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	Information Management US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (USACE) COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (CoP)	
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CECI-A

Regulation
No. 25-1-8

31 March 2011

Information Management
US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (USACE)
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (CoP)

1. Purpose. To provide general policy and a framework for the establishment, sustainment, operations, roles and life cycle of Communities of Practice (CoP) in facilitating knowledge sharing across USACE to transition from “Good to Great”. This regulation severs the link between CoPs and the functional responsibilities of offices and the organizational structure of the Corps of Engineers. This regulation supports effective communication, learning, and relationship development within the Corps team.

2. Applicability and Proponency. This Engineer Regulation (ER) applies to all USACE elements and activities. The proponent for this ER is the Deputy Commanding General (DCG). Recommended revisions to the ER shall be submitted to the Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO).

3. Distribution. For public release, unlimited.

4. References:

a. Army Regulation 25-1 Army Knowledge Management and Information Technology, December 2008.

b. Army Knowledge Management Principles, July 2008.

c. USACE 2012: Aligning the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Success in the 21st Century, October 2003.

d. Learning Organization Doctrine, Roadmap for Transformation, USACE, November 2003

e. Defense Acquisition University Community of Practice Implementation Guide v3.0, October 2007.

f. Quality Management Process ES-20200, Cultivating CoPs within USACE.

g. USACE Knowledge Management (KM) Strategic Plan, version 1.04, 9 Jan 2001.

h. Cport Building Communities of Practice, a practitioner's guide v1.0; Department of the Navy Chief Information Officer compact disk (CD).

i. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't. Collins, Jim, New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

5. Glossary. The glossary at the end of this regulation provides definitions for the purpose of assuring a common understanding of key and essential terms among all USACE personnel, members of our Communities of Practice, and others who read this regulation.

6. Overview.

a. USACE 2012. The USACE 2012 Executive Summary issued in October 2003 laid out the imperative for change within USACE, to include the concepts of One Corps, Regional Business Centers, Regional Integration Teams, CoPs, Key Initiatives and Enablers, Expectations, and lastly the Commander's Intent. The USACE 2012 report included the following statements about CoPs:

“CoP Defined - What makes a community is its practice and the sharing of that practice among its practitioners. What holds communities together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows, and not the organizational structure requirement. In fact, it is this very point that gives rise to stovepipes vs. communities. CoP encourage a shift in our stovepipe -- from islands of isolation to communities that share their knowledge and learn from one another. Without this, CoP are nothing more than stovepipes by another name. Communities of Practice are not a new kind of organizational unit to the Corps, rather they are a different cut on the organization's structure, one that emphasizes the learning that people have done together rather than the unit they report to, the project they work on or the people they know.”

b. AR 25-1. AR 25-1 further defines CoP as a group of people who regularly interact to collectively learn, solve problems, build skills and competencies, and develop best practices around a shared concern, goal, mission, set of problems, or work practice. CoPs cut across formal organizational structures and increase individual and organizational agility and responsiveness by enabling faster learning, problem solving, and competence building; greater reach to expertise across the force; and quicker development and diffusion of best practices. CoP structures range from informal to formal and may also be referred to as structured professional forums, knowledge networks, or collaborative environments. Ideally, every USACE team member will be a member of at least one CoP.

7. CoP Guiding Principles. To implement CoPs effectively, it is important to understand the fundamental CoP guiding principles discussed below.

a. Communities form around shared interest—Communities are formed around a shared interest in accomplishing the Corps mission. They accomplish this by sharing information,

maintaining and building expertise of their members and by solving problems. Communities create synergy as members and interested parties participate and share best practices.

b. Communities are built on Trust—Trust is the foundation of any community. Trust manifests itself when people share their expertise because they know it will be used for the good of the organization.

c. Communities provide value to their members—The long term success of any CoP is dependent upon the value it provides to its members. That value includes personal growth and learning, the recognition and satisfaction of contributing to the greater good of the organization, the benefit of USACE wide assistance in solving problems encountered, the ability to influence and maintain situational awareness, and the recognition and satisfaction of contributing to something bigger than one's self. Each member participates to the extent that he/she realizes these benefits.

d. Communities are engines of learning—Communities exist to share, enhance, advise and encourage expertise across the entire Corps. By bringing together the knowledge and expertise of the entire community, members can continually learn and raise the level of professionalism. Communities serve as innovation hubs where ideas can be developed, tested, and shared. The community is a learning organization that learns from its experience. Communities support individual learning by providing a forum for discussion with peers and experts as shown in Figure 7-1, Cycle of Professional/Personal Development.



