A Multi-sectoral Community of Practice Amongst Librarians
Une communauté de pratique multisectorielle parmi les bibliothécaires

Helen Power et Chau Ha

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Résumé de l'article

Les communautés de pratique (CdP) rassemblent des praticiens qui partagent un intérêt commun et leur offrent un forum pour améliorer leur pratique. La CdP des bibliothécaires de Saskatoon a été créée vers la fin 2019 pour répondre à un besoin de développement professionnel au sein des bibliothécaires de la ville. Des bibliothécaires de tous les secteurs ont été invités à se joindre à cette CdP multisectorielle dans le but de faire du réseautage, de collaborer et de partager les meilleures pratiques. Les communautés de pratique multisectorielles ne sont pas courantes dans la littérature, car la plupart des CdP se concentrent sur un domaine d'intérêt précis ou sont hébergées au sein d'un établissement. Cette étude présente les résultats d'une enquête menée auprès des bibliothécaires de Saskatoon, y compris ceux qui sont devenus membres de la CdP et ceux qui ont choisi de ne pas y adhérer. L'enquête visait à recueillir des commentaires anonymes sur la CdP afin d'en déterminer les avantages et d'identifier les domaines potentiels de croissance et d'amélioration. Quoique la CdP n'ait pas eu un impact direct sur la pratique des membres, les participants ont identifié des impacts indirects, y compris l'occasion de partager de l'information, d'entendre parler d'enjeux liés aux bibliothèques provenant d'autres perspectives et de socialiser. Plusieurs membres préfèraient une approche informelle et souple plutôt que des rencontres académiques plus rigides. Des communications et des contrôles réguliers avec les membres et les membres potentiels ont été identifiés comme une façon de palier à l'attrition naturelle qui survient avec les CdP et de continuer à s'assurer que la CdP demeure pertinente et engageante pour les bibliothécaires de Saskatoon.

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Helen Power
Engineering and Science Librarian
University of Saskatchewan
Helen.power@usask.ca

Chau Ha
Instructional Librarian
Saskatchewan Polytechnic Library
chau.ha@saskpolytech.ca

Abstract / Résumé

Communities of Practice (CoPs) bring together practitioners who share a common interest and provide a forum for them to improve upon their practice. The Saskatoon Librarians CoP was formed in late 2019 to fulfil a professional development need among librarians across the city. Librarians from across sectors were invited to join in this multi-sectoral CoP with the intent of it being an opportunity for networking, collaborating, and sharing best practices. Multi-sectoral communities of practice are not common in the literature, with most CoPs focusing on a narrow subject area of interest or being hosted by a single institution. This study reports on the results of a survey of Saskatoon librarians, including those who became members of the CoP and those who opted not to join. The survey was intended to garner anonymous feedback on the CoP to determine its benefits and to identify potential areas for growth and improvement. While the CoP did not directly impact members' practice, participants did identify indirect impacts, including an opportunity to share information, hear about librarianship issues from other perspectives, and socialize. Many members preferred an informal, flexible approach over more rigid, academic meeting structures. Regular communication and check-ins with members and potential members was identified as a way of handling

the natural attrition that comes with CoPs and to continue to keep the CoP relevant and engaging for the librarians of Saskatoon.

Les communautés de pratique (CdP) rassemblent des praticiens qui partagent un intérêt commun et leur offrent un forum pour améliorer leur pratique. La CdP des bibliothécaires de Saskatoon a été créée vers la fin 2019 pour répondre à un besoin de développement professionnel au sein des bibliothécaires de la ville. Des bibliothécaires de tous les secteurs ont été invités à se joindre à cette CdP multisectorielle dans le but de faire du réseautage, de collaborer et de partager les meilleures pratiques. Les communautés de pratique multisectorielles ne sont pas courantes dans la littérature, car la plupart des CdP se concentrent sur un domaine d'intérêt précis ou sont hébergées au sein d'un établissement. Cette étude présente les résultats d'une enquête menée auprès des bibliothécaires de Saskatoon, y compris ceux qui sont devenus membres de la CdP et ceux qui ont choisi de ne pas y adhérer. L'enquête visait à recueillir des commentaires anonymes sur la CdP afin d'en déterminer les avantages et d'identifier les domaines potentiels de croissance et d'amélioration. Quoique la CdP n'ait pas eu un impact direct sur la pratique des membres, les participants ont identifié des impacts indirects, y compris l'occasion de partager de l'information, d'entendre parler d'enjeux liés aux bibliothèques provenant d'autres perspectives et de socialiser. Plusieurs membres préfèraient une approche informelle et souple plutôt que des rencontres académiques plus rigides. Des communications et des contrôles réguliers avec les membres et les membres potentiels ont été identifiés comme une façon de palier à l'attrition naturelle qui survient avec les CdP et de continuer à s'assurer que la CdP demeure pertinente et engageante pour les bibliothécaires de Saskatoon.

