire (4, 5, 7 and 12) paint a slightly less varied picture. All interviewees saw indicators 4 and 5 as important and three of them regarded 7 similarly. With indicator 12 there was again a divide between the more senior and the newer members. A1 and A2 discussed jargon and communicative shortcuts more than the newer members. A1 described the nicknames that team coined for their working routines:

(6)     We have these principles 'a silver platter', 'car crash test' and 'keeping your eye on the ball' that we follow in our work. (A1)

Based on the indicators present in the interviews it seems, all in all, reasonably certain that the translation team in question performed as a community of practice. The two senior members' (A1, A2) interviews pointed more clearly to the existence of a CoP, while the

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[2] A2 and A3 assumed this stemmed from their experiences with outsourced translations.

more junior members (A3, A4) were at the very least on the periphery of a CoP. It is also possible that the interview material was simply not able to validate their membership due to their focus which was initially not aimed at detecting the indicators (cf. Section 1).

## 4.2 Benefits of a CoP

The previous section determined that the translation team under investigation in this article is indeed a CoP. In the following sections, the benefits of the CoP are described as manifest in the interviews. The first subsection examines the interview material from the perspective of the individual translator (how the individual translator perceived team membership as enhancing work quality, skills development and quality of working life in general). The next subsection reports on how the CoP enhanced the team considering quality and as a social entity. The final subsection considers the benefits from the company perspective.

### 4.2.1 Benefits for the individual translator

CoPs as social learning environments may enhance the skills and knowledge of their members. This does not usually result from intentional training, rather 'learning by doing', through legitimate peripheral participation and the interactions between the team members.

(7)     Yeah, since we're all in the same office, it turns into. Hmm. on-the-job training for a new employee. (A2)

This support was most often mentioned by the newer members of the team.

(8)     And when we discuss my translations, I can ask [a more senior team member] which translations would sound more idiomatic and fluent in a given context. (A3)

All interviewees mentioned learning from one another during translation projects where they either translated together or received feedback from each other during the translation revision process. A3 and A4 in particular mentioned both of the above.

However, it is important to note that training is also actively carried out during a new employee's induction period. After a few months the newcomers are accepted as equals and treated as any other member of the team.

The senior members view their role both as fellow translators and trainer-mentors for the other members of the team, but they also admit to learning from their interactions and on the job.

(9)     Yes, I learn things from the new translators. (A1); You learn something new every day. I mean, I am not fully trained up yet. (A2)

This interaction, in which tacit knowledge and best practices are transferred, is not likely in ad hoc teams of freelancers.

## 4.2.2 Benefits for the in-house translation team

Comfortable and flexible interaction and collaboration between its members is considered a feature of a CoP. There were many examples of this in the interviews. Throughout team translations, the translators were aware of their context and understood on another's questions without requiring explicit contextual details.

(10)   It's kind of assembly line work, [translation memory] segments come and go. You don't discuss the context much when … You don't talk about that when you're in a rush and you ask somebody else for advice. (A1)

(11)   We kind of share a similar spirit and understand immediately what the problem is that the other team member needs a solution for. (A3)

Comments such as these strongly infer indicators 4 and 5, and as such indicate a strong mutual relationship within the in-house team.

A1 and A2 in particular often refer to shared repertoire, the tools and routines, that have developed throughout the history of the in-house team. This is seen as a strength by the interviewees, even if this would seemingly contradict translation practices used in the field.

(12)   Our approach to doing things is maybe a bit odd and everybody might not understand it, especially not a translation memory vendor. But for us it works just fine. (A1)

The in-house team members offer support to other team members whilst translating, and also in coping socially within the company setting, when they first enter into employment at the company.

(13)   Naturally working closely together and collaborating has a positive effect on translation quality. (A2)

(14)   We also try to help new people within the company, including outside of the translation team, like telling them that they're a good sort, having lunch with them. (A2)

This behaviour is in line with the improved networking and collaboration, which CoPs provide (cf. Section 2).

