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From Teams to Communities of Practice

Stephen Dade Ashton

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

From Teams to Communities of Practice

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Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation documents the qualitative study that was conducted with the Ambassador Pilot Program team at Thanksgiving Point Institute; a non-profit farm, gardens, and museum complex and informal learning institution; from the summer of 2011 to the fall of 2012. The Ambassador team was tasked to develop an employee training program. Over time the team members were given more freedom to direct their own course and set their own objectives. To the co-directors of the program it seemed the Ambassadors began to embrace some characteristics common to a community of practice (CoP); however, it remained to be seen how the Ambassadors viewed themselves. Therefore, this research study seeks to answer the following research questions: Did this Ambassador team transform into a CoP or at least the beginnings of a CoP? If so, what contributed to this transformation? And if not, what discouraged this transformation from occurring? To what extent did the Ambassadors become a CoP or not?

This dissertation is comprised of two articles. The first article is a literature review of applicable CoP and team literatures that investigate the theoretical underpinnings of the question, “Can a team become a CoP?” Thus far, no documented cases have been found in the literature of teams transforming into CoPs.

The second article documents the study that was conducted at Thanksgiving Point with the Ambassador team during the Ambassador Pilot Program. Using qualitative methods including interviews, observations, and document analysis, it was observed that the Ambassador team took on many characteristics of a CoP, including becoming a community of learners, sharing a domain of interest, engaging in a common practice, and evolving organically as directed by the Ambassadors and not the senior management at Thanksgiving Point.

Appendices of this dissertation include the following: (a) a literature review similar to the first article but with more content; (b) a detailed methodology plan that outlines the qualitative methods, techniques, and standards that were followed to conduct this study; and (c) the interview protocol used during the study.

Keywords: teams, communities of practice, knowledge management, training, management, domain of shared interest, culture

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First, my thanks goes to my precious wife Erin. She encouraged me all along the way. And it was a long, long way. She and our dear children are the joy of my life.

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DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

This dissertation, *Transforming a Team into a Community of Practice*, was written in a hybrid format, which brings together the traditional dissertation format with the journal publication format.

The majority of the content for this dissertation is found within two articles. Both articles are connected to a study that was conducted with the Ambassador Pilot Program team at Thanksgiving Point Institute, a large non-profit farm, gardens, museum complex, and informal learning institution, from the summer of 2011 to the fall of 2012 to answer the following research questions: Did this Ambassador team transform into a community of practice (CoP) or at least the beginnings of a CoP? If so, what contributed to this transformation? And if not, what discouraged this transformation from occurring? To what extent did the Ambassadors become a CoP or not?

The first article is an extensive literature review on teams and CoPs. This article also considers the theoretical underpinnings of the question, "Can a team become a CoP?" Scholars have supposed that teams can become CoPs (Gilley & Kerno, 2010); however, no documented accounts of the transformation from team to CoP have been found in the literature.

The second article documents the qualitative study that was conducted at Thanksgiving Point with the Ambassador team during the Ambassador Pilot Program. The purpose of this study was to see if this Ambassador team transformed into a CoP, or at least the beginnings of a CoP. The results of the study are included in this article.

Appendix A is a literature review that is largely the same as the first article but with more content. Appendix B details the methods used in the study. Appendix C is the interview protocol followed during the study. The final section is a complete list of dissertation references.

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ARTICLE 1 – From Teams to Communities of Practice: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract for Article 1

Teams and communities of practice (CoPs) play important yet distinct roles within organizations. Teams are typically employed to accomplish tasks and meet particular objectives. CoPs provide organizations with a means to manage and share knowledge in an open, fluid manner. The following article is a literature review of applicable CoP and team literatures that investigates the theoretical underpinnings of the question, “Can a team become a CoP?” Thus far, no documented cases have been found in the literature of teams transforming into CoPs. This literature review, therefore, investigates this question by first introducing CoPs and discussing their purpose. The characteristics of CoPs and the benefit of community membership are then outlined. In conclusion, comparisons between teams and CoPs are made, and the possible transition from the one to the other is discussed.

Keywords: teams, communities of practice, knowledge management, training, management, domain of shared interest

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Introduction

As organizations have moved into the twenty-first century, increases in technology and the expansion of global markets have mandated that companies find any competitive edge possible. The effective use of *knowledge management* is one way that organizations have sought to stay relevant and maintain their competitive edge (Holsapple, 2003). Through effective knowledge management, organizations are able to share best practices, skills, traditions, and general and intrinsic knowledge among their employees. While relatively new, it is becoming increasingly popular to deliberately incorporate communities of practice (CoPs) into organizations as a tool to generate and share knowledge (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Hemmasi & Csanda, 2009; Holsapple, 2003; Smith & McKeen, 2003). While not directly related to knowledge management, teams have also continued to play an important role within organizations. An effective team can accomplish tasks, achieve goals, and generate products and services (Gilley & Kerno, 2010; Baldwin, Bommer, & Rubin, 2008; McDermott, 1999).

According to Wenger et al. (2002), communities of practice (CoPs) are “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” (p. 4). CoPs are organic structures; they facilitate learning and knowledge management within an organization (Hemmasi & Csanda, 2009; Holsapple, 2003). Contrarily, a team is “a group of people who are collectively accountable and responsible for specific outcomes, and have a high degree of interdependence and interaction” (Gilley & Kerno, 2010, p. 48; see also Baldwin, Bommer, & Rubin, 2008). Generally teams have specific assignments and are connected to specific processes or functions.

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Nickols (2011) stated, “CoPs are NOT teams or task forces. CoPs should not be confused with teams or task forces” (paragraph 4). Lesser and Storck (2001) made specific distinctions between CoPs and teams. They expressed that (a) CoP membership is usually voluntary while membership on teams is usually assigned. (b) Expertise determines authority in a CoP while authority in a team is generally assigned or based on organizational structure. (c) CoPs generally do not have specific goals or tasks to accomplish while teams are task- and goal-oriented. (d) CoPs determine their own process while teams usually follow processes defined by the organization. Thompson (2005) noted CoPs are generally not accountable to management. When there is too much managerial supervision and control, the effectiveness of a CoP can be diminished. In contrast, teams generally account to management regarding the work they accomplish. Both teams and CoPs have their benefits, drawbacks, and unique purposes, and according to Snyder and Wenger (2010), neither one is better than the other. They both fulfill specific needs.

But what if an organization wanted to develop a more effective system to manage knowledge but lacked the structure to do so? Smith and McKeen (2003) argued, “Because knowledge incorporates such a wide range of items, companies are now recognizing the crucial role communities play in creating, maintaining, and transferring knowledge” (p. 399). Others have stated that a CoP not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge within a CoP but “throughout the wider organization” (Retna and Ng, 2011, p. 55). Suppose an organization had teams built into its infrastructure but wanted to improve its knowledge management. Would it be possible to take a structured, preexisting team and transform it into an organic CoP?

There are disagreements whether or not CoPs can be deliberately designed from scratch within an organization, which will be discussed later on in this literature review; however, the

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primary objective of this literature review is to investigate the theoretical underpinnings of this question: "Can a team become a CoP?" The answer is worth knowing, because if CoPs are such effective knowledge management tools, organizations embedded with teams might find value in transforming preexisting teams into CoPs as a means to facilitate knowledge management within their infrastructure.

Review of the Literature

This literature review investigates the question, "Can a team become a CoP?" by first introducing CoPs and discussing their purpose. The characteristics of CoPs are outlined along with the benefits of community membership. Comparisons between teams and CoPs are then discussed.

Introduction to CoPs

Lave and Wenger (1991) first coined the phrase "communities of practice." Later Wenger (1998) spoke about CoPs as a way for people to engage in learning through social interactions. He identified four key components to this social theory of learning: (a) Community: learning as belonging; (b) Identity: learning as becoming; (c) Practice: learning as doing; and (d) Meaning: learning as experience (see Wenger, 1998, p. 5). In speaking about CoPs, Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that the term community implies "participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (p. 98). Barab, MaKinster, and Scheckler (2003) defined a CoP as "a persistent, sustained social network of individuals who share and develop an overlapping knowledge base, set of beliefs, values, history and experiences focused on a common practice and/or mutual enterprise" (p. 238).

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As was mentioned in the introduction, organizations have sought to stay competitive and relevant through the use of effective knowledge management (Holsapple, 2003). Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) stated, "Knowledge Management allows organizations to share, capture, organize, and store internal company knowledge and intellectual capital. It is a way of finding, understanding, and using knowledge to create value" (p. 262; see also O'Dell, 2004). According to Hildreth and Kimble (2004), "More recently, there has been recognition of the importance of more subtle, softer types of knowledge that need to be shared. This raises the question as to how this sort of knowledge might be 'managed'" (p. ix). CoPs have become an effective resource for managing knowledge.

In describing the value of CoPs, Iaquinto, Ison, and Faggian (2011) stated, "In the business management literature, a successful CoP is generally one which helps businesses compete in the marketplace. The value of a CoP is then based on its ability to help the organization it exists within achieve the organization's goals" (p. 8; see also Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger and Snyder (2000) listed several ways in which CoPs can benefit organizations. They "(a) solve problems quickly…(b) transfer best practice…(c) develop professional skills…[and] (d) help companies recruit and retain talent" (p. 141).

In relation to the value of CoPs for organizations, Lesser and Storck (2001) hypothesized that, "the vehicle through which communities are able to influence organizational performance is the development and maintenance of social capital among community members" (p. 833). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital is defined as, "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (p. 243). Not only does the individual benefit from participating in the CoP, but organizations-at-large benefit from the effective use of

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social capital. For there to be effective social capital, individuals need to be connected through networks, trust one another, and have a common understanding of challenges facing the organization (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Lesser & Storck, 2001). Therefore CoPs become the "generators" of an organization's social capital (Lesser & Storck, 2001, p. 833).

CoPs cause participants to move from a focus on the individual to a focus on the community. Barab and Duffy (2000) explained, "This [emphasis on CoPs] is a considerable shift…from a focus on the activity of an individual in a collaborative environment to a focus on the connections an individual has with the community and the patterns of participation in the community" (p. 48). Individuals can still have meaningful learning experiences in collaborative settings; however, they miss out on the unique, authentic, and lasting experiences that they can have when they are a part of a CoP. Barab and Duffy (2000) further explained, "A community is not simply bringing a lot of people together to work on a task…The key is linking into society—giving the [participants] a legitimate role (task) in society through community participation and membership" (p. 49).

Characteristics of CoPs

Many argue that CoPs require three defining characteristics: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 1998; Kerno & Mace, 2010; Wenger, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lesser & Storck, 2001). The importance of these three characteristics are detailed as follows:

> The *domain* has an identity defined by a shared realm of interest. Membership consequently implies a commitment to the domain, and thus a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. The *community* consists of members engaging in joint activities and discussions to help one another and share information.

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> Relationships are developed that allow members to learn from each other. The *practice* connotes members as practitioners who develop a shared repertoire of resources, which inevitably takes time and sustained interaction (Kerno & Mace, 2010, p. 80, emphasis added).

Wenger (1998) also identified two other primary components that could be added to three of domain, community, and practice; they are meaning and identity (see also Kerno & Mace, 2010).

As CoPs have evolved over time and as an increasing number of scholars have investigated them, their defining characteristics have also expanded and evolved. Gilley and Kerno (2010) identified what they argued are essential characteristics of a CoP. They said, “The critical ingredients for an effective CoP include knowledge exchange and growth along with fulfillment of individual curiosity, not work products, measurable and quantifiable results, or external management of membership” (p. 51; see also Nickols, 2011; Wenger et al., 2002; Stamps, 1997). Barab et al. (2003) identified four characteristics of a CoP. They are, “(a) a common practice and/or mutual enterprise; (b) opportunities for interactions and participation; (c) meaningful relationships; and (d) respect for diverse perspectives and minority views” (p. 238).

Using information from Wenger (1998) and Stewart (1996), Smith and McKeen (2003) identified more characteristics of CoPs. They stated the following:

> First, because a CoP must develop over *time*, it has a history of learning. Second, it has an *enterprise* – something that forms around a "value-adding something-we-are-all-doing" – but it does not have an agenda of action items as a team would. Third, *learning* is a key element of this enterprise. As a result, CoPs develop their own ways of dealing with their world. Fourth, they are *responsible* only to themselves and self-policing.

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> There's no boss. Leaders tend to emerge on an issue-by-issue basis. In addition, because *relationships* within a CoP are ongoing and indeterminate, they tend to be characterized by mutual trust. Finally, CoPs are concerned about *content* rather than form. As a result, they are not identifiable or designable units (p. 395, italics in the original document; see also Storck & Hill, 2000).

Wenger (1998) and Barab et al. (2003) discussed different dualities that exist in all CoPs. Barab et al. stated, “Tensions, or dualities, refer to overlapping yet conflicting activities and needs that drive the dynamics of the system…[and promote] system innovation” (p. 239; see also Engeström, 1987, 1999). The following are six different dualities identified in CoPs. The first four were originally identified by Wenger (1998); the last two were identified by Barab et al. (2003). Each of these dualities represent opposite ends of CoP continuums. CoP elements can lie anywhere in-between the opposing dualities. They are (a) *Designed/Emergent*, which refers to the interplay between a CoP being designed or simply emerging on its own; (b) *Participation and Reification*, which contrasts fully-immersed participation in a CoP with the condensed or summarized output of a CoP; (c) *Local/Global*, which refers to communities meeting locally versus globally; (d) *Identification/Negotiability*, which refers to individual membership identities and the degree to which members can control the meanings of the CoP; (e) *Online/Face-to-Face*, which refers to the contrast between meeting over the Internet and meeting in person; and (f) *Diversity/Coherence*, which contrasts the effect that diversity or coherence have among members, their skills, their work tasks, etc.

Benefits of Community Membership

The following section details some of the effects that active membership has on CoP participants. As the question is considered, “Can a team become a CoP?” this section becomes

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particularly important, because it establishes whether or not it is worthwhile to participate in a CoP. As will be explained, the literature shows that most of the effects on the members who participate in CoPs is beneficial; however, there are some drawbacks and resistance to CoPs. This section also illustrates how CoPs can benefit organizations as well.

Retna and Ng (2011) discussed some of the benefits that members of CoPs experienced through their participation. They stated, "Individual members are highly motivated in applying what they learn and in doing so enhance their individual and organizational performance" (p. 50). They went on to say, "One of the most important key success factors is the individual motivation displayed by each member of CoPs, who consider their participation and contribution as an integral part of delivering world-class services and products to their customers" (p. 53). The employees in Retna and Ng's (2011) study felt they were more competitive in the marketplace because of the exchanging of ideas that occurred in their CoPs.

Another benefit of belonging to and participating in a CoP is that, "Being [in a CoP] provides members with a sense of identity-both in the individual sense and in a contextual sense, that is, how the individual relates to the community as a whole" (Lesser & Storck, 2001). Participating in a CoP provides members with a higher-level understanding of their organization. Lesser and Storck (2001) also argued that participation in CoPs can positively affect the behavior of community members. They stated, "The social capital resident in communities of practice leads to behavioral change—change that results in greater knowledge sharing, which in turn positively influences business performance" (p. 833).

Lesser and Storck (2001) listed several benefits that members of CoPs experienced according to a focus group they conducted. Benefits were categorized into four major benefits that included the following: "(a) Decreasing the learning curve of new employees. (b)

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Responding more rapidly to customer needs and inquiries. (c) Reducing rework and preventing 'reinvention of the wheel'. (d) Spawning new ideas for products and services" (p. 836).

The benefits of CoP membership are not confined to the members alone. Fontaine and Millen (2004) compiled a list of measurable community benefits that were identified from both interviews with community members and a review of the literature (see Table 1). These are benefits that not only helped the community members; they also positively influenced the entire organization.

Table 1

*List of Measurable Community Benefits**

Ability to Execute Corporate Strategy	Innovation
Ability to Foresee Emerging Market, Product, Technology Capabilities, and Opportunities	Job Satisfaction
Authority and Reputation with Customers and Partners	Learning and Development
Collaboration	Learning Curve
Coordination and Synergy	New Biz Development
Cost of Training	New Customers
Customer Loyalty Stickiness	New Revenue from New Business, Product, Service, or Market
Customer Responsiveness	Partnering Success
Customer Satisfaction	Problem Solving Ability
Customer Service, Support, and Acquisition Costs	Productivity or Time Savings
Customer Turnover	Professional Reputation or Identity
Employee Retention	Project Success
Empowerment	Quality of Advice
Higher Sales per Customer	Risk Management
Idea Creation	Supplier Relationship Costs
Identification and Access to Experts and Knowledge	Supplier Relationships
	Time-to-Market
	Trust Between Employees

Note. *Extracted from Fontaine and Millen (2004, p. 5)

In Table 2 Fontaine and Millen (2004) also reported on benefits to individuals, communities, and organizations based on a self-reporting survey distributed to several members of CoPs.

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Table 2

*Individual, Community, and Organization Benefits**

Type of Benefit	Impact of Community *It has improved or increased the following:*	% Agree
Individual Benefits *What does participating in the community do for individuals?*	Skills and Know How	65%
	Personal Productivity	58%
	Job Satisfaction	52%
	Personal Reputation	50%
	Sense of Belonging	46%
Community Benefits *How does collective participation benefit others?*	Knowledge Sharing, Expertise, and Resources	81%
	Collaboration	73%
	Consensus and Problem Solving	57%
	Community Reputation and Legitimacy	56%
	Trust Between Members	50%
Organization Benefits *How does participating in a community increase organizational efficiency, better serve customers/partners, and provide insights for the future of the firm?*	Operational Efficiency	57%
	Cost Savings	51%
	Level of Service or Sales	46%
	Speed of Service or Product	42%
	Employee Retention	24%

Note. *Extracted from Fontaine and Millen (2004, p. 6)

Not all of the effects of community participation on its members are seen as beneficial. Integrating learning into a work atmosphere has been particularly challenging. Brown and Duguid (1991) explained,

> Working, learning, and innovating are closely related forms of human activity that are conventionally thought to conflict with each other. Work practice is generally viewed as conservative and resistant to change; learning is generally viewed as distinct from working and problematic in the face of change; and innovation is generally viewed as the disruptive but necessary imposition of change on the other two. To see that working, learning, and innovating are interrelated and compatible and thus potentially complementary, not conflicting forces requires a distinct conceptual shift (p. 40).