Keywords / Mots-clés

community of practice, professional development, career development, education; communauté de pratique, développement professionnel, développement de carrière, éducation

Introduction

Librarianship is a broad discipline with many potential career paths and environments, from public libraries to academia. One of the key values of the profession, as outlined in the American Library Association's (ALA's) (2019) *Core Values of Librarianship*, is education and lifelong learning. There are numerous ways for library and information science (LIS) professionals to engage in lifelong learning, including attending workshops and conferences, watching online webinars, reading scholarly literature, and joining communities of practice (CoPs). CoPs are defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 9). In librarianship, this model presents an opportunity for LIS professionals to come together to learn from one another.

The Saskatoon Librarians CoP was initiated in late 2019, when Chau Ha perceived a need for networking and collaboration among librarians in the city and decided that a

CoP could provide a solution. A distributed CoP is defined by Wenger et al. (2002) as being spread out geographically, which can be on a small scale, spanning different units with an institution, or on a broader scale, comprising different organizations and time zones. Within Saskatoon, a multi-sectoral, distributed CoP was proposed to provide an opportunity for librarians to learn from those in different specialities and who work in various types of libraries, providing diverse perspectives and expertise. The hope was that this would open the door for collaborations across institutions that could ultimately make a positive impact on the residents of Saskatoon. The CoP format was selected because it provides a unique opportunity to learn from others in a forum that encourages social interactions. This social element is a critical aspect because Saskatoon is an isolated city, and engagement with librarians from other locations is generally limited to attendance at conferences, which in turn is subject to institutional budgets.

In late 2019, an initial meeting was struck among interested librarians across the city. There was a general consensus that learning from those with roles different from their own would be beneficial, so the Saskatoon Librarians CoP was officially formed in 2020. Shortly after, Helen Power joined as co-chair.

The purpose of the CoP was threefold: (1) to provide a forum to share information across library sectors within Saskatoon, (2) to explore possibilities for networking and collaboration, and (3) to gain knowledge to solve various practice issues in librarianship.

This paper will report on the results of a CoP for librarians who are geographically co-located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan but who have different expertise, specialties, and job descriptions. Specifically, this paper will address the following two questions: How has engaging with individuals from other types of institutions influenced librarians' practice, both directly and indirectly? What are the benefits and challenges of bringing together librarians from across sectors to discuss practice?

Literature Review

Eldho Joy and Vijayakumar (2016) described a CoP as an interest group gathering to solve practice problems through sharing and discussion. CoPs have existed for as long as people have, with an early example being prehistoric humans gathering and communicating with each other about survival techniques (Wenger et al., 2002). In essence, CoPs bring together individuals who share a specific interest and are practitioners of that hobby or career (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). LIS professionals often engage in CoPs, whether formal or informal, even if they simply have casual discussions around the watercooler. Furthermore, Bilodeau and Carson (2014) found that academic librarians participate in CoPs for professional development purposes throughout the entirety of their career, from newly graduated librarians to experienced practitioners.

Wenger et al. (2002) defined CoPs as change-oriented groups that embrace different perspectives, invite participation, and focus on providing value to their members. They also identified the stages of a CoP as follows: potential, coalescing, maturing,

stewardship, and transformation. According to Wenger et al., successful CoPs have members with common goals, interests, and a shared identity; members who are invested in relationship building and fostering a sense of community; and a framework to guide their practice.

Successful CoPs also often focus on a specific area of librarianship. For instance, Osborn (2017) formed a CoP specifically on the topic of library instruction, while Smith and Lee (2017) created a CoP specifically for Open Education Resources librarians to share experiences, stories, and tools in order to create a sense of identity and connectedness. In other cases, CoPs are formed not around a topic but around a need. An example is when Luetkemeyer et al. (2021) used the CoP framework to create a critical friends group to provide feedback, discussion, and reflection on projects that individual members were working on.

Burns (2020) noted that an important reason for having a CoP is to cultivate a sense of identity and community. However, to accomplish this goal, a CoP requires structure. Johnson and Vasudev (2020) recommended establishing goals and objectives for a CoP as well as identifying barriers to participation in order to measure success. They established their CoP by developing an administrative and leadership structure, identifying topics for discussion, and examining opportunities for improvement. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) recommended that CoPs have a leader or organizer and a facilitator in order to create a structure, whether formal or informal, that would facilitate knowledge sharing and knowledge creation. Similarly, Carroll and Mallon (2021) found value in having a CoP with an established framework to meet the professional development needs of librarians, but they also stressed the importance of evaluation to determine its value and to assess whether the structure continues to achieve the group's goals.

