

IT Support Services Constituent Group

The IT Support Services Constituent Group is an Online Community of Practice (OCoP). This type of collaborative community is growing and offers an effective method of interaction among those with like interests. Online Community of Practice is established on the theory of connectivism. This paper will examine how the IT Support Services Constituent Group uses the online community to improve IT support services in higher education.

The Model of the IT Support Services Constituent Group

IT Support Services Constituent Group is facilitated by EDUCAUSE. The EDUCAUSE website provides informal, open online communities of practices known as Constituent and Discussion Groups. The IT Support Services Constituent Group is a member-driven OCoP that hosts a publicly searchable listserv of indexed and archived discussions. This OCoP provides the opportunity to discuss issues concerning information technology (IT) support services in higher education. The IT Support Services Constituent Group is a hub of faculty, staff and students for networking, and constructing and sharing content on best practices within the higher education community. The focus of this group is to share information, best practices, common tools and strategies” (EDUCAUSE, 2014).

The Attributes of Success

The IT Support Services Constituent Group can attribute the majority of its success to its association with EDUCAUSE. EDUCAUSE is a leading community of higher education information technology leaders and professionals. Membership includes U.S. and international colleges and universities, corporations, foundations, government, and other nonprofit organizations (EDUCAUSE, 2014). This OCoP is located on the EDUCAUSE website and is available to 1800 colleges and universities and 300 corporations that share interests in information technology in higher education (EDUCAUSE, 2014).

Furthermore, the IT Support Services Constituent Group has managed sustainability through frequent face-to-face interaction with its members. This OCoP meet at the EDUCAUSE annual and regional conferences. It uses face-to-face interactions to generate enthusiasm, significance, and value, and to attract and engage members (EDUCAUSE, 2014). Finally, what makes this OCoP successful is the robust dialogue in the online discussions. Various threads evolve naturally as member interests are stimulated and knowledge related to IT support services is acquired.

Through their association with EDUCAUSE, face-to-face meetings and robust dialogue, members have the opportunity to experience a deeper learning experience and can apply and advance their working knowledge.

The Theory of the OCoP

The IT Support Services Constituent Group is established on the theory of connectivism. Connectivism concludes that knowledge is disseminated through networks, and learning is chiefly one of establishing a diverse network of connections and observing patterns of participants (Siemens, 2008b). Siemens claims the focal point of connectivism is the practice of congregating and depositing information into a learning community by way of nodes and connections. A community of practice is a point of connection depicted as a node. More than one connection formulates a network (Siemens, 2005). The function of the network is to interface and discover new information for the purpose of formulating decisions, and conspiring ideas and information. EDUCAUSE serves as the network, and the collaboration of information within the IT Support Services Constituent Group makes it palpable to the connectivism theory.

The Functions of the OCoP

The IT Constituent and Discussion Group accommodates dialogue among members of the higher education IT community. It was created to stimulate learning by functioning as the conduit for communication, mentoring coaching and self-reflection. It uses an open, self-subscription format to promote wide participation (EDUCAUSE, 2014). The Constituent and Discussion Group utilize a collaborative process and encourage autonomy of ideas through the various discussions. The members of the group range from experts and beginners in the field of IT Support Services. This group accommodates the mature, business-minded or analytical distance education learner.

The function of this OCoP is to accommodate the “leveraging of commonalities” (EDUCAUSE, 2014). Dialogue is focused on leadership, managerial and technical issues for the purpose of providing educational value. Members ask questions or provide knowledge on “help desk management, desktop support, hardware/software standards, knowledge management, service management systems and end user communications” (EDUCAUSE, 2014). The group also serves as a platform for informal opinions relating to topics such as best practices, and innovative technology. The IT Support Services Constituent Group help members become aware of conferences, publications and other resources related to information technology in higher education. Members have also used the forum to conduct surveys that contribute to identify and resolve issue in the information technology community.

Facilitation of the OCoP

The IT Support Services Constituent Group is facilitated by group leaders Wendy Woodward and Cathy O’Bryan. Wendy Woodward is the Director of IT Support Services at Northwestern University, and is actively involved in several IT related associations (EDUCAUSE, 2014). Cathy O’Bryan is the Director of Client Support at Indiana University Bloomington, and has more than 30 years of IT support and services (EDUCAUSE, 2014). As group leaders, they assist

members maximize the use of the IT support Services Constituent Group. Group leaders oversee the development of the OCoP by monitoring, promoting, and creating new threads to generate ongoing discussion. Furthermore, group leaders monitor the threads to ensure adherence of participation guidelines.

Learning and Building Knowledge Within the OCoP

The IT Support Services Constituent Group discussions provide an exchange of ideas, opinions, expertise and experiences outside of the traditional didactic method of learning. Learners formulate their participation according to personal preferences. The idea of OCoP elevates the continuum of proficiency and allows the construction of novel learning associations. This interactive condition is conducive to preferences to learning and building knowledge, as opposed to organizational requirements. OCoPs provide accommodation for autonomy that is extremely valued and coveted in distance education.

Monitoring the Success of the OCoP?

The success of an OCoP is assessed by its sustainability. Success is indicated by activity, commitment to, and visibility of the community (EDUCAUSE, 2014). A factor used to assess the success of the IT Support Services Constituent Group is active participation. This community has an immense amount of interactions. An indication of productive dialogue is the number of replies or comments associated with each posting. Furthermore, group leaders can monitor the success of the group by conducting surveys. A survey would assist the group leaders in understanding, improving and ensuring that the objectives of the group are met, and can help identify the need for improvement. Finally, attendance at the face-to-face meetings is a good indication of the success of the community. Members who are inspired by the online interaction will be enthusiastic about attending meetings to develop a wider network of peers.

Conclusion

The IT Support Services Constituent Group is making a major contribution to the IT support services higher education community. This OCoP offers the opportunity to experience a fresh sense of independence and convenience through the concept of connectivity. The U.S. and international platform has afforded the community prominent participation and popularity. The success of group is evident by extensive dialogue. This Online Community of Practices is gaining popularity worldwide and has provided an exciting opportunity for learning and building knowledge within the IT support services community..

Renee Burrell
OMDE 610 9040
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