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Others have felt that finding a balance between regular work responsibilities and participation in a CoP is difficult. Retna and Ng (2011) mentioned, “Some members of CoPs find it a challenge to attend meetings on a regular basis considering their workload and other formal meetings” (p. 55). Key stakeholders within organizations need to determine whether the benefits of community participation outweigh the potential drawbacks.

Relationships Between CoPs and Teams

Thus far the literature review has discussed the purpose of CoPs and has outlined some of their defining characteristics and benefits. The following section discusses the relationship between teams and CoPs within organizations.

According to Nickols (2011), “CoPs are NOT teams or task forces. CoPs should not be confused with teams or task forces” (paragraph 4). According to Gilley and Kerno (2010), a team is “a group of people who are collectively accountable and responsible for specific outcomes, and have a high degree of interdependence and interaction” (p.48; see also Baldwin, Bommer, & Rubin, 2008). Teams are given specific assignments and are connected to specific processes or functions. Then when the assignment is completed the team typically disbands. Nickols (2011) continued, “A team is structured so as to deal with the interdependencies of different roles in that function or process. In a team, roles and tasks often vary; in a CoP they are generally the same” (paragraph 4).

Lesser and Storck (2001) also discussed the differences between CoPs and teams. They noted four distinctions:

> (a) Team relationships are established when the organization assigns people to be team members. Community relationships are formed around practice. (b) Similarly, authority relationships within the team are organizationally determined. Authority relationships in

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a CoP emerge through interaction around expertise. (c) Teams have goals, which are often established by people not on the team. Communities are only responsible to their members. (d) Teams rely on work and reporting processes that are organizationally defined. Communities develop their own processes (p. 832; see also Storck & Hill, 2000).

Table 3, taken from Smith and McKeen (2003), outlines additional differences between CoPs and teams (see Table 3).

Table 3

*The Difference Between Teams and CoPs**

	Communities of Practice	**Teams**
Objective	To share knowledge and promote learning in a particular area	To complete specific tasks
Membership	Self-selected; includes part-time and marginal members	Selected on the basis of the ability to contribute to the team's goals; ideally full-time
Organization	Informal, self-organizing, leadership varies according to the issues	Hierarchical with a project leader/manager
Termination	Evolves; disbands only when there is no interest	When the project is completed (in some cases, a team *may* evolve into a community)
Value Proposition	Group discovers value in exchange of knowledge and information	Group delivers value in the result it produces
Management	Making connections between members; ensuring topics are fresh and valuable	Coordination of many interdependent tasks

Note. *Extracted from Smith and McKeen (2003, p. 397)

Gilley and Kerno (2010) further expounded upon the distinction between teams and CoPs by comparing them against one another and groups (see Table 4).

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Table 4

*Management Versus Group—Team—CoP Influence and Control Chart**

	Group	Team	Community of Practice
Size	Small	Small to moderate	A few to hundreds. As population increases, so does the likelihood of subdivision of members into relevant areas of interest or inquiry.
Longevity	Specific ending	Ongoing…members may change	A few years to several centuries
Member Interaction / Structure	Assigned, formal or informal, regular	Formal or informal, sporadic to regular	Informal, spontaneous, organic. No perfunctory statements, creation of 'shortcuts' to increase efficiency. Common consensus of "who's who," no formal roster.
Accountability / Responsibility	Individual	Shared	None – Members are not formally recognized as such, so may come and go as desired.
Purpose	Specific tasks / objectives	Solutions, problem solving, creativity, innovation	Create and exchange ideas, expand and share knowledge. Common passion and commitment to developing skills and proficiencies.
Members	Assigned; high individual talent	Voluntary; complementary talent	Self-selection
Commitment by Members	Low – medium	Medium – high	High, can be very loyal to both group purpose and members.
Authority / Power	Bestowed by the organization	Bestowed by the organization	None, at least formally acknowledged

Note. * Extracted from Gilley and Kerno (2010, p. 53)

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It is important to note that CoPs do not replace teams. They both serve a unique purpose. Snyder and Wenger (2010) explained,

> On the one hand, the purpose of formal units, such as functional departments or cross-functional teams, is to deliver a product or service and to be accountable for quality, cost, and customer service. Communities, on the other hand, help ensure that learning and innovation activities occur across formal structural boundaries. Indeed, a salient benefit of communities is to bridge established organizational boundaries in order to increase the collective knowledge, skills, and professional trust of those who serve in these formal units (p. 110-111).

Snyder and Wenger (2010) continued to discuss the need for both formalized teams and community-generated learning systems. They argued,

> The design of knowledge organizations entails the active integration of these two systems – the formal [team-based] system that is accountable for delivering products and services at specified levels of quality and cost, and the community-based learning system that focuses on building and diffusing the capabilities necessary for formal systems to meet performance objectives. It is crucial for organizational sponsors as well as community leaders to recognize the distinct roles of these two systems while ensuring that they function in tandem to promote sustained performance (p. 112).

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article the question was posed, “Can a team become a CoP?” There are many references in the literature that compare teams and CoPs; however, very few of them discuss whether or not teams can transition into CoPs. Gilley and Kerno (2010) noted that teams have been known to transform into CoPs, but they acknowledged it happens infrequently.

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Despite their claim, there are no documented accounts of teams becoming CoPs that could be found in the team or CoP literatures. This has been concluded after searching several databases including EBSCO, ProQuest, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Google, using terms such as "communities of practice and teams," "transformation of teams into communities of practice," "communities of practice becoming teams," etc. Gilley and Kerno (2010) acknowledged CoPs generally originate "completely unconstrained by organizational trappings and with the purpose of solely benefiting its members" (Gilley & Kerno, 2010, p. 56). This is because

> Attempts to imply a linear progression from group to team to CoP ignore the very nature and purpose of CoPs, which exist mainly for the benefit of members. Managerial fiat, including the imposition of tasks, projects, deadlines, and deliverables can be problematic for CoPs, whose output is secondary to member teaching, learning, and enjoyment of the company of others who are equally motivated and engaged (p. 52; see also Stamps, 1997).

Some argue that CoPs cannot even be designed, regardless if they are starting as a team or from scratch. Smith and McKeen (2003) argued that CoPs are not "designable units" (p. 395). From their inception into an organization, CoPs are fluid and often take on a life of their own. One of the unique characteristics of CoPs is that they organically change over time. According to Hay and Barab (2001), "Communities of practice are developed, evolve, and change over a rich history that has an eye to continued evolution into the future" (p. 292).

Stamps (1997) was even more adamant that CoPs could not just be created. He stated, "Virtually everyone who has studied them agrees that communities of practice cannot be created out of the blue by management fiat; they form of their own accord, whether management tries to encourage them or hinder them" (p. 39).

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Iaquinto et al. (2011), Hemmasi and Csanda (2009), Storck and Hill (2000), and Perry and Zender (2004) do not necessarily agree with Smith and McKeen's (2003) and Stamps' (1997) assessment that CoPs are not designable. Because of their organic nature Iaquinto et al. (2011) explained, "Despite a growing interest in CoPs, it is still not apparent to what extent a CoP can be created purposefully through 'design' whether from scratch or through harnessing nascent CoPs" (p. 5). However, after investigating several CoPs in an Australian state government department they discovered that several purposefully designed CoPs are thriving, which led them to conclude that given the right conditions CoPs could be intentionally designed. Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) and Perry and Zender (2004) have also found that CoPs can be formed intentionally and still be successful.

Storck and Hill (2000) discussed ways that Xerox was able to create a CoP, called a *strategic community*, from the ground up. They said in order to make this CoP successful they had to

> (a) "Design an interaction format that promotes openness and allows for serendipity;" (b) "Build upon a common organizational culture;" (c) "Demonstrate the existence of mutual interests after initial success at resolving issues and achieving corporate goals;" (d) "Leverage those aspects of the organizational culture that respect the value of collective learning;" (e) "Embed knowledge-sharing practices into the work processes of the group;" and (f) "Establish an environment in which knowledge sharing is based on processes and cultural norms defined by the community rather than other parts of the organization" (pp. 73-74).

So what if a deliberately formed team was given more authority over time to dictate its own course, set its own objectives, and was informed it was no longer accountable to

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management? Would it naturally transform into a CoP? Gilley and Kerno (2010) further discussed the transition from groups to teams to CoPs and argued that the authority given to members is what makes the difference. They stated, “The…team can be vested with greater authority, autonomy, and accountability for its direction and decisions. This is likely the deal ‘maker or breaker’ that determines whether a group or team is capable of successfully transitioning to being a true CoP” (p. 51).

If and when a group makes the transition to a team and eventually to a CoP, there would invariably be tradeoffs. Gilley and Kerno (2010) explained that when member or participant autonomy increases within a community management control decreases. Because of this there is a tradeoff, “One that is often uncomfortable and frequently not easily resolved. The ability of an organization to successfully move forward, mindful of the likelihood of interpersonal friction and conflict resulting from the progression, is critical for a successful outcome” (p. 54).

Supposing a team were to become a CoP, could it be a true community of practice? Would it somehow still be tied down to the will of the management? Would it still seek to accomplish tasks, as a feature of teams, or would its focus shift strictly to learning and knowledge management, which is a feature of CoPs (Smith & McKeen, 2003)? Regardless of what it might become, it has been increasingly easy, but not necessarily wise, to group all CoPs together into one category. Amin and Roberts (2008) warned, “Social practices of all kinds in all sorts of collaborative setting and all manner of learning and knowledge outcomes are becoming folded together into one undifferentiated form” (p. 355). They described the problem with this by stating, “This homogenization is unhelpful, for it not only glosses over significant varieties of situated practice with very different creative outcomes, but it also blunts policy action in an approach to knowledge management that demands attention to situated detail” (p. 355).

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Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) stated, "Community has become an obligatory appendage to every educational innovation. Yet aside from linguistic kinship, it is not clear what features, if any, are shared across terms" (p. 942; see also Barab, 2003). Wenger (2010) admitted,

> When my colleague Jean Lave and I coined the term 'community of practice' in the late 1980s, we could not have predicted the career the concept would have (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It has influenced theory and practice in a wide variety of fields in academe, business, government, education, health, and the civil sector (p. 187).

One explanation for the varying forms of CoPs is because "companies are still experimenting with them" (Smith & McKeen, 2003, p. 395).

Additionally, some scholars, including some of the original CoP pioneers, have bemoaned the loss of informal learning that takes place in CoPs (Duguid, 2008; Lave, 2008). Amin and Roberts (2008) lamented,

> As CoPs thinking proliferates, the original emphasis on context, process, social interaction, material practices, ambiguity, disagreement – in short the frequently idiosyncratic and always performative nature of learning – is being lost to formulaic distillations of the workings of CoPs and instrumentalist applications seeking to maximize learning and knowing through CoPs (pp. 353-354).

Although CoPs have gone through many transitions since their name was penned in the 1990s, Wenger (2010) has continued to connect CoPs with social learning systems. He stated, "Arising out of learning, [a CoP] exhibits many characteristics of systems more generally: emergent structure, complex relationships, self-organization, dynamic boundaries, ongoing

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negotiation of identity and cultural meaning, to mention a few. In a sense it is the simplest social unit that has the characteristics of a social learning system" (pp. 179-180).

In conclusion, McDermott (1999) spoke about cross-functional teams working together with CoPs, and Storck and Hill (2000) spoke about strategic communities being formed as management-endorsed CoPs that were accountable to management; however, a documented case of a team becoming a CoP remains to be seen. Can Gilley and Kerno's (2010) claim that teams can transform into CoPs be more than an assumption? It is proposed that studies be conducted with teams, where they are given increasing authority to set their own course, to observe whether or not they naturally transition into a CoP. Then, if they are able to become CoPs, they should be analyzed to see how they are similar or different to traditional, organic CoPs. Successful examples could give motivation for more organizations to facilitate the incorporation of CoPs into their infrastructure.

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ARTICLE 2 – From a Team to a Community of Practice: A Case Study of a Team's Journey of Transformation During the Ambassador Pilot Program at Thanksgiving Point

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Abstract for Article 2

The following article documents a study that was conducted at Thanksgiving Point Institute with the Ambassador team during the Ambassador Pilot Program. This study asks whether or not this Ambassador team transformed into a community of practice and what may or may not have led to the transformation. Gilley and Kerno (2010) claim that, although rare, a team can transform into a CoP. However, there are no documented cases of this occurring in the team or CoP literatures. Using qualitative methods including interviews, observations, and document analysis, it was observed that the Ambassador team took on many characteristics of a CoP, including becoming a community of learners, sharing a domain of interest, engaging in a common practice, and evolving organically as directed by the Ambassadors and not the senior management at Thanksgiving Point. This team's incorporation of CoP characteristics was influenced by the flexible structure of the program, the welcoming atmosphere of the team and its co-directors, the Ambassadors' sense of meaningful participation, and the support from Thanksgiving Point's senior management team.

Keywords: teams, communities of practice, knowledge management, training, management, domain of shared interest, culture

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Introduction

According to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002), communities of practice (CoPs) are "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" (p. 4). A CoP is an organic structure that focuses on learning and *knowledge management* within an organization (Hemmasi & Csanda, 2009; Holsapple, 2003). A team, on the other hand, is "a group of people who are collectively accountable and responsible for specific outcomes, and have a high degree of interdependence and interaction" (Gilley & Kerno, 2010, p. 48; see also Baldwin, Bommer, & Rubin, 2008). Teams are given specific assignments and are connected to specific processes or functions.

Nickols (2011) stated, "CoPs are NOT teams or task forces. CoPs should not be confused with teams or task forces" (paragraph 4). Lesser and Storck (2001) made specific distinctions between CoPs and teams: (a) Membership in a CoP is generally voluntary; team members are assigned to their teams. (b) Authority in a CoP is based on expertise; authority in a team is assigned or based on organizational structure. (c) CoPs generally do not have specific goals or tasks to accomplish; teams are accountable for the goals, which are often given to them by management. (d) CoPs develop their own process; the processes that teams follow are defined by the organization. There are other distinctions between CoPs and teams. CoPs are generally not accountable to management; in fact, too much management control can diminish the effectiveness of CoPs (Thompson, 2005). In contrast, teams are accountable to management for the work they accomplish. While teams and CoPs are distinct, one is not necessarily better than the other (Snyder & Wenger, 2010).

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Fostering CoPs within organizations has its benefits and drawbacks. One of the benefits of CoPs is that they provide organizations with a way to pass on their traditions, workers' skills, and knowledge, both implicit and general, to new employees. According to Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) and Holsapple (2003), they are effective avenues for knowledge management. Additionally, studies have shown that CoPs can enhance individual and organizational performance (Retna & Ng, 2001), provide members with a higher-level understanding of their organization and their part in it (Lesser & Storck, 2001), and promote learning within organizations (Wenger et al., 2002).

While most of the effects on community members are beneficial, there are some drawbacks and challenges associated with CoPs. Because CoPs are organic and self-monitoring, there is generally little management regulation. This can be troubling for some organizations that feel they need to direct the inner-workings of the institution. Additionally, it may be difficult for some community members to allocate time to participate in CoPs due to requirements for their regular work responsibilities (Retna & Ng, 2011).

Teams have their benefits and drawbacks too. Because teams are goal oriented, focused on common purposes, and are generally deliverables-driven, they provide organizations with the means to produce products and services (McDermott, 1999). However, according to McDermott (1999), "The very thing that makes teams work well – common goals, shared focus, physical proximity and working rapport – can easily lead to two related learning disabilities: isolation and team myopia" (p. 3). As a result, teams can become silos.

It can be argued that if an organization wanted to infuse some of the intrinsic and general knowledge about best practices and skills into the traditions of its employees then it could cultivate the growth of CoPs as a means to manage knowledge. Smith and McKeen (2003)

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argued, “Because knowledge incorporates such a wide range of items, companies are now recognizing the crucial role communities play in creating, maintaining, and transferring knowledge” (p. 399). CoPs can also be encouraged as a means to support the proliferation of an institution’s culture and *discourse* into its members (for more information on discourse, see Krippendorff, 2006).

Because there are so many potential benefits in the incorporation of CoPs, it is reasonable to assume organizations would want to know how to initiate them. There are varying opinions on whether CoPs can be deliberately created. Smith and McKeen (2003) and Stamps (1997) argued that CoPs are not designable. In contrast, Iaquinto, Ison, and Faggian (2011), Hemmasi and Csanda (2009), and Perry and Zender (2004) believed that given the proper conditions CoPs can be intentionally designed from scratch. While there is literature that documents the design of CoPs from the ground up, what if an organization wanted to create a CoP from an existing team? Those that have written about intentional CoP development have not written about the transformation from teams to CoPs.

There are many references in the team and CoP literatures that discuss the similarities and differences between teams and CoPs; however, few, if any of them, discussed whether or not teams can intentionally become CoPs. While Gilley and Kerno (2010) believed the transition *could* occur, they were skeptical that it ever deliberately had. They stated, “Although the evolution from group to team has been documented, along with the distinct benefits of transitioning from group to team, less information is available and supportive of the move from team to CoP, if that is possible” (p.53). They continued by arguing,

> Attempts to imply a linear progression from group to team to CoP ignore the very nature and purpose of CoPs, which exist mainly for the benefit of members. Managerial fiat,

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including the imposition of tasks, projects, deadlines, and deliverables can be problematic for CoPs, whose output is secondary to member teaching, learning, and enjoyment of the company of others who are equally motivated and engaged (p. 52; see also Stamps, 1997).