It's also important for CoP organizers and members to be aware of potential challenges and mitigate them early with strategies such as managing boundaries, aligning the CoP with members' goals or, where applicable, with institutional goals, and engaging in regular assessment and evaluation of the CoP to catch problems early. In particular, Wenger et al. (2002) warned against group think and group dysfunction that can happen when members disregard others' perspectives, form cliques, or leave individuals feeling disconnected. Attrition is another factor that needs to be carefully considered. Attrition is a naturally occurring process within CoPs, so while it's important to continually add new members, they must be properly oriented to the value, purpose, and process of the CoP (Gola & Martin, 2020).

While structure, group cohesion, and clarity of goals are all important facets of CoPs, it's equally important to ensure that CoPs offer a degree of flexibility to their members as well. Attebury et al. (2013) found three characteristics that foreshadow the decline of a CoP: an overly formal structure without strong leadership, a gap between expected and realized benefits, and an unclear purpose. Gola and Martin (2020) stated that the key to sustainability is to have a flexible structure, where facilitators can rotate so that all members have an opportunity to lead. It is also important for members to experience diverse voices and to have the ability to choose which meetings they will attend (Gola &

Martin, 2020). Miller (2011) found that the characteristics of a CoP cannot be rigidly defined and that each one may develop their own unique tools and infrastructure for knowledge sharing. Ultimately, keeping a CoP running and impactful requires constant attention, dedication, and work (Thomas & Martin, 2020).

The additional challenges of a distributed CoP include relationship building, networking, and connecting with members across geographic regions, because it takes additional commitment to participate (Wenger et al., 2002). The value of a distributed CoP is that there is a diversity of views, but with this comes the challenge of finding common ground. It is important to take time to develop trust and relationships between members so that meaningful sharing can take place. Wenger et al. encouraged CoPs to incorporate activities to promote trust and relationship building or have regular networking events.

There is little research on multi-sectoral communities of practice in librarianship in the literature. Clifton et al. (2017) reported on health sciences librarians from an academic library collaborating with public librarians to create a Health Information Specialists Program. In this case, they formed a CoP to share knowledge regarding a specific area of librarianship. However, the model they employed was centred around professional education for public librarians and was not a true CoP, which would have involved all members discussing their practice and learning from one another reciprocally.

The Saskatoon Librarians Community of Practice

In the fall of 2019, Chau Ha reached out to the librarians at Saskatchewan Polytechnic (SaskPolytech), the University of Saskatchewan (USask), the Saskatoon Public Library (SPL), and the Saskatchewan Health Authority to see if they were interested in being part of a CoP. Librarians that expressed interest met at a local restaurant in November to discuss what a CoP was and to identify next steps. Helen Power, a librarian at USask, volunteered to co-chair the group with Chau Ha. After a review of the literature on CoPs in librarianship, materials were forwarded to the librarians who had expressed interest in the group. This was the first step in developing terms of reference (ToR) (see Appendix A). Only those who elected to join the CoP were contacted regarding upcoming meeting dates and the development of the ToR. These individuals are collectively referred to as 'CoP members.' Non-members are librarians in Saskatoon who elected not to join the CoP and were not included in regular communication about the activities of the group. To join, individuals responded to the emails sent to all librarians in Saskatoon. Those who did not request to be added to the list were deemed to be uninterested and were not added to the CoP membership list.

The co-chairs drafted a ToR document, which they then emailed to CoP members along with a request for input. There was no feedback provided to the co-chairs, and they interpreted this as approval by the group.

The purpose of the CoP stated in the initial ToR was as follows:

   1) to provide a forum to share information across library sectors within Saskatoon;

2) to explore possibilities for networking and collaboration; and,

3) to gain knowledge to solve various practice issues in librarianship.

The CoP decided to meet in-person quarterly to discuss a variety of topics identified as being valuable for improving their librarianship practice. The group was surveyed anonymously for topics of interest and dates and times to meet. The times selected for meetings were chosen based on the availability of those who responded to the polls and were held during work hours, which was agreed upon verbally at the first meeting. The CoP had originally intended to meet in person, but just as the first official meeting was about to be scheduled in March 2020, the government locked down the province to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This meant that librarians in the city were required to work from home and could only make short trips to access essential services outside the home. This in-person CoP had to suddenly become a virtual CoP.

The co-chairs identified discussion topics collaboratively, both by asking members during each meeting and by sending follow-up emails to all CoP members to give a voice to those who did not attend. This is also how meeting frequency was set.