## 4.2.3 Benefits for the company

The interviews do not provide adequate data to evaluate reliably the benefits for companies generally speaking. Such would require observing several similar companies, some with long-term in-house translation teams, and some with companies that have outsourced their translations. This could be the focus of a future research project. However, the interviewees did mention several instances that point to the in-house team being valued by the company's administration unit(s). This was especially evident when A1 and A2 discussed the trajectory of the development of the in-house team, and its becoming a respected provider of translation, linguistic and – to some extent – language training services for the company.

(15)    It took some time until I began to feel for myself that I was a sort of expert, but quite quickly you understand that you have to produce translations that are at least equal to, or even better than, those that the organisation was used to before. (A2)

(16)    My understanding is that we have good reputation within the company. (A2); I definitely feel that there's an atmosphere of mutual respect, that we translators are valued, [supervisors] feel that we are part of the joint effort [to produce quality services for our customers]. (A3)

The benefits are also mentioned when the interviewees discuss differences between running company-specific translation projects in-house versus outsourcing the projects.

(17)    There'd probably be nobody who would have a grasp of the whole text if you had twenty freelancers translating a [200-page] project in a hurry. (A2)

One of the main benefits of in-house teams are the social networks that may form between in-house translators and subject matter experts of other departments within the company. These networks can be seen as shared social capital or as interacting CoPs or constellations of practice (Wenger 1998).

(18)    Being inside the company improves the [translation] quality because we can consult [the subject matter experts and original authors] directly. (A2)

The flow of information takes place both formally (emails, phone calls, memos) and informally in chance meetings in the building and the coffee machines by the corridors.

(19)    Even though people may be critical of the chit-chat you have during chance meetings in the company corridors, the amount of information exchanged is huge and a very important source of knowledge. (A1)

These "corridor encounters" seem an especially efficient channel for providing information on recent developments and enable the flow of tacit knowledge in the form of anecdotal information – or even gossip! – often very difficult to record access otherwise.


## 5 Conclusion

The article posited the hypothesis that an in-house translation team that functions as a CoP creates an environment beneficial for enhanced team communication, situated lifelong learning, and interaction with subject matter experts. It was further hypothesised that this would result in improved quality of translations both in the short term (co-operation and peer support during translation) and in the long term (professional growth of individual members of a translation team).

Based on the analysis, it seems that a translation team that also forms a community of practice nurtures learning and skills development. The individual translators seem to benefit the most from being members of a CoP. This benefit takes the form of professional skills development and peer support during the translation process. The improved skills, especially if the translators also develop separate skills sets or knowledge of various specialised fields, will benefit the entire team and enable the team's ability to cope with more heterogenous assignments without the need to resort to outsourcing translation work.

Based on the previous research, as well as some evidence from this analysis, it seems that the CoP's mother organisation also benefits from a more adaptable and better networked translation unit that is able to store organisational intelligence and the tacit knowledge of the procedures and artifacts (texts, terminologies etc.) of the company. These advantages may enhance the quality of translation processes, individual translations and the turn-around speed of team translation projects that require internal knowledge of company processes and products – especially in situations which require co-operation between translators and other company departments.

The data provided by the interviewees is understandably partially subjective and in order to be able to analyse the benefits for the company, further robust interviews with personnel from the other departments of the company would need to be conducted.

However, the analysis does suggest that in-house translation teams – especially when the growth of a community of practice is nurtured – are beneficial for companies that are in need of high quality translations.

All in all, in-house translation teams should not be thought of as separate translation providers but an integral part of the company that can develop in step with the mother organisation. A community of practice can respond to the changing translation needs of the mother organisation in ways and with the speed that an outsourced translation provider cannot, and which the guidance of the mother organisation could not match.

It is evident that there is a need for more research on supporting the nurturing of CoPs in in-house translation teams and units – and considering the increase in telecommuting throughout and possibly even after the COVID-19 pandemic – of virtual or hybrid CoPs in the field of translation studies. The researcher is currently studying the changes brought on in the translation team after more than a year of working remotely and a gradual return to working on the physical office premises, as well as on an additional research undertaking concerning a virtual CoP of translation professionals.

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