Because no documented accounts of teams becoming CoPs can be found in the literature, it remains to be seen whether or not Gilley and Kerno's (2010) claim that teams can transform into CoPs is more than an assumption. There have been accounts of *cross-functional teams* working in tandem with CoPs (McDermott, 1999) and *strategic communities* being deliberately established by management to promote informal learning (Storck & Hill, 2000), but not of teams directly evolving into CoPs. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to discover whether a deliberately formed team could transform into a CoP, or at least the beginnings of a CoP. The specific research questions regarding this topic will be stated and discussed following the context portion of the method section below.

Method

The method section is divided into the following six subsections: (a) context, (b) case study design, (c) participants, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) trustworthiness and qualitative standards.

Context

The following section provides context for the research study by describing the Ambassador Pilot Program. From June 2011 to November 2011, sixteen employees and one third-party management and marketing consultant were organized into the Ambassador Pilot Program team at Thanksgiving Point Institute, which is a large non-profit multi-venue farm, garden, museum complex and informal learning institution in Lehi, Utah. These team members

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came from different departments and job levels throughout Thanksgiving Point. The original purpose of this team was twofold: (a) to allow the team members to be participants in and architects of a new training program at Thanksgiving Point called the Ambassador Program, and (b) to coalesce the independently-operated venues and departments across Thanksgiving Point in an effort to strengthen the community of Thanksgiving Point and create a clearer Thanksgiving Point identity.

There were two sets of expectations related to the establishment of this Ambassador team. First, the two co-directors of the Ambassadors, of which I was one, saw them not merely as a team, but as the beginnings of a CoP. This expectation was never shared with team members by the co-directors, nor did they discuss with the team members what a CoP was. The co-directors thought this team had the capacity to set a course for future members of a full-fledged Ambassador Program at Thanksgiving Point. This was a program the co-directors hoped would continue forward for a long time, educating and benefitting many employees along the way.

The second set of expectations resided within the group of Ambassadors. It is assumed these Ambassadors thought of themselves as a team, brought together just to be trained on their Thanksgiving Point employment, to help unify Thanksgiving Point, and to assist in designing a full-fledged Ambassador Program. It is assumed that initially they did not necessarily catch the implications of their participation on this Ambassador team. The team members may not have seen themselves as "definers," but possibly as mere participants in a new program working under the direction of management. It is assumed they did not see themselves as members of a CoP. However, over time they were given more freedom to direct their own paths, set their own goals, and work toward their own objectives. To the co-directors it seemed that the Ambassador team

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was becoming more like a CoP. However, it remained to be seen if the participants noticed any sort of change.

Once a week this diverse group of Ambassadors met together face-to-face to educate each other on various topics related to their employment at Thanksgiving Point. The co-directors planned out the first three weeks of the Ambassador Pilot Program. The Ambassador members determined what topics to focus on for the remaining twelve weeks. Topics included museum visitor identities (Falk, 2009), customer service, facilitation, the purpose of non-profit institutions (Wolf, 1999), and experiences available to guests at Thanksgiving Point. The Ambassadors also toured the various venues at Thanksgiving Point. As a result of meeting each week, relationships between the members began to strengthen, and they started sharing with one another concerns they were having in their individual venues/departments. Discussions were held to determine how to overcome these concerns. After ten weeks of training, the Ambassadors formally began designing the training program known as the Ambassador Program at Thanksgiving Point.

At the completion of the training and design period of the Ambassador Pilot Program the members of the Ambassador program presented their ideas to the senior management at Thanksgiving Point. Their presentation was very well received, and many of their ideas have already been implemented into a full-fledged training program. At the outset it seems as though the Ambassadors were successful in their perceived objectives to receive and direct their own training, unify the independent venues across property, and design a training program; however, did they accomplish more than this?

This leads to the following research questions for this study: Based on the Ambassadors' experiences, did this Ambassador team transform into a CoP or at least the beginnings of a CoP? If so, what contributed to this transformation from the Ambassadors' perspective? And if not,

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what discouraged this transformation from occurring? To what extent did the Ambassadors become a CoP or not?

Case Study Design

The Ambassador Program at Thanksgiving Point, with its multiple participants, was treated as a single case (Stake, 1995), because this was one team's journey through an experimental program. In this study, the case provides rich details and an in-depth look at the experiences of the seventeen Thanksgiving Point Ambassadors as they were first formed into the Ambassador team and later as they completed the 15-week Ambassador Pilot Program.

Participants

The Ambassadors were purposively selected by the co-directors using a blend of *maximum variation sampling* and *unique sampling* (Patton, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The sampling was maximum variation in that co-directors selected a broad swath of employees from across Thanksgiving Point that would be representative of many of the employee types that work at Thanksgiving Point. See the following paragraph for further descriptions about this diverse set of participants. The sampling was unique in that the co-directors, with recommendations from the Thanksgiving Point senior management team, selected employees that had demonstrated qualities of cultural leaders. These employees were or had the potential of being influential within their various departments and venues due to their positive relationships with other employees, work ethic, and supportive attitude toward Thanksgiving Point and its mission.

Sixteen employees and one third-party management and marketing consultant participated. Two employees were selected from the Museum of Ancient Life, a museum manager and a part-time frontline staff employee; three were selected from the Gardens, a

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Gardens manager, a horticulturist/Gardens supervisor, and a part-time frontline staff employee; two were selected from Farm Country, both were supervisors; three were selected from the food and retail department, an assistant manager at the Deli, a retail manager, and a part-time catering captain; four were selected from the cross-property programming department, the programming director who was one of the co-directors and who was a member of Thanksgiving Point's senior management team, a public events manager, a part-time youth educator, and a part-time assistant volunteer coordinator; two were selected from administrative departments, the human resource manager and communications director; and one was a heavily involved management and marketing consultant, who is also the wife of Thanksgiving Point's CEO.

As researcher I also participated in this study as the second co-director and as a *participant as observer* (Merriam, 1998), which is defined as follows: "The researcher's observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant" (p. 101). It was apparent to the Ambassadors that I was researching the process at the same time that I was participating in the program. Additionally, I was employed part-time at Thanksgiving Point in the programming department as the Ambassador coordinator/audience research and development coordinator. As a fellow coworker with the Ambassadors, I was able to develop friendships and build relationships of trust with the Ambassadors over a 15-week period of time. As a group we met once a week, but I often interacted with the others in Ambassador- and non-Ambassador-related functions.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with Ambassadors, observations of Ambassador meetings and activities, and document analysis. The interviews with the Ambassadors occurred after the program had ended and were conducted over a three-

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week period of time. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Of the seventeen participants, fourteen were able and willing to be interviewed for this study. During and after each Ambassador meeting, the co-directors took notes on the *physical settings*, the *participants*, the *conversations*, *personal impressions*, and the *activities and interactions* the participants engaged in (Merriam, 1998). The observation notes were shared between co-directors after each meeting. A large variety of documents were analyzed in this study, some of which were researcher-generated. Types of documents included, but were not limited to, pre- and post-Ambassador surveys, interview notes, design documents, course syllabus, agendas, emails, presentation slides and notes, meeting summaries documents, training documents, attendance rolls, and various meeting handouts.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this case study was analyzed using *constant comparison* (Merriam, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978) and *category construction and analysis* (Merriam, 1998). As the data was collected and constantly compared against data collected earlier, different categories of information emerged.

An additional framework was used to analyze the data. When describing the differences between teams and CoPs, Smith and McKeen (2003) identified five categories in which teams and CoPs differ (see Table 1). They are objective, membership, organization, termination, value proposition, and management. This study will use the categories and descriptions identified by Smith and McKeen as the primary measurement to determine if the Ambassadors started as a team and then transformed into a CoP.

Smith and McKeen's (2003) table shows a dichotomy of characteristics between teams and CoPs. However, from the literature on teams and CoPs it is evident that there is a continuum

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between regimented, task-oriented teams and organic, self-directed CoPs (Gilley & Kerno, 2010; Snyder &Wenger, 2010; Storck & Hill, 2000; McDermott, 1999). The Ambassador Program was not on either polarized end of the team-to-CoP continuum. What remains to be illustrated is where on the scale, based on the feedback from the Ambassadors, the program falls.

Table 1

*The Difference Between Teams and CoPs**

	Communities of Practice	**Teams**
Objective	To share knowledge and promote learning in a particular area	To complete specific tasks
Membership	Self-selected; includes part-time and marginal members	Selected on the basis of the ability to contribute to the team's goals; ideally full-time
Organization	Informal, self-organizing, leadership varies according to the issues	Hierarchical with a project leader/manager
Termination	Evolves; disbands only when there is no interest	When the project is completed (in some cases, a team *may* evolve into a community)
Value Proposition	Group discovers value in exchange of knowledge and information	Group delivers value in the result it produces.
Management	Making connections between members; ensuring topics are fresh and valuable	Coordination of many interdependent tasks

Note. *Extracted from Smith and McKeen (2003, p. 397)

Trustworthiness and Qualitative Standards

Trustworthiness and qualitative standards identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were also followed in this study. To maintain the credibility of the research, the following techniques were implemented: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis, and progressive subjectivity checks. I followed the standard of prolonged

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engagement in a number of ways. First, because I had been employed at Thanksgiving Point for about two years, I was already privy to the "culture" and "context" of the organization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 301-302); second, I knew many of the Ambassadors before the program began; and third, meeting once a week for fifteen weeks allowed trust and relationships to develop throughout the program. Triangulation was accomplished through using multiple forms of data collection, comparing the data collected against the literature reviewed, and interviewing multiple participants, thus providing multiple points of view. Peer debriefing was accomplished by showing the research results to a committee of colleagues in the Instructional Psychology and Technology Department at Brigham Young University. Member checking was accomplished by reviewing the results with the other co-director, who was a member of the Ambassador group, and by showing the completed manuscript to all the Ambassadors with their quotes highlighted. All the Ambassadors acknowledged their comments had been reported accurately and appropriately. Negative case study analysis played a particularly important part in this study. The quotes from the Ambassadors in this report are generally representative of the group as a whole. However, when there are opposing opinions by individuals or small sets of Ambassadors, those quotes are included to paint a clearer picture of the Ambassadors' experiences. I conducted progressive subjectivity checks during the research project by taking notes throughout the research process and by writing drafts of the write-up that documented how my learning and thinking as a researcher progressed throughout the study.

As an author I also sought to achieve transferability; confirmability; and dependability. For more information regarding these trustworthiness and qualitative standards see Lincoln and Guba (1985).

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Results

The results are divided into the following six sections: (a) the Ambassadors' story, as told briefly from their perspectives; (b) characteristics of the Ambassadors when they started the Ambassador Pilot Program; (c) characteristics of the Ambassadors when they concluded the program; (d) additional CoP evidences; (e) transformation influencers; and (f) additional supplemental benefits.

The Ambassadors' Story

The Ambassadors first met together as the Ambassador Team in June of 2011. "The group itself…was interesting because it included everyone from very experienced people to novices. So we had a full range of experience," said one Ambassador. "We were so similar [in our passion for Thanksgiving Point] and yet so diverse at the same time," said another Ambassador.

In the first meeting the purpose of the program was discussed. One Ambassador came away from the meeting saying the Ambassador Pilot Program was "a program to help Thanksgiving Point employees develop better communication, ownership, and guest relation skills," all in an effort to develop a full-fledged Ambassador Program. The next week the Ambassadors learned about different types of museum visitors; on the third week the topic was guest service. The first three weeks had been led by the co-directors. "And then after that I remember you [co-directors] just saying, 'What do you guys want to do?' And we gave some suggestions. We wanted to go see the venues; we wanted to talk about different issues that crop up through our day to day." Another Ambassador stated, "I remember the first few meetings, we kind of had specific things that we talked about…After that we kind of structured it on our own."

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One Ambassador remembered, “We had a list of…options, and then we could add whatever else we could think of. And then it kind of became a consensus group vote.” This led the Ambassadors to tour different parts of Thanksgiving Point Property, conduct facilitation activities, and discuss issues pertinent to their job responsibilities. “We just did whatever the group felt was going to be best,” she concluded. “It was kind of organic and…had its own flow,” stated another.

One Ambassador noted the program “seriously enhanced my view of how Thanksgiving Point operates: the strengths, the challenges, opportunities for improvement…It was actually an even deeper experience than I expected.” Others felt like they learned a great deal from their participation in the program. “I saw the Ambassador Program as probably an educational program that we learned how to improve Thanksgiving Point or to keep it going better.”

One Ambassador noted, “I thought that we would go in and it would be kind of lectures and learning and [the co-directors] would be telling us this is what we want you to do. And it wasn't that.” Ambassadors felt that they could direct their own learning within the program. Another said, “It's both sides working together, the teacher and the students interacting together or the leader and the members of the program. They're all discussing together…[and] discussing what the members want to learn.”

Relationships between Ambassadors changed over time. “In the beginning I could see people really just staying with the people from their own venue,” said one Ambassador. But relationships quickly gelled due to “the welcome from the leaders and from the group,” another Ambassador noted. This led to there being “a high level of investment pretty early on,” she continued.

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One Ambassador stated, “As we got to know each other better, the communication did open up and people were more free to say what they thought…then we could get down into the real problems, the real issues and talk more openly about that.” Another Ambassador agreed; she stated, “It wasn't a hostile environment. And nobody was pressured into saying anything either.”

“By the end, you could see that we were all pretty comfortable with each other and that we could talk and ask questions and work together easily,” said one Ambassador. Another noted, “I could feel my relationships growing with other people on property and I didn't want that to fail.” One Ambassador said her relationship with the other Ambassadors was “more personal…[and] on a deeper level” than relationships with other coworkers.

At the end of 15 weeks, the Ambassadors presented what they had learned to Thanksgiving Point’s senior management team. The Ambassadors also made proposals for a full-fledged Ambassador Program. One Ambassador remembered, “It felt like we were being a little bold in that meeting with the managers and they took the idea and they ran with it and they were willing to invest.” Another commented, “I think it kind of opened their eyes like, ‘Oh, this program really has value.’” One stated, “I think [the senior managers] were even surprised at the quality of work that that group of Ambassadors did…I felt like senior management team liked the idea generally, but liked it better after having met with [the Ambassadors] and seeing their presentations.”

Looking back on her experience in the program, one Ambassador remarked, “I do think that our group became the community, and I really felt like we all got close together and actually enjoyed the time…[and] each other's company.” Another Ambassador agreed. He said, “I think it evolved into more of an education program…It wasn't just about this is how you do this better.

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This was about people growing together and it was almost like a community educational program." "I thought, for me, it was really motivational," said one. Another concluded, "I think if people really immersed in the program they must have thought it was very valuable."

Initial Ambassador Characteristics

The following section uses Smith and McKeen's (2003) team and CoP characteristics identified in Table 1 to demonstrate where on the team-to-CoP continuum the Ambassador group initially landed when the Ambassador Pilot Program began.

Objective. According to Smith and McKeen (2003), a team's objective is to complete a specific task while a CoP's is to share knowledge and promote learning. When the Ambassadors first met for their orientation meeting, they were informed that they had a task of helping to develop a full-fledged Ambassador training program. The syllabus they received further explained, "The purpose of the Ambassador Pilot Program is to determine whether or not a full Ambassador Program should be implemented at Thanksgiving Point…New ideas will be prototyped and evaluated with [this] initial Ambassador Team" (Ashton, 2011, p. 1). They were tasked with helping to evaluate whether or not the Ambassador Program was worthwhile, and they were informed that they would be responsible for sharing their findings with senior management at the end of the pilot experience. This would help to determine whether or not a full-fledged Ambassador Program should be implemented at Thanksgiving Point.

There were also portions of the syllabus that emphasized community and learning. It states, "The purpose of the Ambassador Program is to develop a community of 'ambassadors' among Thanksgiving Point's employees" and "Ambassador team members will participate in educational training throughout the life of the Ambassador Pilot Program" (Ashton, 2011, p. 1-2).

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With regards to objective, the Ambassadors seemed to start in the middle of the team-to-CoP continuum. They were told to develop a full-fledged Ambassador program after determining if it was worthwhile; they were also supposed to participate in education training and become a community of employees. Shortly after the orientation meeting, one Ambassador responded to an internal survey and wrote about the joint emphasis on learning new things and completing the task of helping evaluate whether or not the Ambassador Program would be implemented in full. When writing about the purpose of the Ambassador Pilot Program this Ambassador stated the Ambassador Pilot Program is "A program in which different work groups within Thanksgiving Point are given an opportunity to increase their skills in working with Thanksgiving Point customers, learn more about Thanksgiving Point, and teach others their skills. This will be an opportunity for us to learn whether this program should be implemented more fully."

Membership. Members of a CoP are usually self-selected and can include part-time and marginal members; members of a team are generally full-time and are selected based on their ability to help the team meet its goals (Smith & McKeen, 2003). None of the Ambassadors were self-selected. They were jointly selected by the co-directors and senior management. They were perceived as cultural leaders within their departments and venues and were selected because it was assumed they could contribute to the goal of creating a full-fledged Ambassador Program. While they were purposively selected, the Ambassadors were also given the opportunity to accept or reject the invitation to join the Ambassador group. Only one person opted not to participate due to her busy schedule, so another person was selected in her place.

Organization. Generally the organization of a team is formally structured and hierarchical with a set project leader; CoPs are often informal and self-organized with varying

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leadership (Smith & McKeen, 2003). In the program syllabus it was shown that the agendas for the first three meetings with the Ambassadors were already set, and the two co-directors would lead the program. However, the Ambassadors were also informed in the syllabus that the "content of the educational meetings will be more defined towards the beginning of the summer and will vary near the end of the summer, depending on the needs of the Ambassadors" (Ashton, 2011, p. 3). When speaking about the beginning of the program, one Ambassador noted, "I felt like that you and Greg had certain topics that you would like to cover [and] discuss." Another said, "You [co-directors] had us do a lot of things… it was always well thought out, [and] well planned."