The ToR laid out a structure for sessions that was quite prescriptive, stating that CoP meetings would be held quarterly for 1.5 hours, with a standing, yet flexible agenda. The agenda was as follows:

- Introductions, new members

- Presentation and/or facilitated discussion of topic

- Around the table

- Future agendas/ housekeeping

The facilitator of each individual meeting could be anyone, including the co-chairs, any member of the group, or special guest speakers. The duty of the facilitator was to select a topic for discussion after soliciting feedback from the group. They had the option of providing a short bibliography of resources and preliminary questions so that group members could prepare for the discussion. However, once the pandemic struck, there was much more flexibility in the meeting structures, and the co-chairs served as co-facilitators for each meeting due to the lack of response to their emailed requests for expressions of interest.

The co-chairs' responsibilities were to manage the group's administration, including sending out meeting invitations, putting out calls for new members, and distributing agendas and materials for discussion. Group members were expected to come prepared to share their experiences and participate in the discussion.

Although polls were sent to all CoP members to select the date and time of the next meeting, the CoP developed a core group of the same four or five librarians at each meeting. While the ToR indicated that meetings would be held quarterly, it was decided

at the first official meeting, which took place online in March of 2020, that meeting more frequently would be beneficial due to the need to connect in a remote work environment. Despite this decision, attendance began to decrease, so the co-chairs decided to return to meeting quarterly to better accommodate their own capacity to organize and facilitate meetings.

Table 1

Dates, Attendance and Topics for CoP Meetings

Date	Topic	Approximate attendance
March 2020	Remote work	19
April 2020	Teaching online	6
May 2020	Trends in reference services	8
October 2020	Assessment and evaluation of practice	Not available
January 2021	Revisiting working remotely	6
April 2021	Casual chat	5
August 2021	Check in: What are we doing this fall?	4

Various tactics were used to engage members to take an active role in planning CoP topics and discussions, such as polls for discussion topics, a collaborative website for sharing (Slack), and asking those who attended the meetings what topics they would like to discuss and what changes could be made to the meeting structure. Unfortunately, very little feedback was provided by the group through these avenues. As a result, the co-chairs deemed it necessary to create an anonymous survey of all the city librarians. This was done in hopes of improving the dwindling attendance, identifying potential areas of improvement, and formally identifying the benefits and challenges of a location-based, multi-sectoral community of practice.

Methodology

The inclusion criteria for participation in this study is librarians working within the geographical bounds of the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Librarians are defined as all those working in a librarian position, including managers, supervisors, and deans. Exclusion criteria includes those not working in librarian positions and those not working within the city limits. Because of the onset of the pandemic occurring prior to the collection of data, the language surrounding living in the city was removed, as work had become remote, and some librarians could be residing elsewhere, but their workplace remained within the city. As this CoP was meant for librarians working at the hospital, university, public, and college libraries within the city, contact information for all librarians fitting these parameters had been collected and used to distribute the initial invitations to join the CoP in late 2019. The survey was sent to all individuals who had been initially contacted to join the CoP in late 2019, as the same email lists and points

of contact for each institution were used. There was, however, the potential for some exclusion due to employee turnover at some institutions over the span of those two years.

Because of the small number of librarians in Saskatoon and the desire for a high participation rate, the co-authors settled on using an anonymous survey to garner feedback. There are only 76 librarians in the city, and the authors wanted the highest participation rate possible. They chose to primarily use open-ended questions that were optional so as not to discourage individuals from completing the survey.

The survey questions were designed to emphasize the primary research questions regarding the impact of this multi-sectoral CoP on librarians' practice. These questions stemmed from the co-chairs' observations of what transpired in the group and were crafted in collaboration with the USask Library's Assessment Analyst (see Appendix B for the full list of survey questions and the question logic used). Individuals who self-identified as members of the CoP would be directed to a longer survey including questions about the CoP's scope and impact. Those who had not elected to become CoP members viewed a truncated survey, which included a question asking their reason for not participating and an invitation to leave comments on how the scope of the CoP could be altered to better fit their needs.

Ethics approval was obtained via the USask Research Ethics Board. The consent form clarified that the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and that participants could skip questions, exit the survey, and withdraw their data up to the point at which they submitted the survey. Once they had submitted the survey, they could not withdraw consent.

The survey was developed using Survey Monkey, and it was distributed via email. The survey was open for two weeks, with two reminder emails. The longer survey provided to CoP members also included several questions regarding their satisfaction with session facilitation. Analysis of these questions is outside the scope of this research article, but they were included in the survey to identify any changes needed in the co-chairs' discussion-leading skills and techniques. The questions are included in the appendix for transparency.