Figure 7-1: Cycle of Professional/Personal Development

e. Communities are not bound by geography, organization or hierarchy--Each community is a clear example of “*One Corps operating virtually as a learning organization*”. Communities of Practice exist outside the normal organizational structure and participation on the part of each member is voluntary. To reinforce the point that Communities are not bound by geography, organization or hierarchy, all USACE Communities of Practice will be called Communities of Practice. Even when a CoP has identified the need for additional communities with a more focused area of interest - commonly referred to as sub-communities of practice - it is the intent to identify all communities of practice as Communities of Practice, This will increase the visibility of the existence of these Communities to everyone in USACE and reinforces the concept that Communities of Practice are not part of some hierarchy. The graphic in Figure 7-2, USACE Communities of Practice, depicts how CoPs may contain members from different organizational units, geographies, disciplines, and levels of the organization. Communities may vary in size from a few members to many. What’s key to note is that preferably every CoP should have a Champion but must have a Community Leader.

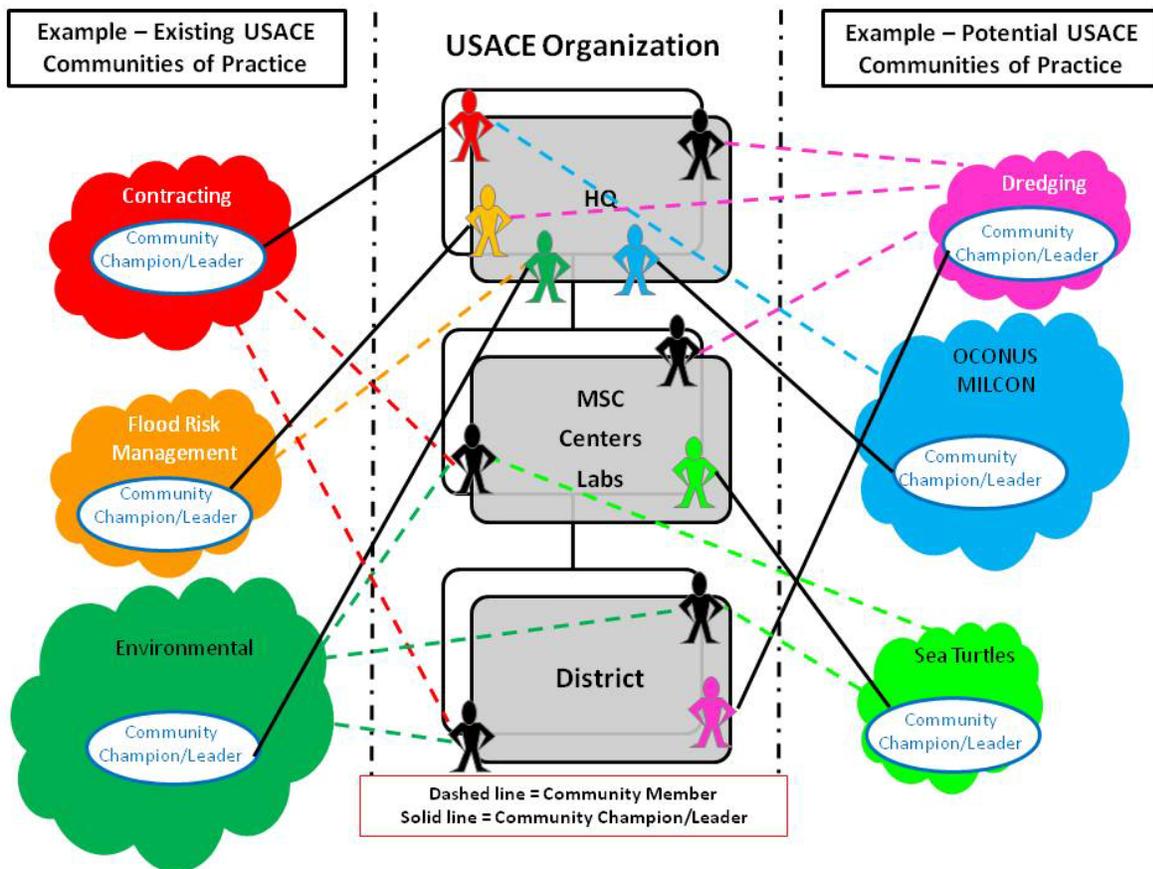


Figure 7-2: USACE Communities of Practice

f. Communities are built on Relationships--The foundation of a Community is relationships among people. Communities may include members from outside agencies and stakeholders. Successful communities build relationships with other communities.

g. Communities Promote Communication--CoPs facilitate community-wide communication among members. This communication extends across all organizational and geographic boundaries and is not hindered by varying information technology tools typically used for day-to-day communication where members know how to communicate within the community. Other venues may include national or regional conferences and face-to-face meetings.