Termination. Teams generally disband after a set date or after a project has been completed; CoPs disband when there is no more interest (Smith & McKeen, 2003). In the orientation meeting the Ambassadors were told that the program would last about 15 weeks, and that at the conclusion they would be sharing their findings with senior management. There were no plans to continue past that time. However, if the pilot program was successful, then a full-fledged program would be implemented, thus allowing other employees to participate.

Value proposition. Teams find value in what they produce while CoPs find value in the act of learning and sharing information with other community members (Smith & McKeen, 2003). The Ambassadors knew they would need to report their findings to senior management. They were accountable to show something to senior management, to produce ideas that the senior management would then use to decide what to do moving forward. However, Ambassadors knew from the syllabus that there would be learning and teaching that would occur throughout their time as Ambassadors. At the beginning it was not clear to Ambassadors how much learning would be an aspect of the program. One Ambassador stated, "It changed a little

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bit because at the beginning I thought that we would go in and it would be kind of lectures and learning and you would be telling us this is what we want you to do. And it wasn't that." Later in the article it will be shown just how much learning became a critical factor in the Ambassador Pilot Program.

Management. With teams, management generally has a greater say in what the team does and does not do. Before the Ambassador Pilot Program began, the senior management team was well informed with what was going to be taking place in the program. They knew that there would be flexibility and that the outcomes were not predetermined. However, they did want to have progress updates to know what was happening with the program and to see if it was making a difference. They were supportive, but they also recognized that the co-directors did not want them dictating what would occur in the program.

One of the co-directors of the Ambassador Pilot Program was a member of the senior management team. He explained the backend support and apprehension that was experienced by the other senior management members. He stated,

> I think they played a huge supporting role meaning fully supportive of the amount of time and commitment and getting people to it. Supportive of the idea and the conceptual framework of it. Very supportive in terms of keeping out of the way as much as possible too. Not in a bad way, but in a good way meaning you know, to set out and say we're going to commit this many staff, this much time and we're not really going to define where we're going to go – is a big risk, especially for a non-profit with not much, if none, really, additional resources.

In a way it was as much a learning process for the senior managers as it was for the participants in the program.

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Conclusion. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of the Ambassador group when they first began the Ambassador Pilot Program. From Table 2 it can be observed that the Ambassadors had qualities of a team and a CoP. However, it can be argued that at this time the Ambassadors were more team-like in that there were specific tasks for the Ambassadors to accomplish. The Ambassadors were also selected by management to accomplish the goals of the program, the co-directors were clear leaders within the program, there was no set plan for the Ambassador Program to continue after the program was done in fifteen weeks, the Ambassadors felt value in producing meaningful results for the senior management, and senior management played a somewhat supervisory role in the program.

Concluding Ambassador Characteristics

The following section uses Smith and McKeen's (2003) team and CoP characteristics identified in Table 1 to demonstrate where on the team-to-CoP continuum the Ambassador group landed when the Ambassador Pilot Program concluded.

Objective. According to Smith and McKeen (2003) the objective of a CoP is to learn and share knowledge with one another. Other scholars have emphasized the importance of learning and knowledge sharing within CoPs (Gilley & Kerno, 2010; Wenger, 1998; Barab, MaKinster, & Scheckler, 2003; Holsapple, 2003; Nickols, 2011; Stewart, 1996). To most of the Ambassadors, the sharing of knowledge became the key characteristic of the Ambassador group. Many of the Ambassadors were surprised at how much they learned from being a part of the Ambassador group. Learning was the second most talked about item in the interviews with Ambassadors with about 70 references, second only to Relationships, which had about 80

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Table 2

Ambassador Group Characteristics at the Beginning of the Ambassador Pilot Program

	Communities of Practice	**Teams**
Objective	Ambassadors were to become a community of employees and would participate in educational training.	Ambassadors were tasked to identify whether or not a full Ambassador Program should be implemented; and if so, they were tasked to develop that program. They were called the Ambassador team.
Membership	Both full-time and part-time employees participated. Ambassadors could choose to opt out.	Ambassadors were selected because they were seen as cultural leaders, and it was assumed they could help develop a full-fledged Ambassador Program.
Organization	Once the first three weeks of meetings were over, the content for the remaining Ambassador meetings would be selected based on the needs of the Ambassadors.	Co-Directors were established as leaders within the Ambassador group. Agendas for the first three meetings were predetermined before the group met together.
Termination	If the pilot was successful, a full-fledged Ambassador Program would be initiated for others to participate in.	Ambassadors were informed the pilot program would last for 15 weeks and then would conclude.
Value Proposition	Ambassadors knew they would be learning new things, but it was unclear what role learning would have throughout the development of the program.	Ambassadors felt a need to produce meaningful ideas, suggestions, and findings to senior management.
Management	Senior managers were supportive of the Ambassador Pilot Program, but some were apprehensive about giving free reign to the Ambassadors.	One of the senior managers was a co-director of the Ambassador program. Other senior managers sought regular updates on the status of the program.

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references. One of the Ambassadors felt that the Ambassador Pilot Program encompassed several different key characteristics; however, learning took precedence. He stated, “I think [the meetings] were a combination of information, education, and interaction…But you know, we learned new things. We expressed our ideas. We interacted with each other. But I would say learning was number one.”

The view and understanding of one frontline Ambassador greatly expanded as a result of the things he learned in the Ambassador Pilot Program. He stated the program “helped me understand some of the mechanisms behind a larger company. When you work in a small branch you can understand the mechanisms of how everything's functioning together. And it made me think that the people at the top really do care about the little grunts in the front even if it doesn't seem like that sometimes.” He explained that he can now give better customer service because he understands more about the institution than just his designated work area. Another Ambassador agreed when she stated, “I think the more you learn about something, the better you will become at it. The more we learn about Thanksgiving Point, communication, visitors, the better we will become at helping visitors. Knowledge about this kind of thing will really only benefit us I believe.”

Over time the Ambassadors became increasingly interested in learning what they wanted to learn and sharing applicable knowledge with one another. One Ambassador, completely unscripted and unprompted, stated, “I think it evolved into more of an education program…It wasn't just about this is how you do this better. This was about people growing together and it was almost like a community educational program.”

While learning and sharing knowledge became central components to the Ambassador Pilot Program, Ambassadors were still tasked to help develop a full-fledged Ambassador

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Program, and they never neglected that task. There was the continual pressure that the group would need to report their findings at the end of the fifteen weeks to senior management. But instead of being burdened by the task, the Ambassadors were excited about sharing their ideas with the senior managers.

Membership. Originally the Ambassadors were selected by the management. However, at the end, when discussing the idea of implementing a full-fledged Ambassador Program, the Ambassadors talked about different ways to recruit new Ambassadors. Two of the most popular ideas among the Ambassadors were (a) self-selection by interested candidates and (b) nomination, not by management but by the current Ambassadors. Regardless of the option chosen, the Ambassadors felt that only those that had a vested interest in the organization, and in improving it, should be allowed to participate. This would limit the number of people who participated, which they felt would be a positive component of the program. They argued their limited group size allowed their discussions to be more intimate and allowed for many Ambassadors to speak their minds freely. They wanted other Ambassadors after them to have the same kinds of opportunities.

Over time the Ambassadors recognized the importance of having a variety of staff, including both full-time and part-time. According to Barab et al. (2003), a defining characteristic of CoPs is a respect for diversity and minority views. Generally, diversity in a CoP refers to the diverse backgrounds of the members who share or are developing the same skill set. Not only did the Ambassadors come from various backgrounds, but they were also made up of a variety of employees with different job responsibilities. Most of the Ambassadors felt that the diversity of the group was key and was one of the factors that lead to the success of the program.

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One Ambassador, who worked part-time, shared an interesting insight about the bringing together of full-time and part-time employees. She shared the following:

> Well, a lot of times when I was working frontline cashier staff, I would hear all of the people at work around me, like, "Oh, you know, these bigwigs don't even know what they're talking about, they don't know what we're doing," and stuff like that. And then there's also the people up in the higher-ups, since I was able to work in an executive capacity too, they're like, "They don't really know what we're doing either."…And the fact that they were able to be in the same room together and actually talk about it, it helped kind of show each other that we really do know what we're talking about, that maybe you don't quite know what I'm doing kind of deal. And I thought that was really helpful and interesting.

Another Ambassador felt that the members of the Ambassador group were originally divided due to their diversity but by the end they had gelled together. She stated that the differing dynamics of the group "brought different points of view to discussion to help us see things from different angles. In the beginning I could see people really just staying with the people from their own venue, but by the end I could see that people were associating with everyone from the entire group."

Other Ambassadors spoke about the diversity of the program with phrases such as the following: "I thought [the diversity] made it successful…[and it] let us open up to a lot of different perspectives," "[Without the diversity,] it just wouldn't have the same impact at all…and I think that having diversity is key," "In my opinion, the program went well because of the diversity," "We were so similar and yet so diverse at the same time," "I think [the diversity] was critical," "The group itself I thought was interesting because it included everyone from very

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experienced people to novices," and "Everybody had a different opinion about different things so I mean it was great to bring all those people together to try and formulate those into one thought."

Organization. In the end the two co-directors were not seen just as leaders but also as facilitators. The co-directors helped lead the discussions and activities, but towards the end the bulk of the content came from the Ambassadors, and they were increasingly involved in the decisions that were made. Additionally, other Ambassadors felt like they were able to become leaders within the Ambassador group. One of them noted, "I became one of those people that was kind of helping lead people into directions to see how the growth could be implemented." This Ambassador felt like there were others along with him that emerged as leaders.

One Ambassador remembers that the first few sessions together were structured, "And then after that I remember [the co-directors] just saying, 'What do you guys want to do?' …We wanted to go see the venues; we wanted talk about different issues that crop up through our day." Another Ambassador agreed. She stated, "I remember the first few meetings, we kind of had specific things that we talked about…After that we kind of structured it on our own." She continued, "It felt really fluid to me." At first this was difficult for her, because she was more of a "follow-the-rules…need-a-guideline, type person," but over time she felt that neither the Ambassadors nor the co-directors could have planned it all out at the beginning.

The structure of the program became much more informal and flexible as time went on, and more responsibility was shifted from the co-directors and onto the other Ambassadors. More about the organic organization and structure of the program will be discussed later.

Termination. According to Smith and McKeen (2003), CoPs disband when there is no longer any interest, and teams disband after a project is completed. As a co-director I had

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assumed that after the completion of the Ambassador Program it was likely the Ambassadors would discontinue meeting together and communicating with one another. That assumption was only partially true. The Ambassadors ceased meeting with each other, but many of them continued to communicate with one another.

Several Ambassadors shared stories of meeting and communicating with different members of the Ambassador group after the program had officially ended. One Ambassador shared a story about calling on another Ambassador when he was in need. This experience occurred approximately a year after the program ended. He explained, "Today, in fact, one of my employees walked into the kitchen and said we're out of some lids for some cups. I was able to pick up the phone and call another department and say, 'Hey, Ann, would you mind helping me with this?' And she was like, 'Yeah, I've got lids, come grab 'em.'…In five minutes we had lids." This Ambassador concluded, "I knew that there was a solution that I could find immediately, because I had that relationship already built."

While relationships have continued past the termination date, there have been no times when the group as a whole has come back together again. When Ambassadors have met together or communicated with one another it has usually been informally, one-on-one.

The other co-director remarked how he noticed a desire from the Ambassadors to continue to meet formally after the program had ended. He stated, "There were a number [of the] Ambassadors…that came to me and asked, 'When are we going to get back together, are we going to do some more stuff? Are we going to continue to do these things?'" He then noted that he felt the investment that had developed among the Ambassadors was strengthened, because they had become like a CoP. He said, "And so that personal investment of, 'I want to stay involved,' is greater than just a project committee or something like that." While the

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Ambassadors have wanted to stay involved, there has not been the supporting structure to keep meeting regularly since the termination of the program.

Value proposition. Learning was the second most referenced topic in the interviews conducted. It was second only to Relationships. Learning and knowledge sharing became central components to the Ambassador Pilot Program as the program progressed. The other co-director noticed this as well. He compared the Ambassador group to a recent signage committee that was at Thanksgiving Point. About the signage committee he said, "That's a team together to do some sort of project. It's different than the Ambassadors who seem to have a higher connectivity and purpose to it beyond just working on, doing some kind of project."

The consultant Ambassador spoke about how the learning within the program exceeded her expectations. She noted that participating in the program "seriously enhanced my view of how Thanksgiving Point operates: the strengths, the challenges, opportunities for improvement. So I felt like it was a real enhancement for me to be able to sit in on it. And I thought it would be, but it was actually an even deeper experience than I expected."

The Ambassadors still had to produce something, however. They had to propose their ideas for a full-fledged Ambassador Program to the senior management. The Ambassadors did not generate any design documents or a detailed implementation plan; instead, they shared with senior management how this learning-centric program had helped them and how they thought it could help other employees.

Management. Thanksgiving Point's senior managers continued to play a very supportive role by the end of the Ambassador Pilot Program, but they were less hands-on than they were at the beginning. Initially they were slightly apprehensive about implementing a new

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program. But as they saw value in it by observing positive changes in their own employees, they were willing to let it flourish on its own, without their direct influence.

When speaking of the senior management's role, one Ambassador felt that senior management "let the thing go free." Another felt that senior management did not have "a big part in it," which allowed the Ambassadors "to decide what we wanted to do and talk about how we wanted this to go forward."

Other Ambassadors, who were closer to their senior managers, reported frequently to them and shared what they were learning, thus helping them to stay connected. One Ambassador noted, "I know Trevor [my senior manager] really appreciated the insight Clara and I brought back to the Farm."

As the Ambassadors began directing their own paths they began to feel more accountability towards themselves as a group, which, according to Wenger (1998), Stewart (1996), and Smith and McKeen (2003) is a defining characteristic of a CoP. While the Ambassadors became accountable to themselves, they were still accountable at the end to show the senior management what they had learned. To the Ambassadors these two types of accountability were positive aspects of the program.

The consultant Ambassador felt there was a proper balance between the Ambassadors setting their own course while still accounting to senior management. She explained,

> I saw that as a broader reaching accountability…[The Ambassadors] knew at the end they were coming up with some recommendations [to senior management]. And so I think that level of accountability made them filter the kinds of things they considered because they wanted to do something productive. But I never had the sense that they filtered out things because they were trying to second-guess senior management. I didn't think they

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> were saying to themselves, "Oh, I don't think senior management will want to hear that, so let's not talk about that." I think they felt like they really had the freedom to explore the property [and] ideas around improving Thanksgiving Point. So I don't think they over filtered. I think they filtered with an idea of being helpful. And I liked that.

Conclusion. Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of the Ambassador group when they concluded the Ambassador Pilot Program. Table 3 again illustrates that the Ambassadors still had both team and CoP characteristics. However, the Ambassadors became much more CoP-like in the following ways: Sharing knowledge, learning with one another, and respecting diverse views became essential components of the program; Ambassadors were given flexibility to direct their own course and make their own decisions; the co-directors became facilitators, allowing leadership responsibilities to be spread throughout the group; Ambassadors have desired to continue learning and interacting with one another even though the program has ended; and the senior management played a supportive yet hands-off role.

Additional CoP Evidences

The previous sections used Smith and McKeen's (2003) characteristics to make the distinction between teams and CoPs to illustrate how the Ambassadors took on more CoP characteristics as the program moved forward. However, further CoP characteristics have been highlighted by other scholars, and their descriptions of CoPs can be used to establish further claim that the Ambassador group took on CoP qualities. These additional scholars have noted CoPs contain the following: (a) a domain, or shared body of interest; (b) a community with tight connections, meaningful relationships, and communication between members; and (c) a practice, which would include a repository of shared resources (Kerno & Mace, 2010; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Barab et al.,

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Table 3

Ambassador Group Characteristics at the End of the Ambassador Pilot Program

	Communities of Practice	**Teams**
Objective	Sharing knowledge and learning together became the Ambassadors' primary objectives.	Ambassadors were still tasked to develop a full-fledged Ambassador Program. By this point the Ambassadors had determined a full program would be beneficial.
Membership	Ambassadors recommended future participants for the full Ambassador Program be chosen through self-selection or nomination by current Ambassadors. They felt having a diversity of employees, including full- and part-time, was vital to the program's success.	Ambassadors wanted others selected that were committed to the organization, and who would work to improve it. They also recommended having a cap on the number of people that could participate at once.
Organization	Ambassadors became decision makers, they determined the direction of the program, and leadership expanded to other Ambassadors throughout the group.	The co-directors led the group as facilitators.
Termination	Relationships and communication between Ambassadors have continued since the program ended. Ambassadors have also shared a desire to meet together again with the other Ambassadors to continue the program. Due to the relationships built, some Ambassadors have sought help from others to overcome challenges.	The Ambassador Pilot Program ended after the Ambassadors presented their ideas to senior management. The Ambassadors have not met together as a group since the program ended.
Value Proposition	Ambassadors valued learning and the connections they made with the other Ambassadors.	Ambassadors still felt a desire to provide meaningful ideas and recommendations to senior management.
Management	Senior management played a hands-off, supportive role and allowed Ambassadors to direct their own paths. Ambassadors felt accountable to themselves as a group.	Ambassadors were still accountable to senior management to show what they had learned and accomplished. The senior managers appreciated the updates they received on the progress of the program.

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2003); and (d) CoPs evolve organically, without much prodding from management (Hemmasi & Csanda, 2009; Holsapple, 2003; Iaquinto et al., 2011; Stamps, 1997).