Findings

Of approximately 76 email invitations that were sent to the librarians in the city, we received 34 responses to the survey. Three responses were incomplete, meaning that they did not submit the survey, and these responses were removed from the findings, as per our ethics requirements. The survey was also unintentionally sent to three librarians who were outside of the scope of the city, and their results were removed from the findings, though one of these provided a suggestion to expand the CoP's geographic scope and is briefly addressed in the discussion. Twenty-eight survey responses were included in the study, resulting in a 36.8% participation rate.

Table 2 shows the institutional affiliation of respondents and their self-reported attendance at meetings. Seven respondents were from SPL, 15 from USask, four from SaskPolytech, and two from the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Of the 28 included responses, 13 participants self-reported as having joined the CoP, and 15 stated that they did not.

Of the 13 respondents that became CoP members, four respondents self-identified as having attended one meeting, five said two meetings, and only four said three or more meetings. No CoP members said they did not attend any meetings.

Table 2

Respondent Demographics Including Institutional Affiliation and Attendance at CoP Meetings.

Institutional affiliation	Did not join CoP	Joined; did not attend meetings	Attended 1 meeting	Attended 2 meetings	Attended 3+ meetings
Public Library	1	0	1	4	1
University Library	10	0	2	2	1
College Library	3	0	0	0	1
Health Authority Library	1	0	0	0	1

Expectations vs. Reality

A key theme that arises in the literature regarding the assessment of CoPs is the disconnect between expectations and reality (Attebury et al., 2013). All 13 respondents who self-identified as being CoP members answered the question about their reason for joining the CoP. Of these responses, three clear themes arose. Eight of the respondents indicated that they joined in order to network and build relationships with librarians outside of their field or institution. Three respondents specifically mentioned looking for ways to collaborate with librarians from other institutions. Ten respondents indicated a desire to learn about practices outside of their institution, as well as to learn about how librarians in other sectors handle different areas of librarianship.

A Likert scale was used to assess whether members agreed that the CoP had achieved its goals, as outlined in the terms of reference. Table 3 shows that the majority of CoP members who responded to the survey agreed that the CoP had met its goals. One of them self-identified as having attended one meeting but when later asked about the impact of the CoP inserted a comment stating that they had not been able to attend any of the meetings. The other self-reported as having attended two meetings and disagreed with the CoP achieving its first and third goals.

Table 3

Results from Likert Scale Assessing Whether CoP Members Agreed the CoP Had Achieved its Goals

Achievement of CoP Goals	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Provided a forum to share information across library sectors within Saskatoon	4 (36.36%)	3 (27.27%)	3 (27.27%)	1 (9.09%)	0 (0%)
Explored possibilities for networking and collaboration	3 (27.27%)	7 (63.64%)	1 (9.09%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Gained knowledge to solve various practice issues in librarianship	2 (18.18%)	5 (45.45%)	2 (18.18%)	2 (18.18%)	0 (0%)

Note: n=11

Only 5 respondents answered the open-ended question asking for comments about the scope of the CoP's goals and whether it was achieving these goals. One librarian from SPL and one from USask said that they supported the scope and/or had no feedback. Two of the comments were unrelated to scope. One respondent said that there should be a focus on "relationship building."

A public librarian said they wanted the events to be more social and did not like the academic spin that some sessions took: "Was hoping for something looser and more social." Another public librarian indicated that they felt their library was "over-represented" at the meetings, so they would not attend and instead got information from coworkers after the event itself.

Another challenge came from a librarian with a supervisory role who attended one meeting and commented that discussion of practice issues with those they supervise can "create uncomfortable and awkward situations."

A librarian from USask commented that the small group size for some meetings made discussion and sharing less valuable, stating, "Greater attendance at the meetings would help facilitate more robust discussions and information sharing."

Three respondents (1 USask, 2 SPL) stated that they attended meetings based on the topic for discussion. One respondent from USask stated that they were happy with their current level of attendance and involvement and that they "appreciate the flexible nature of a CoP where members can choose to attend or not based on their level of interest to the topic at hand."

When asked if there were any additional comments, one respondent said,

I love the idea of this and the facilitators were highly competent, organized, and engaged, but every participant in the "community" needs to be on the same footing for a formal structure like this to work. Partnerships and collaboration come out of relationships. Start with relationships.

Another respondent said, "I would really like there to be a leadership component of this group in Saskatoon."

Impact on Practice

Ten out of 11 CoP members stated that attending the CoP had no direct influence on their practice. Five respondents, spanning across all four institutions, indicated in some way that they appreciated the opportunity to learn about what other libraries and librarians were doing. This increased awareness of other approaches to librarianship may have impacted their practice indirectly.

A respondent from USask stated, "I'm not sure it has directly influenced my practice yet, but the ability to engage with other librarians and build local networks has value beyond direct influences to my work." A public librarian said that "hearing from others about how they approach a situation or issue does help me to reframe or reevaluate [sic] my own approach." Another respondent said, "I get to see how other librarians are dealing with current issues that I don't have experience with." The college librarian who indicated that the CoP influenced their practice commented that learning about pandemic responses with regards to their reference questions was "beneficial."