h. Communities and Teams--A key concept for Communities to be successful is to understand how they are different than teams. Teams are formed by management to perform a task. Teams have a clear leader and should operate with a project management plan. Teams disestablish with the completion of the assigned task(s). Work performed by teams accomplishes the mission of the organization. Communities may be self-forming, and while they may support the accomplishment of work by team members, the Communities are just another resource for the team members to help them perform their work. The CoPs versus Team Comparison Matrix in Appendix A illustrates the difference between Communities and teams.

i. Communities and Functional Offices— Communities are not bound by geography, organization or hierarchy. Functional offices have a defined organizational structure and hierarchy. In functional offices individuals may have team leaders, branch chiefs and division chiefs. Functional offices appear on organizational charts with lines of authority indicating defined areas of responsibilities. For example we have engineering and construction divisions with a design branch, and human resources development divisions with training sections, each with their own functional chain of command. Communication between these functional offices is generally limited to mission execution and not general knowledge sharing. This is in contrast to communities of practice where all members communicate without regard to organizational structure and the focus is on knowledge sharing with each other. There is limited structure to the community, although there may be a few people whose designated role is to facilitate and guide the community of practice. The CoPs versus Functional Office Comparison Matrix in Appendix A illustrates the difference between Communities and Functional Offices.

8. Strategic Positions Supporting CoPs. Active involvement by the general members of a CoP is critical to the success of the community serving as a knowledge sharing venue. Additionally there are a number of key functional and knowledge sharing individuals which are necessary to ensure a CoP is successful. Additional details on roles and responsibilities can be found in the USACE QMS business process titled “Cultivating CoPs Within USACE”. Some key positions with designated responsibilities to support CoPs include:

a. USACE Commanders create an organizational culture that supports knowledge sharing and adheres to the guiding principles of CoPs.

b. Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) facilitates the exchange of knowledge, enterprise-wide, and will establish a Knowledge Management (KM) Advisory Board.

c. Community Champion provides high level sponsorship and support for the community at large, promoting the value of membership across the organization, thereby encouraging community growth and commitment of resources.

d. Community Leader guides the community's purpose and strategic intent, energizes the process, and provides continuous nourishment for the community.

e. Subject Matter Experts (SME's) are knowledgeable and experienced members of the community who use their knowledge of the discipline to judge what is important, groundbreaking, and useful.

9. Resourcing. Successful implementation of CoPs within USACE offers tremendous potential for sharing knowledge and experiences across USACE. Necessary resources and investment will be provided in three ways: directly, through the investment in technological tools recommended by the CKO; directly and indirectly, through the annual budget allocations to the CKO and core functional offices and entities which are at the heart of each CoP; and, indirectly, through the contributions of CoP members to the CoPs and project development teams (PDT's) to which they belong. At the District level, where the vast majority of the technical expertise resides, Commanders, leaders, supervisors and resource providers must be willing to invest and underwrite the time for their employees to be involved in, contribute to, and learn from CoPs. Over the long term, this minimal investment of employees time will help realize the incalculable benefits of mature CoP, operating virtually across USACE, contributing directly to Project Delivery Teams solving problems in a more timely and efficient manner and facilitating the retention and sharing of technical capital. All USACE leaders, supervisors, resource providers and managers must fully support this approach for CoPs to succeed.

10. Benefits and Value. Communities of Practice have value to individual members, the community, and to the entire USACE organization. Some of the benefits that will be realized by active, engaged, and effective CoPs are listed below:

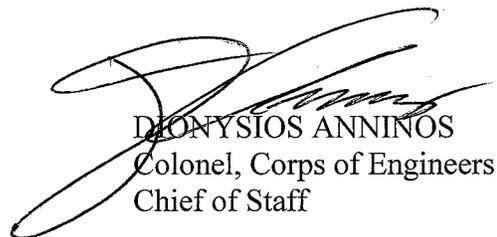
- a. Flow of high-quality information from both inside and outside the community
- b. Prevent loss of knowledge
- c. Less "reinventing the wheel"
- d. Time and cost savings
- e. Improve creativity and promote innovation

- f. Error reduction
- g. Promote personal development and individual learning
- h. Develop mentoring relationships outside of geographical boundaries
- i. Provide team learning opportunities
- j. Encourage professional development and identification of career competencies
- k. Increased engagement with professional organizations

11. Measuring Value. In order to be recognized by USACE, the community must demonstrate that it is providing value to its members and to the USACE organization. Metrics, both quantitative and qualitative, can assist community leaders in determining how effective the community is in reaching and providing value to the members. Communities are encouraged to utilize and monitor metrics to track their effectiveness and help take positive action to build and improve the community. Participation and use of metrics is encouraged and is an option available for CoP leaders to assess the value of the CoP. See QMS Business Process “Cultivating CoPs within USACE” (ES-20200) for suggested metrics.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Appendix - CoPs vs Team
Comparison Matrix
Glossary