Establishing a domain of shared interest. The Ambassadors had a shared domain of interest; however, it was unlike a domain one might see within a typical CoP. Kerno and Mace (2010) mentioned that shared domains come out of "shared competence" among community members (p. 80). Therefore a CoP comprised of members with a shared competence might be comprised of a group of zoologists, who share competence about animals; IT professionals, who are all knowledgeable about computer networks; or school teachers, who are all interested in improving their performance. The Ambassadors' CoP did not have shared competence nor a shared skill set. Instead they were a diverse group of people with a shared interest in Thanksgiving Point and its mission. This CoP was not comprised solely of marketers, supervisors, frontline cashiers, gardeners, or educators. Instead, it was a conglomeration of all those types of people, all of whom shared a passion for understanding and improving Thanksgiving Point.

Many of the Ambassadors spoke about their common interest in Thanksgiving Point, its mission, and bettering the guests' experiences at Thanksgiving Point. Eleven of the fourteen Ambassadors interviewed, unprompted, spoke about Thanksgiving Point's mission, and how it is a special place. This was their shared domain. One Ambassador said, "I view [the Ambassador Program] as an opportunity to really learn what Thanksgiving Point is and find ways to share it, not only with our fellow employees but with our guests and possible future funders and vendors."

The consultant in the Ambassador group remarked how surprised she was at the level of interest in Thanksgiving Point's mission that developed for the entire Ambassador group. She

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commented, “I saw a terrific investment in Thanksgiving Point emotionally from the participants,” and, “I was interested in how invested the group became in finding their own ways as well as group ways to improve Thanksgiving Point.”

Creating a cohesive community. Over time the Ambassador group became more like a community. Thirteen of the fourteen Ambassadors interviewed either mentioned the word community or described the group of Ambassadors using community-like identifiers, such as “bring together,” “being a part of,” “collective,” “consensus group,” “interaction between,” “all valued,” “all working together,” “sense of connectivity,” “sense of camaraderie,” “bringing in a bunch of people,” etc. Without being prompted, one Ambassador said, “I do think that our group became the community, and I really felt like we all got close together and actually enjoyed the time…[and] each other's company.” She was able to look beyond her job only and saw herself as part of something bigger: “We need to know that even though we're all doing our separate jobs that we're a part of something bigger and that we all have to do our best to make the whole work.”

Some, including the consultant and myself, were surprised at how close-knit of a community the Ambassadors became. The consultant remarked, “I expected them to connect to each other…[But] I was surprised at how much connection [there was in the end].” Another Ambassador, at the end of the experience, expressed, “And after we finished I think we were like a unit, you know?” Developing a community of Ambassadors provided the Ambassadors with a broader view of Thanksgiving Point. Beforehand, many of them had only a limited understanding of their particular department or venue.

While the members of the Ambassador group were able to come together as a community, there was still room for the different departments to come together. The other co-

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director mentioned, “There are certain departments that just haven't been able to connect as well with it based on the type of job they have…We're still trying to figure out how to weave [those groups] in so that they get the sense of it.”

Developing meaningful relationships. An important part of communities are the relationships developed between community members. According to MacDonald (2008), Wenger (1998), Chalmers and Keown (2006), and Niesz (2007), relationships between CoP members should be more than just professional; they should also be informal and interpersonal. The Ambassadors noted their favorite part about the Ambassador Pilot Program was strengthening relationships with other employees across property. Relationships was the number one mentioned topic in all the interviews that were conducted; every Ambassador mentioned it. There were approximately 80 mentions of or references to relationships.

One Ambassador who works in retail spoke about a specific member of the Ambassador group. The two of them, from very differing departments, likely would not have engaged with one another had it not been for the Ambassador Pilot Program. She said, “Even with Farm Country I've had times to talk with Clara on the phone and it's so nice because now we know each other…I really formed bonds with a lot of the people that we met with, which was so awesome because I think it just reinforces that we're one collective group and community working towards the same goals.”

Another Ambassador felt like she and others were able to make connections across departments. She said, “There were a number of people who I didn't know very well [who by the end] felt comfortable coming to me and asking for things or exploring things or working through things.” This same Ambassador also noted how other Ambassadors that were in the

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program have continued to work with her. She stated, “I think there is definitely more of a collaborative environment with people that went through the Ambassador Program with me.”

One of the positive aspects about the strengthened relationships was that it made it exciting for Ambassadors to get together. One Ambassador explained she enjoyed getting together with the other Ambassadors, because,

> I could talk to people from other venues and hear their funny stories and anecdotes, you know? And oh, not all the crazy people come to the Farm. They do go to the Gardens too, you know? Or just to see other people's personalities, it made it more fun and then I could come back here and talk to the guests about funny stories that happened at the Gardens or you know, funny things that happened elsewhere…It just made it easier to get people excited because it made me more excited.

Another Ambassador spoke about how having relationships with the other Ambassadors allowed for there to be a stronger sense of collaboration. She said, “I think it just helped us all to see each other's point of view. It wasn't us against them anymore, it was, oh, okay, they're with us too. We're all on the same team.” One Ambassador felt that one of the purposes of the Ambassador Pilot Program was to create a community to “provide sort of a network of people to go to for answers and to share information and knowledge.”

The other co-director explained how he felt that the relationships developed over time. He said, “I noticed the group in general was quieter at the beginning and became far more engaged and connective with each other towards the end of the project.” One of the most poignant examples of relationship building that occurred as a result of the Ambassador Pilot Program happened between the marketing and retail departments. An Ambassador from the marketing department noted the following:

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> There's a lot of friction between marketing and retail for whatever reason all the time, and so [experiencing the Ambassador Pilot Program] was kind of a good bridge-building type thing…The good part about going through Ambassador with Monica is she's a manager [in retail]…I think just going through that process with her just made that transition a little bit easier, and I think everybody is in a better spot now from it. It wasn't just that, but just having that time with her one-on-one and I think we…have a relationship as a result.

Even the consultant Ambassador, who had experience with team building in other organizations, was surprised at the level of relationships that were built. She had expected relationships to form, but not necessarily to the extent that she witnessed. She explained,

> The [benefit] that was even better than I expected it to be was how much people across property enjoyed getting to know each other. So they came in feeling like individuals who had a job in a unit…and they left feeling like they belonged to Thanksgiving Point and that they had friends all over Thanksgiving Point. So they had very much a sense of connectivity across property that they didn't come in with.

Relationships and friendships between the Ambassadors have continued past the completion date. One Ambassador stated, "When I gave blood a couple weeks ago, Janelle was there at the same time, so it was fun to sit and visit with Janelle, you know, and just see other people as we go about…I don't ever hang out with anyone outside of work, but you feel like you could, you know?" Another Ambassador described her relationships with the other Ambassadors as different than regular work relationships. She said, "It's more personal…[and] on a deeper level."

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One Ambassador summarized well the feeling the Ambassadors had towards one another by the end of the program. She stated, "I don't see the other Ambassadors now as coworkers; I see them more as friends. I feel comfortable going up and talking to them while I am working in different venues and communicating with them more openly about things that need to get done or problems we may be having."

Experiencing elite status. Several of the Ambassadors felt that the Ambassador group was an elite group that gave them unique status at Thanksgiving Point. They felt privileged to be included in the program. One Ambassador stated, "I think some people felt very honored to be included, and I think that just having that voice at the table was really nice for some people. [It] brought about some, I think, good outcomes." Another stated, "It felt very special to be chosen…[and] it feels almost like an exclusive little club." One Ambassador remarked, "It's kind of cool to say, 'I'm an Ambassador.'" while another said, "I thought it was a privilege, I really did." For one Ambassador the sense of pride for being a part of the Ambassador group developed over time. She said the Ambassadors "were more proud to be part of Thanksgiving Point and its mission than when they started." One Ambassador thought it was an elite group, not necessarily because of structure of the Ambassador group, but because of the people that were in it. He felt the Ambassadors were "some of our brightest and best employees," and "go-getters."

A few of the Ambassadors noticed that there was a tinge of jealousy from their coworkers. One Ambassador noted, "A lot of people were curious about it, like, 'Does that make you special or something like that?'…I remember [a coworker] telling me that there were several people she thought were jealous because there were certain people that got picked and certain people that didn't. And so it kind of made people feel special." This led other people to wonder,

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"How come I didn't get picked?" Some of the Ambassadors' coworkers adjusted what they were doing so that they could get picked to participate in the future. Another Ambassador commented, "I actually had one of my employees who was disappointed she didn't get to go…and she said, '…What's this all about and why wasn't I chosen?'"

Building a practice. The practice of a CoP refers to their repository of shared resources (Kerno & Mace, 2010; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Barab et al., 2003). This group of Ambassadors participated in various activities together and as such built their own repository of resources. First, the Ambassadors found great value in the activities they participated in. Some of the most popular activities included the tours that the Ambassador group went on to visit the various parts of Thanksgiving Point property. One Ambassador noted, "I really think if you're going to speak well about the property, you really have got to see it first-hand and maybe learn things about the different parts of the property that are interesting." One Ambassador believed the tours made it easier to relate to guests. She said, "It's easier if you've been there and seen it." Others felt like the tours gave them the insider's look, and one thought it allowed her to "draw connections between my venue and their venue [to make] the whole property feel more unified." One Ambassador thought the tours were the most meaningful activities the group participated in.

Two of the Ambassadors found less value in the property tours, because they felt like they had already seen all or most of Thanksgiving Point, and there was little more to learn. One of the Ambassadors stated, "There were some things I learned more about the property on some of the field trips…but they were trivial. Like trivia things." She found the tours interesting, but they didn't really relate to her job. These Ambassadors did not necessarily disagree that the Ambassadors had a repository of shared resources; they had just found less value in the tours.

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Other activities included discussions about different types of museum visitors, Thanksgiving Point as a non-profit institution, customer service, and facilitation. Some Ambassadors found ways to apply what they had learned into their regular work responsibilities, particularly with customer service. One Ambassador described how the various activities helped the entire Ambassador group to elevate themselves to a new level. She explained,

> I think the purpose of the Ambassador Program is to bring people from all different parts of the property together and get us on the same page; knowing the background of the property, visiting the different parts of the property, just expanding our knowledge and our knowledge about the property, and then also making sure everyone understands what non-profit is, and what our mission is. And…get the people from all different parts of the property together to get to know each other, get to know the property, get to know what we're talking about when we talk to the guests and make sure that we're all on the same page so that we can really bump up the level and the standard of the guest service and…be on that same level.

Most of the Ambassadors came to see the various venues in new ways. However, two Ambassadors, which included one of the Ambassadors who found less value in the tours, felt that despite their participation in the Ambassador Pilot Program their perceptions of the various venues across Thanksgiving Point property did not change. This was due in part to the cross-property roles they already had.

Allowing organic evolution. While there was some prodding from the co-directors, much of what took place during the Ambassador Pilot Program happened in a free-flowing manner. One Ambassador stated, "I felt like that you and Greg had certain topics that you would like to cover or discuss. And then I think it was kind of organic and it went from maybe we

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didn't talk about that enough, and we needed to talk about it more next time…It had its own flow and I think that you allowed it to be that way." She went on to say that she appreciated that there was a loose structure that allowed for there to be a focus on the topics that were of most relevance to the Ambassadors. "We kind of decided as a group," she stated.

One Ambassador mentioned the loose structure was not only beneficial to the program, but it was a necessary component. She stated, "I think for what the program is, it's appropriate to not have an agenda…Just the nature of bringing in a bunch of people to think through different issues or to learn together or whatever that is, it sort of needs to be a little bit fluid so that you can explore whatever you end up with, the big questions." One Ambassador stated, "I think [it] was very flexible and I think that was great so that we could focus on some areas that were the goals of most of the participants. It was not just straight in, that's what we're gonna pitch and that's it." One Ambassador liked the flexibility but warned about having the program be too unstructured. She stated, "I think unconstrained creativity can sometimes stymie people. [It] can help them move forward if you give them some constraints." The Ambassadors did have restraints. They were accountable to the group to give their best contributions, and they were accountable to senior management to develop a full-fledged Ambassador program. There was also some basic structure to the program that helped move it along.

Transformation Influencers

Over time the Ambassador team took on many CoP characteristics. These characteristics give indication that the Ambassadors seemed to have transformed from a team into a CoP, or at least the beginnings of a CoP. There were likely several different aspects of the program that influenced a transformation from team to CoP. The following section will outline what may have contributed to the transformation, as identified both by the participants and the co-directors.

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Allowing structured flexibility. A contributing factor that led to the transformation from team to CoP was the balance between structure and flexibility. The consultant Ambassador stated,

> It was a really good balance, because if…as a group the first thing we heard is an Ambassador Program is a potential program to improve Thanksgiving Point but we have no idea what it is, what it might look like, how it might go, I think some would've dropped out. Some would've remained silent and I think that we would've had a really tentative group. The fact that there were some basic guidelines gave them a sense of where to get started and yet they had enough flexibility that they felt like their input was listened to pretty early on.

The program was more structured at the beginning and less so as it moved forward. The first three meetings were planned out, but then the Ambassadors as a whole determined the plans for the remaining meetings.

Creating a welcoming atmosphere. Another feature that promoted the transition from team to CoP was the welcoming atmosphere of the program. Ambassadors felt they could openly share their opinions in the program. There were no qualifiers such as age, experience, or length of employment for the Ambassadors to be able to express their thoughts. According to the consultant Ambassador, personality played some part in that openness, "But the bigger part of it is the welcome from the leaders and from the group," she stated. She continued by mentioning that she felt the two co-directors were welcoming as was the remainder of the group, even when some of the less-experienced members of the group recommended things that likely would not work. She explained by saying the co-directors "encouraged the younger members to talk a little bit more, to tell a little bit more because then they themselves would sometimes say,

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'Well, I don't know if it's practical after all.' But it was interesting that it sometimes spawned other ideas that were practical."

Promoting equal standing. Similar to the welcoming atmosphere that was discussed above, another component of the program that contributed to the change from team to CoP was the equal standing of the group members. One of the Ambassadors, a new, part-time frontline staff member stated, "Everybody was equal. Kind of like when you went in that [meeting] room…[your] rank, such as manager, or leader of this department or whatever is kind of stripped off you while you were in a group. There was nobody that had priority over anybody else or more important things to say because they were higher up in the organization at Thanksgiving Point or not." Over time it did seem like leaders within the group did emerge, but everyone's standing and opinion were still equal.

Receiving support from senior management. One feature that encouraged the transformation from team to CoP was the role that senior management took. Initially some members of senior management were skeptical about what would come of the Ambassador Program. And while they continued to follow up with the employees in the program that worked under them, they were willing to let the program members shape the program without their input. One senior manager noticed a positive change occurring in two of his employees that were in the program. One of the Ambassadors explained, "I know Trevor really appreciated the insight Clara and I brought back to the Farm." This Ambassador had written emails to her senior manager and explained to him just how much she enjoyed the program and felt like she was getting a great deal out of it. He shared in return to her, "Every time you go [to an Ambassador meeting] and you come back and you're so excited to tell us what you talked about…you're excitement gets us more excited."

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The other co-director with me was a member of senior management. He played a key role both in the Ambassador group and the senior management team. Regarding his role in the program he stated, “Well, I'm a senior manager at Thanksgiving Point so I think that defines [my] role a little bit. But then also because I was co-kind of developer of the program with you, that gave a different perspective. So my relationship…is defined a little bit by that as opposed to say a peer or someone in the community in practice.”

This same co-director also felt that senior management played a very supportive role in the development of the Ambassador CoP. They had to learn how to support it without supervising it. This co-director stated that the rest of senior management was “Supportive of the idea and the conceptual framework of it. Very supportive in terms of keeping out of the way as much as possible too.” Senior management realized it was “a big risk, especially for a non-profit with not much [in terms of] additional resources.”

Participating meaningfully. When asked what it was that she thought brought about the change, the consultant Ambassador felt that it was the opportunity the Ambassadors had to share their opinions in a meaningful way. She explained,

> Everybody has an opinion, everybody's looked around them and observed in their environment what they believe is going on and what they perceive should be going on. And the Ambassadors were asked their opinion: How do you see things happening here? How do you think things ought to be? And the way the program was structured, they had a very sincere feeling that their feedback was valuable…I think they had a very clear feeling right from the beginning that their ideas were worth expressing and that we were listening to them. We were listening to each other and that the management team at Thanksgiving Point would be listening.

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Supplemental Benefits

The Ambassadors that participated in the Ambassador Pilot Program identified additional benefits for participating. The following section briefly discusses these benefits.

Impacting culture. Many of the Ambassadors felt the Ambassador Program had the potential to influence the culture of Thanksgiving Point. One Ambassador thought it was such a unifying agent that she said, "I think the Ambassador Program could shape the culture of Thanksgiving Point." Another Ambassador stated, "It has made me more aware of visitors, it has helped me become a better communicator, and it has made me more proud to work for [Thanksgiving Point]." One Ambassador spoke about how excited she would get each week to attend. "It was the highlight of my week," she said.

Allowing free expression. The tightknit community that was formed allowed for Ambassadors to freely share their opinions without the feeling of being rejected or mocked. One Ambassador stated that the intimate feel of the group meant she and others were "able to voice our opinions." She continued, "It wasn't a hostile environment. And nobody was pressured into saying anything either. It was just, 'This is my honest opinion; this is what I really think'."

Several of the Ambassadors mentioned that it was easy to "speak up" for things. One explained, "The best part about it is we all had a chance to speak up and say well this is something I think that would benefit me. And then someone else would speak up and say I think it would also benefit me." Some might think that this kind of a structure might lead to group think, where people are agreeing with one another without voicing their true opinion. One Ambassador explained how that was not the case. She explained that because everyone had an "equal voice," meaning the managers in the program were on the same level as the frontline staff, the members of the group shared freely with one another.

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The structure of the program and relationships of the Ambassadors were such that the Ambassadors knew they could disagree with one another without fear of being punished, mocked, or isolated. A young, newly hired Ambassador noted, “Even if Greg [a member of senior management] said something that I didn't agree with I could raise my hand and say that I don't agree with that and I see it differently. And because in that room, we're not in an official business meeting, I'm not going to make him mad and there's not going to be repercussions upon my job.”