When provided with an open-ended option to elaborate on the perceived benefits of the CoP, 3 respondents reinforced the benefit of learning what other libraries and librarians are doing (1 USask, 1 SPL, 1 SaskPolytech).

This open-ended question also identified social engagement as being a primary benefit of the CoP. Six respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet new people and build stronger connections with other librarians, and this perceived benefit was spread across librarians from different institutions (3 USask, 1 SPL, 1 Saskatchewan Health Authority, 1 SaskPolytech).

The Barrier of Time

The most consistently identified barrier to attending meetings that was reported by CoP members was the timing of the meetings, with 7 librarians making reference to this (4 public, 2 university, and 1 college). Three public librarians indicated that they would prefer meetings held outside of work hours. Two public librarians also indicated that they were not able to get or were afraid to ask for permission for such an activity, with one of them elaborating that they would like the meetings to be "more official" so that they could get managerial approval to attend. A librarian from USask stated they were too busy and had to prioritize other professional development.

Of the 15 survey respondents who elected not to join the CoP, 4 indicated it was because of a lack of time, with 3 of these respondents being from USask.

Communication

Of the 15 survey respondents who elected not to join the CoP, when asked what could be changed to make them want to participate, the responses overwhelmingly reflected possible improvements for the CoP's communication strategy. They indicated that they would appreciate an increase in communication about the CoP, including reminders that it exists, re-articulation of its scope, and information about the format and benefits of the meetings (n=3). Seven respondents indicated they were not aware that the group existed, despite being on the email list for invitations to join. One respondent said they would like to see "evidence of impact of value" prior to joining. Another respondent commented that they would like "more networking events once the province has Covid more under control." Finally, one respondent commented that they elected not to join because of a lack of strategic focus that was Saskatoon-specific. Only two respondents stated that they had no changes to suggest.

A public librarian who joined the CoP commented that they would like to have an online asynchronous workspace, such as Slack or Discord. There was already one put in place, which was promoted via email, yet only one member joined. This disconnect between what exists and what the CoP members were aware of demonstrates a need for better communication within the CoP group as well.

Impact of the Pandemic

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, just before the CoP had its first official meeting, we would be remiss not to comment on its impact on the CoP's activities.

Two respondents mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as being a reason for joining the group. One librarian from USask stated, "I wanted to meet other librarians in the city and see how everyone is dealing with the pandemic personally and professionally."

Conversely, the pandemic was also cited as a reason not to join the CoP. Two respondents indicated that because of the pandemic, they were developing online meeting fatigue and did not want to add another meeting to the list. One of these respondents later commented that they "look forward to the opportunity to meet in person."

Discussion

The uniqueness of the Saskatoon Librarians CoP is its multi-sectoral membership. The goals of the CoP are to provide a means and an opportunity for librarians across the city to collaborate, network, and learn from one another. All CoP members either agreed or were neutral about the group's accomplishment of these goals except for two respondents, one of whom had not attended any meetings. The results overwhelmingly showed that members are most interested in the social aspects of the group, with librarians across sectors wanting the group to shift its focus to this.

Several respondents commented that a lack of a specific topic or a topic that was of interest to them were reasons for not attending. This was a challenge, given the multi-sectoral nature of the CoP. While topics were selected for individual meetings, they were inherently broad in scope (e.g., "reference") because attendees were coming from different libraries with different backgrounds. The Saskatoon Librarians CoP is targeted to all librarians, which may be too broad of a scope for pre-assigned discussion topics. However, given that respondents expressed strong preference for social engagement and relationship building, readjusting the group's scope to focus on these goals may reduce the perceived irrelevance of pre-assigned topics based on individuals' roles. Fostering an environment for discussion about current projects or activities, regardless of topic, would allow participants to share feedback and collaborate in a more organic, less structured manner. This is supported by findings in the literature that flexibility is critical for the success of a CoP (Attebury et al., 2013; Gola & Martin, 2020).

The CoP was formed and its first meeting held prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, initial interest was high, but the needs of the members changed greatly once Saskatoon underwent lockdown in March 2020. The highest attended CoP meeting was the first, with 19 out of 26 members joining the online web conference meeting. This meeting was held shortly after the lockdown began, and the topic was "working remotely," which was a new and intimidating concept for many, which may have been what resulted in the inflated attendance. As outlined in the findings section, the pandemic influenced individuals' interest in the CoP both positively and negatively. Over time, attendance decreased, which may have been a result of attrition, which is expected of any CoP (Gola & Martin, 2020), or it may have been due to online meeting fatigue. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact impact that the pandemic had on members' interest and attendance. Given the gravity of the pandemic, it would have been beneficial for us to officially revisit the CoP's goals and revise the ToR to meet the evolving needs of members. This may have slowed the attrition rate.