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Colonel, Corps of Engineers
Chief of Staff

APPENDIX A

CoPs versus Team Comparison Matrix

Table A-1: CoPs versus Team Comparison Matrix

	CoPs	Teams	Functional Office
What is the purpose?	Support, enhance and guide the professional skills and abilities of members in any knowledge area/discipline for the greater good of the organization and the individual.	Accomplish a project plan/mission that supports organization objectives.	To accomplish the assigned missions and functions.
Who belongs?	Anyone from within USACE interested in the topic addressed by the COP. Others from outside USACE may join too as determined by the individual CoPs	Members of the organization and others from outside the organization.	Members of that organization.
What makes members come together?	Self-selection based on expertise or passion.	Selected and assigned by management.	Selected and assigned by management.
What is the glue holding it together?	The passion, commitment, and identification to the chosen knowledge area/discipline.	The project management plan.	Support for the missions assigned to that Functional Office.
What is the nature of the activities?	Defined by CoP members.	Tasks are assigned by management. Specific goals from organization, establishing deliverables and deadlines.	Tasks are assigned by management. Specific goals from organization, establishing deliverables and deadlines.
How long does it last?	As long as the members have an interest in and are actively building and sustaining the community.	Until the project or work deliverable is completed.	Ongoing.
What are the resources?	Information and knowledge assets contributed by the members. Collaboration tools and funding to support the CoP provided by the organization.	Information and knowledge assets contributed by the members. Program/project funds participation of team members.	Information and knowledge assets contributed by the members. Organizational information technology tools, supplies and funding to accomplish mission.

GLOSSARY

Terms and Abbreviations

Community Champion: A senior leader providing high level sponsorship, support, and strategic direction for one or more communities of practice. Champions encourage growth and participation in communities of practice and value and reward knowledge sharing.

Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO): CKOs focus their efforts on an integrated set of activities that address organizational behaviors, processes, and technologies. These activities involve leveraging the organizations "soft stuff" that fall in the areas of: providing leadership and strategy, capturing outcomes, identifying best practices/ processes, promoting a knowledge-sharing culture, facilitating communities of practice, using incentives and rewards, recommending tools and technology, promoting education and identifying resource needs. In sum, their role is to create and maintain an environment and atmosphere within which all workers deliver value to the organization using existing and unexploited explicit and tacit knowledge sources. Frequently, CKOs fulfill this role by experimenting and partnering with business units to promote sharing across time, space, and boundaries.

Community Leader: Facilitates the day-to day operations of a community of practice and energizes the community. The community leader is the liaison to the community champion, lead editor for the community, and expert on the focus of the community.

Community of Practice (CoP): A CoP is a group of people who regularly interact to collectively learn, solve problems, build skills and competencies, and develop best practices around a shared concern, goal, mission, set of problems, or work practice. CoPs cut across formal organizational structures and increase individual and organizational agility and responsiveness by enabling faster learning, problem solving, and competence building; greater reach to expertise across the force; and quicker development and diffusion of best practices. CoP structures range from informal to formal and may also be referred to as structured professional forums, knowledge networks, or collaborative environments. (AR 25-1)

Explicit knowledge: Explicit knowledge is knowledge that has been or can be articulated, codified, and stored in certain media. It can be readily transmitted to others. The most common forms of explicit knowledge are manuals, and documents, or other digital media. (Army Knowledge Management Principles)

Knowledge: The state or fact of knowing. Familiarity, awareness, or understanding gained through experience or study. Knowledge is composed of the tacit experiences, ideas, insights, values, and judgments of individuals. It is the integration of ideas, experience, intuition, skill, and lessons learned that has the potential to create value for a business, its employees, its products and services, its customers and ultimately its

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stakeholders by providing information for decisions and improving actions. Information + Context = Knowledge.

Knowledge Management (KM): KM is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, retrieving, evaluating, and sharing an enterprise's tacit and explicit knowledge assets to meet mission objectives. The objective is to connect those who know with those who need to know (know-why, know-what, know-who, and know-how) by leveraging knowledge transfers from one-to-many across the enterprise. (Army Knowledge Management Principles)

Subject Matter Expert: A knowledgeable and experienced individual who shares that expertise with his/her community to inform others, answer questions, and save resources.

Tacit Knowledge: Tacit knowledge is knowledge that people carry in their minds and is difficult to access and not easily shared. People are often not aware of this knowledge they possess and how valuable it can be to others. It is considered more valuable because it provides context for people, places, ideas, and experiences. (Army Knowledge Management Principles)