Contrarily, one of the Ambassadors felt the large group discussions made it difficult for her to voice her opinion. Speaking of the discussions she expressed, “I just could never get a word in. I have a lot to say but I'm just not assertive enough.” There were other quiet Ambassadors. It was observed that the Ambassadors did open up as the program progressed, but it is unknown to what extent each of the Ambassadors felt they could express their feelings openly.

Building confidence. A few of the Ambassadors confessed that their confidence had grown as a result of participating in the Ambassador Pilot Program. One Ambassador said, “This program really helped me gain my confidence, because I really did feel important and that I could share like ideas and share the same experience in the Ambassador Program as other people who have been working there for a long time.” She then explained about how she can approach many different people that are in different departments and not have it be such an intimidating experience. Two other Ambassadors remarked how they had seen the confidence flourish in this particular Ambassador. She has since become a leader in her department.

Altering senior managers’ perceptions. The Ambassadors were not the only ones that benefited from the implementation of the Ambassador Pilot Program. Senior management also

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experienced positive changes. The other co-director, who was a senior manager, mentioned, "Some of our bigger critics [on the senior management team] at the get-go, who did not understand it, became the hugest supporters because they saw the output on their end." The changes that they were seeing with their employees provided them with additional motivation to move forward with other strategic initiatives. Their original perception of the Ambassador Program was that it was a customer training program. Even their perceptions changed. The co-director explained, "At the end of it they understood that it was about facilitation and building a community…There was a difference that was there, and that grew over time."

Improving communication. While the Ambassador Program does not solve all the issues Thanksgiving Point faces regarding internal communication, it does help in some regards. One of the Ambassadors noticed that the Ambassador Pilot Program not only provided a way to communicate with others across property, but it was a tool she could use to identify weak spots in the communication lines. She noted, "That as bad as I think that our training was, it's worse. [Laugh] Just people don't know things, you know, that you would think that they know." There seems to be a need for even more knowledge sharing across the organization.

Conclusion

Smith and McKeen (2003), along with other scholars (Gilley & Kerno, 2010; Nickols, 2011; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Thompson, 2005; Snyder & Wenger, 2010), have drawn distinctions between teams and CoPs. Both are important, and neither of them is necessarily better than the other. But as knowledge management within organizations is becoming increasingly important, some organizations are recognizing the need to facilitate CoPs as a means for their employees to learn basic skills and understand institutional practices. It would therefore be beneficial if an organization could take a team and help it transform into a CoP.

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Teams are generally regimented, task-oriented, and hierarchical in nature. CoPs are typically organic, learner-driven, and informal. While the hardline definitions of teams and CoPs put them opposite one another, there is a continuum between them. When the Ambassador Pilot Program began it had aspects of both teams and CoPs. However, its primary characteristics show that it was more team-like, because there were specific tasks to accomplish, the members of the group had been selected to participate by senior management and the co-directors, senior management desired to supervise the program, and there was a set completion date.

Over time the Ambassadors were given more freedom to direct their own course and set their own agendas. They taught one another those things they thought were most relevant for their jobs. They discussed challenges they were facing and considered ways to overcome them. Leadership within the program expanded to include more than the co-directors. Learning together and sharing knowledge became the main focuses of the program. The Ambassadors group started changing and began embracing CoP characteristics. The amount of change the Ambassadors experienced surprised even the co-directors. This was a team of employees that came to see themselves in a new way. They made connections with one another, developed lasting relationships, focused on learning, and, as a result, evolved into a community of learners. Because of these transformations, it is argued that the Ambassadors became a CoP, or at least the beginnings of one.

It should also be noted that while the Ambassadors became increasingly CoP-like, they still maintained several key team characteristics. Although the Ambassadors were given additional flexibility, they were still tasked to develop a full-fledged Ambassador Program. The Ambassadors remained committed to accomplishing this task. As such, the Ambassadors were still accountable to senior management for what they learned throughout the program. They

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wanted to make meaningful recommendations for a full-fledged Ambassador Program. At the end of the program, and after reporting their findings to senior management, the Ambassadors discontinued meeting formally. While communication between some of the Ambassadors has continued, there have been no times when the original group of Ambassadors has come back together again. The feedback from the Ambassadors to the senior management has led to the development of a full-fledged Ambassador Program at Thanksgiving Point. However, questions still remain. Will the new program include the original Ambassadors? Will it become any more or less CoP-like than the original group of Ambassadors?

It is also recommended that additional studies be conducted regarding teams and CoPs. It remains to be seen if other teams will experience results similar to the Ambassadors if they are encouraged to set their own agendas without being accountable to management, particularly preexisting teams where the team members have already been working together accomplishing objectives for a longer duration.

Additionally, as was discussed earlier, the CoP literature has shown that a majority of CoPs have a shared domain wherein the community members have a shared set of skills or competencies. Within the museum field, for example, one might find separate CoPs for exhibit designers, evaluators, fundraisers, or educators. However, what remains to be seen are CoPs that bring people together from a variety of skill sets and competencies. That is what was done in this particular study. But other similar studies, with people from other skill sets and competencies, could be conducted to see if the vast diversity within their CoPs has the same results as the Ambassadors.

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APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study asked the following questions: Did the Thanksgiving Point Ambassador team transform into a CoP or at least the beginnings of a CoP? If so, what contributed to this transformation? And if not, what discouraged this transformation from occurring? To what extent did the Ambassadors become a CoP or not? The following section outlines the various bodies of literature that are relevant to these questions. Due to the intent of the study to focus on the creation of a CoP, a majority of the literature focuses on CoPs, including an introduction to CoPs, the characteristics of CoPs, the evolution of CoPs in organizations, and membership in CoPs. Next, the difference between CoPs and teams is discussed.

Introduction to CoPs

Lave and Wenger (1991) first coined the phrase "communities of practice." Wenger (1998) spoke about CoPs as a way for people to engage in learning through social interactions. He identified four key components to this social theory of learning: (a) Community: learning as belonging; (b) Identity: learning as becoming; (c) Practice: learning as doing; and (d) Meaning: learning as experience (see Wenger, 1998, p. 5). In speaking about CoPs, Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that the term community implies "participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (p. 98). Barab et al. (2003) defined a CoP as "a persistent, sustained social network of individuals who share and develop an overlapping knowledge base, set of beliefs, values, history and experiences focused on a common practice and/or mutual enterprise" (p. 238).

As organizations have moved into the twenty-first century, increases in technology and the expansion of global markets mandate that companies find any competitive edge possible.

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One of the key ways that organizations have sought to stay relevant is through the use of effective knowledge management (Holsapple, 2003). Knowledge management is the way in which an organization shares its general or implicit knowledge, skills, and culture with its members. Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) stated, "Knowledge Management allows organizations to share, capture, organize, and store internal company knowledge and intellectual capital. It is a way of finding, understanding, and using knowledge to create value" (p. 262; see also O'Dell, 2004). According to Hildreth and Kimble (2004), "More recently, there has been recognition of the importance of more subtle, softer types of knowledge that need to be shared. This raises the question as to how this sort of knowledge might be 'managed'" (p. ix). CoPs have become an effective resource for managing knowledge. Smith and McKeen (2003) argue, "Because knowledge incorporates such a wide range of items, companies are now recognizing the crucial role communities play in creating, maintaining, and transferring knowledge" (p. 399). Others have stated that a CoP not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge within a CoP but "throughout the wider organization" (Retna and Ng, 2011, p. 55).

In describing the value of CoPs, Iaquinto, Ison, and Faggian (2011) stated, "In the business management literature, a successful CoP is generally one which helps businesses compete in the marketplace. The value of a CoP is then based on its ability to help the organization it exists within achieve the organization's goals" (p. 8; see also Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger and Snyder (2000) listed several ways in which CoPs can benefit organizations. They "(a) solve problems quickly…(b) transfer best practice…(c) develop professional skills…[and] (d) help companies recruit and retain talent" (p. 141).

In relation to the value of CoPs for organizations, Lesser and Storck (2001) hypothesized that, "the vehicle through which communities are able to influence organizational performance is

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the development and maintenance of social capital among community members" (p. 833). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital is defined as, "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (p. 243). Not only does the individual benefit from participating in the CoP, but organizations-at-large benefit from the effective use of social capital. For there to be effective social capital, individuals need to be connected through networks, trust one another, and have a common understanding of challenges facing the organization (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Lesser & Storck, 2001). Therefore CoPs become the "generators" of an organization's social capital (Lesser & Storck, 2001, p. 833).

CoPs cause participants to move from a focus on the individual to a focus on the community. Barab and Duffy (2000) explained, "This [emphasis on CoPs] is a considerable shift…from a focus on the activity of an individual in a collaborative environment to a focus on the connections an individual has with the community and the patterns of participation in the community" (p. 48). Individuals can still have meaningful learning experiences in collaborative settings; however, they miss out on the unique, authentic, and lasting experiences that they can have when they are a part of a CoP. Barab and Duffy (2000) further explained, "A community is not simply bringing a lot of people together to work on a task…The key is linking into society—giving the [participants] a legitimate role (task) in society through community participation and membership" (p. 49).

Characteristics of CoPs

This section will first identify broad characteristics of CoP. These characteristics will then be discussed in greater specificity in subsequent subsections.

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Many argue that CoPs require three defining characteristics: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 1998; Kerno & Mace, 2010; Wenger, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lesser & Storck, 2001). The importance of these three characteristics are detailed as follows:

> The *domain* has an identity defined by a shared realm of interest. Membership consequently implies a commitment to the domain, and thus a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. The *community* consists of members engaging in joint activities and discussions to help one another and share information. Relationships are developed that allow members to learn from each other. The *practice* connotes members as practitioners who develop a shared repertoire of resources, which inevitably takes time and sustained interaction (Kerno & Mace, 2010, p. 80, emphasis added).

Wenger (1998) also identified two other primary components that could be added to three of domain, community, and practice; they are meaning and identity (see also Kerno & Mace, 2010).

As CoPs have evolved over time and as an increasing number of scholars have investigated them, their defining characteristics have also expanded and evolved. Gilley and Kerno (2010) identified what they argued are essential characteristics of a CoP. They said, “The critical ingredients for an effective CoP include knowledge exchange and growth along with fulfillment of individual curiosity, not work products, measurable and quantifiable results, or external management of membership” (p. 51; see also Nickols, 2011; Wenger et al., 2002; Stamps, 1997). Barab et al. (2003) identified four characteristics of a CoP. They are, “(a) a common practice and/or mutual enterprise; (b) opportunities for interactions and participation;

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(c) meaningful relationships; and (d) respect for diverse perspectives and minority views" (p. 238).

Using information from Wenger (1998) and Stewart (1996), Smith and McKeen (2003) identified more characteristics of CoPs. They stated the following:

> First, because a CoP must develop over *time*, it has a history of learning. Second, it has an *enterprise* – something that forms around a "value-adding something-we-are-all-doing" – but it does not have an agenda of action items as a team would. Third, *learning* is a key element of this enterprise. As a result, CoPs develop their own ways of dealing with their world. Fourth, they are *responsible* only to themselves and self-policing. There's no boss. Leaders tend to emerge on an issue-by-issue basis. In addition, because *relationships* within a CoP are ongoing and indeterminate, they tend to be characterized by mutual trust. Finally, CoPs are concerned about *content* rather than form. As a result, they are not identifiable or designable units (p. 395, italics in the original document; see also Storck & Hill, 2000).

Wenger (1998) and Barab et al. (2003) discussed different dualities that exist in all CoPs. Barab et al. (2003) stated, "Tensions, or dualities, refer to overlapping yet conflicting activities and needs that drive the dynamics of the system…[and promote] system innovation" (p. 239; see also Engeström, 1987, 1999). The following are six different dualities identified in CoPs. The first four were originally identified by Wenger (1998); the last two were identified by Barab et al. (2003). Each of these dualities represent opposite ends of CoP continuums. CoP elements can lie anywhere in-between the opposing dualities. They are (a) *Designed/Emergent*, which refers to the interplay between a CoP being designed or simply emerging on its own; (b) *Participation and Reification*, which contrasts fully-immersed participation in a CoP with the

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condensed or summarized output of a CoP; (c) *Local/Global*, which refers to communities meetings locally versus globally; (d) *Identification/Negotiability*, which refers to individual membership identities and the degree to which members can control the meanings of the CoP; (e) *Online/Face-to-Face*, which refers to the contrast between meeting over the Internet and meeting in person; and (f) *Diversity/Coherence*, which contrasts the effect that diversity or coherence among members, their skills, their work tasks, etc. can have on a CoP.

Purposeful creation of CoPs. Smith and McKeen (2003) argued that CoPs are not "designable units" (p. 395). From their inception into an organization, CoPs are fluid and often take on a life of their own. One of the unique characteristics of CoPs is that they organically change over time. According to Hay and Barab (2001), "Communities of practice are developed, evolve, and change over a rich history that has an eye to continued evolution into the future" (p. 292).

Stamps (1997) was even more adamant that CoPs could not just be created. He stated, "Virtually everyone who has studied them agrees that communities of practice cannot be created out of the blue by management fiat; they form of their own accord, whether management tries to encourage them or hinder them" (p. 39).

Iaquinto et al. (2011), Hemmasi and Csanda (2009), and Perry and Zender (2004) do not necessarily agree with Smith and McKeen's (2003) and Stamps' (1997) assessment that CoPs are not designable. Because of their organic nature, Iaquinto et al. (2011) explained, "Despite a growing interest in CoPs, it is still not apparent to what extent a CoP can be created purposefully through 'design' whether from scratch or through harnessing nascent CoPs" (p. 5). However, after investigating several CoPs in an Australian state government department they discovered that several purposefully designed CoPs are thriving, which led them to conclude that given the

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right conditions CoPs could be intentionally designed. Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) and Perry and Zender (2004) have also found that CoPs can be formed intentionally and still be successful.

According to Snyder and Wenger (2010), when establishing a CoP both sponsors and community members need to realize

> The intentional and systematic cultivation of communities cannot be defined simply in terms of conventional strategy development or organizational design. Rather, sponsors and community leaders must be ready to engage in an evolutionary design process whereby the organization fosters the development of communities among practitioners, creates structures that provide support and sponsorship for these communities, and finds ways to involve them in the conduct of the business (pp. 111-112).

Lesser and Storck (2001) identify three management actions that can promote the use of CoPs. They urge organizations to, "(a) Provide opportunities for individuals to make new connections…(b) Allow time and space for relationship building among individuals…[and] (c) Find ways to communicate the norms, culture, and language of the community and the organization" (p. 840).

According to Iaquinto et al. (2011), there are some other ways to foster the intentional growth of CoPs. Before practitioners attempt to develop a CoP in an organization they should

> (a) Build or reveal a discourse of organizational imperative/need; (b) gain organizational commitment and support structures for the CoP concept, including sponsors, funding, allocation of time, etc.; (c) foster or facilitate individual motivations to participate in a CoP (enthusiasm, ownership, etc.); and (d) develop the means to value and communicate individual and organizational benefits from CoP participation (learning, improved delivery on core business, communication, etc.) (p. 17).

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Some individuals can initiate or participate in a CoP without realizing it. Retna and Ng (2011) explained,

> These CoPs are formed from the natural dynamics of the staff members, and most staff members, although aware that they are working as in groups, are not deeply conscious of these groupings as they go about their daily work. The groups do not appear to be deliberate and artificial. There is a sense of "natural-ness" about these groups. However, when probed from the angles of domain, community and practice, the dynamics and utility of the CoPs reveal themselves (p. 47).

Diversity within CoPs. Above, Barab et al. (2003) identified diversity as an important characteristic in CoPs. Others have written about the benefit of diversity among CoP members. Iaquinto et al. (2011) remarked that diversity in a CoP can contribute to its success. They stated that one CoP "had variable topic areas that encouraged the exchange of different repertoires, allowing members with different competencies and experiences to interact" in meaningful ways (p. 13). CoPs are often unconfined to a particular department or area, thus promoting a variety of ideas from a diverse group of people. Gilley and Kerno (2010) stated, "CoPs often cross organizationally imposed boundaries of departments and divisions and even include participants from outside an organization" (p. 50).

Diversity can promote innovation in CoPs (Justesen, 2004; Storck & Hill, 2000; Barab et al., 2003). Innovation and design was an important component of the Thanksgiving Point Ambassador team. Having a diverse set of individuals, such as managers and frontline staff, and museum employees and garden employees, all with different skill sets and perspectives, allowed the Ambassadors at Thanksgiving Point to approach challenges from multiple angles. Doing so promoted innovative solutions.

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Management involvement within CoPs. There are varying degrees of supervision by management among CoPs. According to Smith and McKeen (2003) there needs to be a balance between limiting hierarchical management and receiving support from management. They explained that a challenge within CoPs is that their "organic and informal nature makes them highly resistant to management supervision and interference in their activities. CoPs are therefore controversial because there is no clear role for management in them. In fact, if management does get involved, the community often dissipates" (p. 394). But without buyoff from management, the existence of CoPs can also be compromised. Wenger and Snyder (2000) argued that CoPs "require specific managerial efforts to develop them and to integrate them into the organization so that their full power can be leveraged" (p. 145). Iaquinto et al. (2011) and Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) believe that receiving support from high-level management is important to the success and sustainability of a CoP. The Thanksgiving Point Ambassador team had the backing of the entire senior management and even involved senior management members in some of the sessions. This promoted the legitimacy of the CoP.

In a case study conducted by Retna and Ng (2011), the supportive role of a company CEO to promote and establish effective CoPs is discussed. Retna and Ng (2011) stated, "[The CEO] has integrated CoPs into company policy, processes, and reward schemes. Every single individual [interviewed] gave favorable comments about the leader for the kind of support and encouragement given to them for collaborating and sharing knowledge in their CoPs" (p. 51).

While having support from upper management is helpful, qualified leadership within the CoPs is also important. Retna and Ng (2011) argued,

> There is a need for better facilitation, as there is a tendency for members to go astray in their discussions and sometimes individuals may dominate their views about certain

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issues…Therefore, a facilitator is considered to be an important factor in helping the CoPs to grow and evolve in membership and culture (p. 55).