When it comes to the best modality of future CoP meetings, it is difficult to make conclusions based on the survey results. As we move forward, we will continue to assess and communicate with the group to determine if in-person, online, or even hybrid meetings are optimal for the majority of the members.

As mentioned in the literature review, Miller (2011) stated that there is no set-in-stone format for a CoP and that individual groups develop their own best practices for information sharing, which is true in our experience. Although our CoP was informed by readings on how to develop a CoP and included clear ToR reviewed by all potential members, there is no recipe for cultivating a group identity and group connectedness, which is what many of our survey responses alluded to when expressing a desire for greater relationship building, collaboration, and networking in a social setting. Upon reflection and examination of the survey results, more attention will be placed on the relationship building aspects of the group as we move forward. This will be facilitated with a more informal structure for the group meetings, as recommended by several survey respondents. Not having a firm, standing agenda will potentially support a shift in the meeting dynamics away from academic discussion and towards relationship building.

A sense of identity and community is key for a CoP (Wenger et al., 2002), but it is something that we missed from the beginning. While all members work in Saskatoon and are librarians, there needed to be more to bring the group together to create a sense of belonging. We should have had more discussion about the type of framework people wanted, including the degree of formality and structure desired, and the over-arching theme(s) and goals of the CoP. We wrote the ToR and then sent it out for review, and this exercise might have been disengaging to members who thought this was our vision of the group and not an invitation to voice their opinion. When we received very little feedback, we assumed agreement and proceeded with a formal and academic structure. Had we provided more opportunities for feedback, we might have learned earlier on that members wanted a group that prioritized relationship building, collaboration, networking, and socializing.

Of the three respondents excluded due to them working and residing outside of the city of Saskatoon, one commented that they would like for this to be a provincial endeavour, as they wanted to join. This could be of benefit to librarians working in remote communities who may not have other opportunities to engage with fellow librarians, especially across sectors. However, if the CoP returns to in-person meetings post-pandemic, extending the invitation to those outside of Saskatoon would not be feasible due to geographic limitations.

It is necessary to also reflect on the efficacy of the modes of communication used, both for current members of the CoP and for potential members. Email lists were used for invitations to the CoP and for general communication. For communication with CoP members, email was the primary mode of communication. Email reminders were sent to members of the CoP to solicit topics of interest, yet they were rarely responded to. Polls for meeting availability also went unfilled. This made it difficult to gather feedback regarding meeting schedules, topics for discussion, and the structure of sessions. This survey provided an anonymous route for members to answer these questions, which provided information that will guide future conversations surrounding adjusting the CoP goals and meeting structure.

Increased communication with librarians in the city who initially elected not to join the CoP will also be key, both to remind them of the group's existence and to provide clarity about its evolving purpose and scope. These regular reminders will potentially engage individuals who were previously uninterested or unable to join but whose circumstances or interest has changed. Ongoing communication outside of the CoP group will also be necessary to replace members lost to natural attrition. Providing evidence of the CoP's impact, both to prospective members and to members who are not regularly attending meetings, will allow librarians to make an informed decision about committing time to this professional development opportunity. Promoting the values of the CoP through presentations and research is another way to potentially engage new members. The authors presented about the Saskatoon Librarians CoP at the 2022 Saskatchewan Library Association Conference, and they intend to share the results of this survey with librarians in Saskatoon to foster an in-depth conversation surrounding how to move forward and how to evolve the CoP in a way that best benefits all librarians in the region.

Finally, a significant barrier to participation that the co-chairs overlooked because it was not a concern at their own institutions was individuals' work schedules and time, an obstacle that was most frequently reported among public librarians. While many who joined the CoP indicated that a barrier to joining was that the meetings were held during work time, one of the respondents who chose not to join indicated that they did not want to join under the assumption that events would be held during personal time. To mitigate this, it may be possible to alternate between evening and weekday meetings in an effort to be inclusive. Another suggestion worth investigating is to make the meetings official so that supervisors are more likely to grant release time for them. One way to do this would be to connect the CoP with the provincial library association, which would give the group more weight and legitimacy when librarians bring requests for release time to their supervisors. Another possibility is to get managers involved with the CoP initiative from the outset, which might make them more likely to approve employee attendance at an event being held during work hours.