Iaquinto et al. (2011) concurred. They explained, "The role of coordinator was found to be critical for the success of CoPs…because formal CoPs carry a significant organizational and administrative load" (p. 10). However, coordinators face a challenging dilemma. Iaquinto et al. (2011) continued, "Coordinators…must tread a fine line between fostering self-organization and 'taking control'" (p. 10).

Structure of CoPs. Retna and Ng (2011) stated, "Although CoPs can be encouraged and supported top-down, they are fundamentally bottom-up practices" (p. 52). Too much structure can inhibit the effectiveness of CoPs. Thompson (2005) argued, "Some recent empirical research is presented suggesting that attempts to control group interaction by introducing too much structure are likely to result in the demise of the community itself" (p. 151).

According to an empirical study performed by Hemmasi and Csanda (2009), "Communities that failed typically never had a firmly-defined domain, had difficulty collecting and maintaining knowledge generated by the community, and lacked a facilitator focused on helping the community be successful" (p. 266). Additionally, organizations that were more collaborative, rather than "command and control", were much more supportive of CoPs (p. 267).

Communication within CoPs. CoPs can have community members that communicate face-to-face or through the use of technology, such as in Internet forums or emails. However, there can be some challenges associated with both (Barab et al., 2003). Communicating over the Internet allows for members to participate globally and at times that are more convenient for them; however, it often requires the use of methods that are limited to text or asynchronistic communication. Additionally, the design of a technological communication interface requires

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making certain theoretical decisions that will effect how the communication occurs. Barab et al. (2003) explained, "The programming that creates the designed technological interface is composed of decisions that incorporate certain ideologies. At the least, they limit some types of exchange and encourage others" (p. 249). On the other hand, face-to-face interactions can be more intimate and immediate, but they require that members either meet locally or travel long distances to convene.

Members of the Alliance strategic community at Xerox, which will be discussed later in this literature review, found that face-to-face interaction was an essential part of their community development, which in turn helped them to foster more trust between one another. Storck and Hill (2000) stated,

> Although electronic interaction (e.g., an e-mail distribution list) was useful in maintaining community-mindedness, we observed that technology alone was insufficient for effective community development. In fact, the Alliance members – all of whom were completely comfortable with a variety of interaction technologies – strongly believed in the value of face-to-face meetings (p. 73).

Innovation and design in CoPs. CoPs are known for promoting innovation (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Retna & Ng, 2011). In spawning new ideas for products and services, Lesser and Storck (2001) remarked, "In several of the companies that we examined, the communities of practice served as breeding grounds for innovation" (p. 839). This occurred as community members shared new ideas with one another. Community members were often introduced to new ideas through the use of special guests/speakers who attended their community get-togethers to share ideas and discuss new trends. One of the primary reasons that innovation was able to flourish in these CoPs was due to the trust that existed between

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community members. They felt that their community was a "safe environment" to share their ideas and challenges (p. 839).

Lundkvist (2004) explained that end users can be an important source of innovation. He stated, "User networks are a peripheral, yet vital, site for innovation" (p. 97). The Thanksgiving Point Ambassadors were both practitioners and users. They were the ones who would be using the training model they developed. Their role as users allowed them to bring a unique perspective to the innovation aspects of the design.

While CoPs have been seen as the nurturing ground for innovation, there is very little information about members in CoPs engaging in design. Von Stamm (2008) made a clear distinction between innovation and design. Innovation is, "creativity plus (successful) implementation. Creativity alone, to come up with ideas, is not enough. In order to reap the benefits one needs to do something with it" (p. 1). Design, on the other hand, "is the conscious decision-making process by which information (an idea) is transformed into an outcome, be it tangible (product) or intangible (service)" (p. 17). Perhaps one of the reasons that CoPs are not known as environments for design is because CoPs are generally not task-oriented. Without the pressure to generate an output there is less incentive to design. This is one of the major areas in which the Thanksgiving Point Ambassador team differed from typical CoPs. They were given the task to design a training program. It remains to be seen if their focus on design altered the characteristics of their environment enough to disqualify them from being an actual CoP.

Evolution of CoPs in Organizations

Since Lave and Wenger (1991) first coined the phrase "community of practice," there has been a proliferation of community types, such as CoPs, strategic communities (Storck & Hill, 2000), communities of learners (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001), and knowledge-

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building communities (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1993; Barab & Duffy, 2000) to name a few. Additionally, CoPs were originally identified by the informal learning that occurred from people who were close in proximity to one another and who met face-to-face in communities that were generally stable (Amin & Roberts, 2008). Over time the CoP term has become more imprecise to include a blanket repertoire that refers to any group of people working together to promote knowledge management, regardless of the mode of interaction, type of learning that occurs, proximity, or community stability. Technology has also enabled proximally close or distant community members to communicate asynchronously (Lesser & Storck, 2001).

It has been increasingly easy, but not necessarily wise, to group all CoPs together into one category. Amin and Roberts (2008) warned, "Social practices of all kinds in all sorts of collaborative settings and all manner of learning and knowledge outcomes are becoming folded together into one undifferentiated form" (p. 355). They described the problem with this by stating, "This homogenization is unhelpful, for it not only glosses over significant varieties of situated practice with very different creative outcomes, but it also blunts policy action in an approach to knowledge management that demands attention to situated detail" (p. 355). Grossman et al. (2001) stated, "Community has become an obligatory appendage to every educational innovation. Yet aside from linguistic kinship, it is not clear what features, if any, are shared across terms" (p. 942; see also Barab, 2003). Wenger (2010) admitted,

> When my colleague Jean Lave and I coined the term 'community of practice' in the late 1980s, we could not have predicted the career the concept would have (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It has influenced theory and practice in a wide variety of fields in academe, business, government, education, health, and the civil sector (p. 187).

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One explanation for the varying forms of CoPs is because "companies are still experimenting with them" (Smith & McKeen, 2003, p. 395).

As has been discussed, CoPs have been incorporated into many work industries. However, much has been done to incorporate CoPs into educational settings as well (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Brown & Campione, 1990; Lipman, 1988; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1993; Barron et al., 1995; Roth, 1998; Barab, 2003). Because of the emphasis of informal learning in CoPs, they have also increasingly been seen as effective methods to promote adult learning, continuous professional development, and "work-based learning" (Avis & Fisher, 2006). Barab and Duffy (2000) argued that whether a CoP is designed for an educational purpose or not, it should contain the following three components:

> (a) A common cultural and historical heritage, including shared goals, negotiated meanings, and practices; (b) an interdependent system, in that individuals are becoming a part of something larger than themselves; and (c) a reproduction cycle, through which newcomers can become old timers and through which the community can maintain itself (p. 36).

More recently some scholars, including some of the original CoP pioneers, have bemoaned the loss of informal learning that takes place in CoPs (Duguid, 2008; Lave, 2008). Amin and Roberts (2008) lamented,

> As CoPs thinking proliferates, the original emphasis on context, process, social interaction, material practices, ambiguity, disagreement – in short the frequently idiosyncratic and always performative nature of learning – is being lost to formulaic distillations of the workings of CoPs and instrumentalist applications seeking to maximize learning and knowing through CoPs (pp. 353-354).

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Although CoPs have gone through many transitions since their name was penned in the 1990's, Wenger (2010) has continued to connect CoPs with social learning systems. He stated, "Arising out of learning, [a CoP] exhibits many characteristics of systems more generally: emergent structure, complex relationships, self-organization, dynamic boundaries, ongoing negotiation of identity and cultural meaning, to mention a few. In a sense it is the simplest social unit that has the characteristics of a social learning system" (pp. 179-180).

Many organizations embrace CoPs as a means to influence their organizational culture. However, Smith and McKeen (2003) argued that a "knowledge-sharing" culture is crucial to have *before* a CoP can even be established (p. 402). If an organization feels that they lack the open learning culture that can foster CoP growth, Smith and McKeen (2003) identify four basic changes that can support CoPs (p. 402): (a) "Build enough background context to enable people to better understand each other." (b) "Use multiple forums to share knowledge." (c) "Give people time." (d) "Provide for face-to-face meetings." Transformative informal education is the "core business" of Thanksgiving Point (Iaquinto et al., 2011, p. 15); if Thanksgiving Point seeks to educate the public on various subjects, then why not try to educate its own employees?

Generally, CoPs are seen as "useful, management-controlled, problem-solving tools that nonetheless comprises people with an interest or even a 'passion' for their work" (Duguid, 2008, p. 2). However, CoPs are not seen as all good. Duguid (2008) further explains that CoPs are a "double-edged sword" (p. 7). While they can be so beneficial in promoting learning, professional development, and the advancement of an organization's goals, CoPs can also be guilty of "subverting the best-laid business plans, undermining business processes, and making consultants look a little foolish" (p. 7).

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Membership within CoPs

The following section on CoP membership will outline some of the attributes of community membership as well as the effects that membership has on the participating community members.

Attributes of membership. The following subsection will discuss membership initiation, membership participation, member relationships, membership commitment, and what it means to be a member of a CoP.

Membership initiation into a CoP varies across industries and organizations. For some communities membership comes by invitation only. Other communities allow new members to join out of interest alone. Smith and McKeen (2003) conducted a focus group of knowledge managers from across several industries. They noted that, "In one organization, membership is a 'badge of honor' – by invitation only and based on recognized competence. In others, membership is typically self-selected based on interest" (p. 396). Regardless of the group structure, however, "There was general agreement…on the importance and value of knowledgeable, active, and committed members who form the core of the community" (p. 396).

According to MacDonald (2008), membership in CoPs should be voluntary. He stated, "Members of a CoP must want to join the group—and even volunteer. Joining a CoP for other reasons will most likely lead to contrived collegiality, which will result in a short-lived community." (p. 431; see also Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Niesz, 2007; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Snyder and Wenger (2010), agree that voluntary membership is preferred. They argued, "CoPs function well when they are based on the voluntary engagement of members. They flourish when they build on the passions of their members and allow this passion to guide the community's development." (p. 111).

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Membership relationships within an active, working CoP should be more than just professional; informal, interpersonal relationships are encouraged as well (MacDonald, 2008; Wenger, 1998; Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Niesz, 2007). Trust among members will strengthen when relationships are developed. Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) speak about the importance of trust within CoPs. They argued, "Trust among community members is deemed to be an important variable since higher trust and confidence among community members tend to result in greater community involvement, more information sharing, and a more enjoyable and satisfactory experience" (p. 268).

Within a CoP, "newcomers" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) are not the only ones who benefit from participation in the community. According to MacDonald (2008) "newcomers" have their own experiences to share with the "old-timers" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). MacDonald continued by arguing, "When members of a CoP share their experiences and knowledge, the gain to the community may be larger than the sum of its parts. New knowledge may be synthesized that might not be created without a collaborative CoP" (p. 432). Kerno and Mace (2010) agreed that members along the entire experience-continuum can benefit from CoP participation. They stated,

> Apprentice CoP participants, who are typically newer or less experienced, may acquire more knowledge, skills, or abilities in proportion to master participants, who are usually substantially further along the learning curve regarding the subject matter under examination. However, the masters continue to learn as a result of their continued membership and participation within the community (p. 79).

Generally, "novices can learn through collaboration with others and by working alongside more experienced members" (Barab et al., 2003, p. 238). However, this differed from

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the experience at Thanksgiving Point with the Ambassadors. In this CoP there were no newcomers or old-timers within the community. There were members who had been employed at Thanksgiving Point longer than the others and were therefore more experienced; however, all of the community members had joined the Ambassador team at the same time. The co-directors emphasized that the team would benefit most if everyone shared, participated, and taught regardless of their tenure at Thanksgiving Point.

In this study participants were chosen who were seen as cultural leaders within the organization and who were committed to their jobs and Thanksgiving Point's values. Gilley and Kerno (2010) explained the importance of having committed participants within CoPs. They stated,

> [CoPs should be] composed of individuals committed to their occupation. Individuals who readily identify with their job and its activities, express a desire to remain in it for the foreseeable future, and enjoy a heightened sense of satisfaction and purpose from it are candidates for a CoP. Ideally, these persons identify more with the intrinsic rewards associated with an occupation than with extrinsic rewards. Compensation and other financial rewards are not the primary drivers for satisfaction (p. 51).

Iaquinto et al. (2011) argued that for a CoP to be successful, the members must have succeeded in the following:

> (a) Demonstrated a sense of stakeholding or ownership of their CoP topic; (b) demonstrated a willingness to participate in meetings and in the sharing of expertise; (c) communicated with members in meetings and between meetings; and (d) identified gaps in their knowledge and attempted to fill those gaps by, for example, suggesting new topics for meetings (p. 17).

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Benefits of community membership. The following section details some of the effects that active membership has on CoP participants. The literature shows that most of the effects on the members who participate in CoPs is beneficial; however, there are some drawbacks and resistance to CoPs. This section also illustrates how CoPs can benefit organizations as well.

Retna and Ng (2011) discussed some of the benefits that members of CoPs experienced through their participation. They stated, "Individual members are highly motivated in applying what they learn, and in doing so enhance their individual and organizational performance" (p. 50). They went on to say, "One of the most important key success factors is the individual motivation displayed by each member of CoPs, who consider their participation and contribution as an integral part of delivering world-class services and products to their customers" (p. 53). The employees in Retna and Ng's (2011) study felt they were more competitive in the marketplace because of the exchanging of ideas that occurred in their CoPs.

Another benefit of belonging to and participating in a CoP is that, "Being [in a CoP] provides members with a sense of identity-both in the individual sense and in a contextual sense, that is, how the individual relates to the community as a whole" (Lesser & Storck, 2001). Participating in a CoP provides members with a higher-level understanding of their organization. Lesser and Storck (2001) also argued that participation in CoPs can positively affect the behavior of community members. They stated, "The social capital resident in communities of practice leads to behavioral change—change that results in greater knowledge sharing, which in turn positively influences business performance" (p. 833).

After additional study, Lesser and Storck (2001) listed several benefits that members of CoPs experienced according to a focus group they conducted. Benefits were categorized into four major benefits that included the following: "(a) Decreasing the learning curve of new

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employees. (b) Responding more rapidly to customer needs and inquiries. (c) Reducing rework and preventing 'reinvention of the wheel'. (d) Spawning new ideas for products and services" (p. 836).

There were other more specific benefits highlighted by Lesser and Storck (2001) that were categorized within the four major benefits listed in the previous paragraph. Regarding decreasing the learning curve of new employees, one community member from a telecommunications company surveyed in a focus group remarked how he benefited from interactions with other senior community members. He said, "I feel more comfortable calling on [the more senior practitioners]. They know me more because they have seen my face; they know who I am. They know me as part of the community so they identify me…Originally, they wouldn't necessarily pay me the same attention" (p. 837). Another focus group participant spoke about the benefits of the mentor relationships that can form in a CoP. Some participants felt they had a broader understanding of their specific roles, and that they shared in the narrative of knowledge within their organizations.

Within the category of improved response rates to customer needs and concerns, a more specific benefit identified by participants was knowing other subject matter experts within his community who could help to quickly resolve customer concerns. Some of the communities had electronic repositories that had solutions to former challenges posed by clients.

Within the benefit of reducing rework and reinvention, Lesser and Storck (2001) stated what they felt was the greatest contribution that a CoP can make. They argued a CoP provides "the ability for members to more easily reuse existing knowledge assets…Virtually all of the communities within the study cited the ability to locate, access, and apply existing intellectual capital to new situations as an important result of community participation" (p. 838).

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Repositories established by CoPs allowed community members to access the knowledge, ideas, tools, documents, and other valuable materials that were created by other members. Through face-to-face meetings and posting materials into the repositories members felt that they were able to establish themselves both as subject matter experts and as community members who were willing to help others. One community member, a software developer, explained, “If you've done some good work on a project, you can package it up and put it into the Tool Pool [repository]. That is well perceived by other developers around the world, and it's a good way of getting your name known and raising your profile in the organization” (p. 839).

Within the category of spawning new ideas, Lesser and Storck (2001) felt that CoPs provided members with the opportunity to be more innovative because CoPs “create a safe environment where people felt comfortable in sharing challenges” and ideas that were not “fully ‘baked’” (p. 839). The members’ differing viewpoints on common challenges stimulated more innovative solutions to the challenges. Additionally, many CoPs invite guest speakers from inside or outside the field whose insights will often broaden the thinking of the community members and thus help them to be more innovative (Lesser & Storck, 2001).

Because of the educational nature of CoPs, they can be a means of providing professional development for its members (Retna & Ng, 2011; Chalmers & Keown, 2006). Retna and Ng (2011) reported “that people appreciate the benefits that accrue from joining CoPs as some of them claim that their professional growth has been boosted by participating in CoPs and they feel much more competent in dealing with day to day issues” (p. 54).

Not all of the effects of community participation on its members are seen as beneficial. Integrating learning into a work atmosphere has been particularly challenging. Brown and Duguid (1991) explained,

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> Working, learning, and innovating are closely related forms of human activity that are conventionally thought to conflict with each other. Work practice is generally viewed as conservative and resistant to change; learning is generally viewed as distinct from working and problematic in the face of change; and innovation is generally viewed as the disruptive but necessary imposition of change on the other two. To see that working, learning, and innovating are interrelated and compatible and thus potentially complementary, not conflicting forces requires a distinct conceptual shift (p. 40).

Others have felt that finding a balance between regular work responsibilities and participation in a CoP is difficult. Retna and Ng (2011) mentioned, "Some members of CoPs find it a challenge to attend meetings on a regular basis considering their workload and other formal meetings" (p. 55). Key stakeholders within organizations need to determine whether the benefits of community participation outweigh the potential drawbacks.

The benefits of CoP membership are not confined to the members alone. Fontaine and Millen (2004) compiled a list of measurable community benefits that were identified from both interviews with community members and a review of the literature (see Table A1). These are benefits that not only help the community members; they also positively influence the entire organization.