Study Limitations

The majority of respondents were from USask, but the SPL has a greater number of librarians, and very few public librarians who did not join the CoP filled out the survey. There were 26 members of the CoP, and attendance had dwindled in the later meetings down to approximately four members per meeting, but of the 13 survey respondents who joined the CoP, several of them had been active in the group, with 30% of respondents making an appearance at three or more meetings. Due to the nature of reporting on a specific community of practice with strict inclusion criteria, the study's sample size is small, which may result in outlier perspectives having greater voice than is represented in the true population of Saskatoon librarians.

Conclusion

The Saskatoon Librarians CoP was initially created to facilitate networking, collaboration, and learning among Saskatoon librarians. While there is no self-reported direct impact of the CoP on librarian practice within the city, there are indirect benefits, including increased awareness of others' practice, as well as affective, social benefits. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic clearly impacted both the facilitation of meetings and the desired outcomes from members, both in positive and negative ways. Further study post-pandemic to identify the impact of a multi-sectoral CoP would be beneficial.

This study provided the co-chairs with several key insights and introduced opportunities for improvement to better meet the needs of librarians in this region. The next step will be to develop a plan to implement these recommendations. This will be followed up with regular assessment as the needs of the group continue to grow and evolve.

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Appendix A: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for Saskatoon Librarians' Community of Practice (CoP)

Last revised: March 31, 2020

Purpose:

- To provide a forum to share information across library sectors within Saskatoon

- To explore possibilities for networking and collaboration

- To gain knowledge to solve various practice issues in librarianship

Facilitators:

- Chau Ha, Saskatchewan Polytechnic Librarian

- Helen Power, University of Saskatchewan librarian

Structure:

- The CoP meets quarterly for 1.5 hours each session. There is a standing agenda for meetings, which is flexible and may be adjusted over time.

Agenda:

- Introductions, new members

- Presentation and/or facilitated discussion of topic

- Around the table

- Future agendas/ housekeeping

Responsibility of the Chairs:

- Manage the administration of the group, including but not limited to: sending out meeting invitations, putting out calls for new members, and distributing agendas and materials for discussion

Responsibilities of the Facilitators:

- Facilitators can be the Chairs, any member of the group, or special guest speakers

- Select a topic for discussion after soliciting feedback from the group

- May provide a short bibliography of resources and preliminary questions so that group members can prepare for the discussion

Responsibility of Group Members:

- Group members are expected to come prepared to share their experiences and participate in the discussion (Please feel free to ask questions and solicit feedback or participation on any project you are working on)

Membership:

- Membership is open to all librarians in Saskatoon

Note: Terms of reference may change to address the needs or concerns of the group. Chau and Helen will be assessing and evaluating if the goals of the group have been met and write a commentary on it.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. What library are you from? SPL, University of Saskatchewan, SaskPolytech
Other:

2. Did you join the Saskatoon Librarians Community of Practice? (Please select yes
if you are on the email list, even if you have not been able to attend any of the
meetings)

   - Yes/No

   - If #2 is No: What are your reasons for not joining?

     o [Text answer]

   - Is there anything that could be changed that would make you want to join the
community of practice?

     o [Text answer] – optional

3. If #2 is Yes: What are your reasons for joining the CoP?

   - [Text answer] – optional

4. How many of the meetings have you attended?

   - 0, 1, 2, 3+ - required

5. Are there challenges or barriers to attending meetings? Please explain.

   - [Text answer] – optional

6. What would facilitate attending more meetings?

   - [Text answer] – optional

Next page: The following questions are about the impact of this community of practice.

7. How has attending the COP influenced your practice? Please explain.

   - [Text answer]

8. Have you experienced any benefits or challenges from being a member of the
CoP? Please be as specific as possible.

   - [Text answer]

Next page: The following are questions about the scope of the Community of Practice.

This is the Terms of Reference goals for the CoP:

- To provide a forum to share information across library sectors within Saskatoon

- To explore possibilities for networking and collaboration

- To gain knowledge to solve various practice issues in librarianship

Please indicate your level of agreement that the CoP is achieving these goals:

9. Providing a forum to share information across library sectors within Saskatoon

   - Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

10. Exploring possibilities for networking and collaboration

    - Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

11. Gaining knowledge to solve various practice issues in librarianship

    - Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

12. Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding the scope of the community of practice, how the CoP is doing in terms of achieving these goals, or what we could change to meet these goals?

    - [Text answer]

Next page: The following are questions about the facilitation of sessions. If you have not been able to attend any sessions, you can leave questions 15-16 unanswered.

13. How satisfied are you with the facilitator's facilitation skills?

    - Very Satisfied Satisfied Neutral Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied

14. What recommendations would you make for improvement for the facilitation of sessions?

    - [Text answer]-optional

15. Is there anything that you didn't have a chance to comment on about the scope, impact, or facilitation of this community of practice that you would like to add?

    - [Text answer]-optional