In Table A2 Fontaine and Millen (2004) also reported on the following benefits to individuals, communities, and organizations based on a self-reporting survey distributed to several members of CoPs.

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Table A1

*Measurable Community Benefits**

Ability to Execute Corporate Strategy	Innovation
Ability to Foresee Emerging Market, Product, Technology Capabilities, and Opportunities	Job Satisfaction
Authority and Reputation with Customers and Partners	Learning and Development
Collaboration	Learning Curve
Coordination and Synergy	New Biz Development
Cost of Training	New Customers
Customer Loyalty Stickiness	New Revenue from New Business, Product, Service, or Market
Customer Responsiveness	Partnering Success
Customer Satisfaction	Problem Solving Ability
Customer Service, Support, and Acquisition Costs	Productivity or Time Savings
Customer Turnover	Professional Reputation or Identity
Employee Retention	Project Success
Empowerment	Quality of Advice
Higher Sales per Customer	Risk Management
Idea Creation	Supplier Relationship Costs
Identification and Access to Experts and Knowledge	Supplier Relationships
	Time-to-Market
	Trust Between Employees

Note. *Extracted from Fontaine and Millen (2004, p. 5)

Comparisons of CoPs and Teams

Thus far the literature review has discussed the purpose of CoPs and has outlined some of their defining characteristics and benefits. Teams share some commonalities with CoPs but are also different in distinct ways. The following section identifies the relationship between CoPs and teams and will outline some of the similarities and differences between them. This section also introduces strategic communities, a more formalized type of CoP.

Relationships Between CoPs and Teams

According to Nickols (2011), "CoPs are NOT teams or task forces. CoPs should not be confused with teams or task forces" (paragraph 4). According to Gilley and Kerno (2010), a team is "a group of people who are collectively accountable and responsible for specific

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outcomes, and have a high degree of interdependence and interaction" (p.48; see also Baldwin et al., 2008). Teams are given specific assignments and are connected to specific processes or functions. Then when the assignment is completed the team typically disbands. Nickols (2011) continued, "A team is structured so as to deal with the interdependencies of different roles in that function or process. In a team, roles and tasks often vary; in a CoP they are generally the same" (paragraph 4).

Table A2

*Individual, Community, and Organization Benefits**

Type of Benefit	**Impact of Community** *It has improved or increased the following:*	**% Agree**
Individual Benefits *What does participating in the community do for individuals?*	Skills and Know How	65%
	Personal Productivity	58%
	Job Satisfaction	52%
	Personal Reputation	50%
	Sense of Belonging	46%
Community Benefits *How does collective participation benefit others?*	Knowledge Sharing, Expertise, and Resources	81%
	Collaboration	73%
	Consensus and Problem Solving	57%
	Community Reputation and Legitimacy	56%
	Trust Between Members	50%
Organization Benefits *How does participating in a community increase organizational efficiency, better serve customers/partners, and provide insights for the future of the firm?*	Operational Efficiency	57%
	Cost Savings	51%
	Level of Service or Sales	46%
	Speed of Service or Product	42%
	Employee Retention	24%

Note. *Extracted from Fontaine and Millen (2004, p. 6)

Lesser and Storck (2001) also discussed the differences between CoPs and teams. They noted four distinctions:

(a) Team relationships are established when the organization assigns people to be team members. Community relationships are formed around practice. (b) Similarly, authority

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relationships within the team are organizationally determined. Authority relationships in a CoP emerge through interaction around expertise. (c) Teams have goals, which are often established by people not on the team. Communities are only responsible to their members. (d) Teams rely on work and reporting processes that are organizationally defined. Communities develop their own processes (p. 832; see also Storck & Hill, 2000).

The following table from Smith and McKeen (2003) outlines additional differences between CoPs and teams (see Table A3).

Table A3

*The Difference Between Teams and CoPs**

	Communities of Practice	**Teams**
Objective	To share knowledge and promote learning in a particular area	To complete specific tasks
Membership	Self-selected; includes part-time and marginal members	Selected on the basis of the ability to contribute to the team's goals; ideally full-time
Organization	Informal, self-organizing, leadership varies according to the issues	Hierarchical with a project leader/manager
Termination	Evolves; disbands only when there is no interest	When the project is completed (in some cases, a team *may* evolve into a community)
Value Proposition	Group discovers value in exchange of knowledge and information	Group delivers value in the result it produces
Management	Making connections between members; ensuring topics are fresh and valuable	Coordination of many interdependent tasks

Note. *Extracted from Smith and McKeen (2003, p. 397)

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Gilley and Kerno (2010) further expounded upon the distinction between teams and CoPs by comparing them against one another and groups (see Table A4).

Table A4

*Management Versus Group–Team–CoP Influence and Control Chart**

	Group	**Team**	**Community of Practice**
Size	Small	Small to moderate	A few to hundreds. As population increases, so does the likelihood of subdivision of members into relevant areas of interest or inquiry.
Longevity	Specific ending	Ongoing…members may change	A few years to several centuries
Member Interaction / Structure	Assigned, formal or informal, regular	Formal or informal, sporadic to regular	Informal, spontaneous, organic. No perfunctory statements, creation of 'shortcuts' to increase efficiency. Common consensus of "who's who," no formal roster.
Accountability / Responsibility	Individual	Shared	None – Members are not formally recognized as such, so may come and go as desired.
Purpose	Specific tasks / objectives	Solutions, problem solving, creativity, innovation	Create and exchange ideas, expand and share knowledge. Common passion and commitment to developing skills and proficiencies.
Members	Assigned; high individual talent	Voluntary; complementary talent	Self-selection
Commitment by Members	Low – medium	Medium – high	High, can be very loyal to both group purpose and members.
Authority / Power	Bestowed by the organization	Bestowed by the organization	None, at least formally acknowledged

Note. * Extracted from Gilley and Kerno (2010, p. 53)

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While teams have been known to transform into CoPs, it happens infrequently (Gilley & Kerno, 2010). In fact, there is very little in the literature about the transition a team undergoes to become a community of practice. Generally CoPs originate "completely unconstrained by organizational trappings and with the purpose of solely benefiting its members" (Gilley & Kerno, 2010, p. 56). Gilley and Kerno (2010) explained further,

> Attempts to imply a linear progression from group to team to CoP ignore the very nature and purpose of CoPs, which exist mainly for the benefit of members. Managerial fiat, including the imposition of tasks, projects, deadlines, and deliverables can be problematic for CoPs, whose output is secondary to member teaching, learning, and enjoyment of the company of others who are equally motivated and engaged (p. 52; see also Stamps, 1997).

Gilley and Kerno (2010) further discussed the transition from groups to teams to CoPs and argued that the authority given to members is what makes the difference. They stated, "The group or team can be vested with greater authority, autonomy, and accountability for its direction and decisions. This is likely the deal 'maker or breaker' that determines whether a group or team is capable of successfully transitioning to being a true CoP" (p. 51).

If and when a group makes the transition to a team and eventually to a CoP, there are invariably going to be tradeoffs. Gilley and Kerno (2010) explained that when member or participant autonomy increases within a community management control decreases. Because of this there is a tradeoff, "One that is often uncomfortable and frequently not easily resolved. The ability of an organization to successfully move forward, mindful of the likelihood of interpersonal friction and conflict resulting from the progression, is critical for a successful outcome" (p. 54).

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It is important to note that CoPs do not replace teams. They both serve a unique purpose. Snyder and Wenger (2010) explained,

> On the one hand, the purpose of formal units, such as functional departments or cross-functional teams, is to deliver a product or service and to be accountable for quality, cost, and customer service. Communities, on the other hand, help ensure that learning and innovation activities occur across formal structural boundaries. Indeed, a salient benefit of communities is to bridge established organizational boundaries in order to increase the collective knowledge, skills, and professional trust of those who serve in these formal units (p. 110-111).

Snyder and Wenger (2010) continued to discuss the need for both formalized teams and community-generated learning systems. They argued,

> The design of knowledge organizations entails the active integration of these two systems – the formal [team-based] system that is accountable for delivering products and services at specified levels of quality and cost, and the community-based learning system that focuses on building and diffusing the capabilities necessary for formal systems to meet performance objectives. It is crucial for organizational sponsors as well as community leaders to recognize the distinct roles of these two systems while ensuring that they function in tandem to promote sustained performance (p. 112).

Development of Strategic Communities

Smith and McKeen (2003) affirmed, “that CoPs cannot be mandated and should not be created in a vacuum” (p. 400; see also Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Lesser and Storck (2001) agreed, “The traditional notion of a community of practice is that it emerges from a work-related

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or interest-related field and that its members volunteer to join" (p. 832). However, this is not the case with *strategic communities* (Storck & Hill, 2000).

Some types of teams and CoPs lie somewhere in the middle of the continuum between regimented teams and organic CoPs. Storck and Hill (2000) wrote about a successful type of community that was established by the Xerox Corporation called a strategic community. It was similar to a CoP in that "individuals chose whether to be highly active," and, "Motivation to participate actively was based mostly on needs: to improve organizational performance, to learn, and to sustain professional identity" (p. 65). However, if differed from traditional CoPs, because the top management deliberately set up the CoP, and it had overarching goals (Storck & Hill, 2000; Kodama, 2007). It was neither a task-oriented team nor a CoP. It was somewhere in-between.

Xerox's strategic community called the Alliance was set up by management to replace the internally created information technology (IT) infrastructure across the entire company with one that was an industry standard. As a result of their work, the community members effectively managed a complex IT infrastructure, provided high-quality solutions to problems, shared applicable knowledge with one another, and as a result of their increased learning became high-performance individuals at Xerox. The Thanksgiving Point Ambassador CoP was similar to Xerox's Alliance strategic community, because both communities were deliberately developed by management, facilitators were chosen by management instead of community members, and each had an overarching goal, with knowledge sharing an essential characteristic of both. Both were relatively structured at the genesis of their formation, but they became increasingly driven by the needs and desires of the community members.

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One of the primary benefits of a strategic community is that learning is still a high priority similar to regular CoPs. Storck and Hill (2000) explained, "Rather than relying solely on a centralized 'push' of information, a strategic community forms and shares knowledge by 'pulling' individual members into an environment in which they learn from each other" (p. 73). This learning can be enhanced by engaging with other community members and by regular participation in the community. This type of learning is less formal than standard training methods.

According to Storck and Hill (2000) there were other benefits from participating in the strategic community at Xerox. They stated, "We found that improved performance was an outcome of the nature of learning and knowledge processing within the Alliance and among its stakeholders" (p. 70). They continued to say, "Almost all participants that we surveyed valued their membership in the Alliance and shared a sense of pride in belonging to this community" (p. 72).

Due to Xerox's management approval, the Alliance strategic community carried more clout than many of the internal teams.

> Most teams represent only a small organizational component, and they tend to be inwardly focused; typically, they are oriented toward completing a task. Wider dispersion of lessons learned greatly depends on a team's reputation, which may be organizationally limited. In contrast, implementation tactics and management practices that received the Alliance's "stamp of approval" carried considerable authority within Xerox (Storck & Hill, 2000, p. 71).

Storck and Hill (2000) described the Alliance community as a "distinctive and informal, yet corporate-sanctioned, organizational entity" (p. 70). They argued that other organizations

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could receive the same benefits as Xerox if they applied some of the same characteristics of the Alliance strategic community, namely, "mutual engagement, shared communication repertoire, and joint enterprise" (pp. 70-71). They noted that this was seen "as a way to manage knowledge because many of the outcomes of the Alliance revolved around learning" (pp. 70-71).

Storck and Hill (2000) identified six key principles that were critical to the success of the Alliance community at Xerox that they believed could benefit other organization who are seeking to develop a strategic community. They are,

> (a) "Design an interaction format that promotes openness and allows for serendipity;" (b) "Build upon a common organizational culture;" (c) "Demonstrate the existence of mutual interests after initial success at resolving issues and achieving corporate goals;" (d) "Leverage those aspects of the organizational culture that respect the value of collective learning;" (e) "Embed knowledge-sharing practices into the work processes of the group;" and (f) "Establish an environment in which knowledge sharing is based on processes and cultural norms defined by the community rather than other parts of the organization" (pp. 73-74).

Ideally, the results of this study will add meaningful contributions to the following bodies of literature: (a) defining characteristics of CoPs and strategic communities, (b) the transformation from teams to CoPs, (c) and members' perception of teams and CoPs.

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APPENDIX B: DETAILED METHOD

The following sections outline the method used in this study to answer the following research questions: Did the Thanksgiving Point Ambassador team transform into a CoP or at least the beginnings of a CoP? If so, what contributed to this transformation? And if not, what discouraged this transformation from occurring? To what extent did the Ambassadors become a CoP or not? Specifically this section outlines the following: case study methodology, sampling and participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and qualitative standards, role of investigator, limitations, and ethics.

The data collected and analyzed was judged against criteria that demonstrated whether or not the transition from a team to a CoP occurred. Evidence that the Ambassador team had become a CoP would be indicated by results such as the following: (a) The Ambassadors will have established a domain, or shared body of interest; a community with tight connections, meaningful relationships, and communication between members; and a practice, which would include a repository of shared resources (Kerno & Mace, 2010; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Barab et al., 2003). (b) The sharing of knowledge and ideas will have become one of the primary purposes of the Ambassador Program (Gilley & Kerno, 2010; Smith & McKeen, 2003). (c) The group will have evolved organically, without much prodding from management (Hemmasi & Csanda, 2009; Holsapple, 2003; Iaquinto et al., 2011; Smith & McKeen, 2003; Stamps, 1997). (d) There would be a respect for diversity and minority views (Barab et al., 2003). (e) The group would feel primarily accountable to themselves and not to management (Wenger, 1998; Stewart, 1996; Smith & McKeen, 2003).

Additionally, Smith and McKeen's table was used as a gauge (see Table B1).

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Table B1

*The Difference Between Teams and CoPs**

	Communities of Practice	**Teams**
Objective	To share knowledge and promote learning in a particular area	To complete specific tasks
Membership	Self-selected; includes part-time and marginal members	Selected on the basis of the ability to contribute to the team's goals; ideally full-time
Organization	Informal, self-organizing, leadership varies according to the issues	Hierarchical with a project leader/manager
Termination	Evolves; disbands only when there is no interest	When the project is completed (in some cases, a team *may* evolve into a community)
Value Proposition	Group discovers value in exchange of knowledge and information	Group delivers value in the result it produces.
Management	Making connections between members; ensuring topics are fresh and valuable	Coordination of many interdependent tasks

Note. *Extracted from Smith and McKeen (2003, p. 397)

Case Study Methodology

The Ambassador Program at Thanksgiving Point, with its multiple participants, was treated as a single case (Stake, 1995). Sixteen employees and one third-party management and marketing consultant were selected to participate in this program at Thanksgiving Point, a large non-profit farm, garden, and museum complex in Lehi, Utah. This case study provided an in-depth look at the experiences of the seventeen participants. Their experiences were analyzed and described after collecting data through interviews, observations, and document analysis. This was treated as a single case, because this is one team's journey through an experimental program.

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Case study as a research methodology was chosen because it provides insights into particular experiences or phenomena. In this study, the case provided rich details about the experiences of the Thanksgiving Point Ambassadors as they were first formed into the Ambassador team and later as they completed the 15-week pilot program. The intent of this study was to provide meaningful insights about this particular CoP in an effort to allow readers to make their own interpretations based on their own experiences. Through rich descriptions it was hoped readers would able to identify possible ways the experiences of the Ambassadors could be applied in different contexts (for additional information about the use of rich description in qualitative research, see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

Sampling and Participants

The following section discusses sampling procedures used in this study as well as gives a description of the participants who were selected for this study.

Sampling. The Ambassadors were purposively selected by the co-directors using a blend of *maximum variation sampling* and *unique sampling* (Patton, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

Maximum variation sampling. The co-directors selected a broad swath of employees from across Thanksgiving Point that were representative of many of the employee types that work at Thanksgiving Point, including the following types: new and experienced; employees from across various venues and departments, including the Gardens, Museum of Ancient Life, Farm Country, programming, and administration; frontline staff and managers; and male and female. One third-party consultant was selected to participate as well.

Unique sampling. The Ambassadors selected to participate in the program were unique. When the Ambassador Pilot Program was first being designed the co-directors and members of

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Thanksgiving Point's senior management team wanted to select employees that had demonstrated qualities of cultural leaders. This meant they wanted employees who were influential within their various departments and venues due to their positive relationships with other employees, hard work, and supportive attitude toward Thanksgiving Point and its mission. These were employees the co-directors and senior management thought would give their best effort in this Ambassador Program in an effort to improve Thanksgiving Point.

Participants. The following section describes in more detail the participants who were selected for this study.

Sixteen employees and one third-party management and marketing consultant participated. Two employees were selected from the Museum of Ancient Life, a museum manager and a part-time frontline staff employee; three were selected from the Gardens, a Gardens manager, a horticulturist/Gardens supervisor, and a part-time frontline staff employee; two were selected from Farm Country, both were supervisors; three were selected from the food and retail department, an assistant manager at the Deli, a retail manager, and a part-time catering captain; five were selected from the cross-property programming department, the programming director who was one of the co-directors, a public events manager, a part-time youth educator, and a part-time assistant volunteer coordinator; two were selected from administrative departments, the human resource manager and communications director; and one was a heavily involved management and marketing consultant, who is also the wife of Thanksgiving Point's CEO. This group represented a diverse selection of dedicated personnel who were committed to bettering Thanksgiving Point.

As a researcher I also participated in this study as the second co-director and as a *participant as observer* (Merriam, 1998), which will be explained in the Observations section

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below; additionally, I was employed part-time in the programming department as the ambassador coordinator/audience research and development coordinator.

Data Collection

Three primary qualitative methods were used to discover the participants' perceptions about their experiences in the Ambassador Pilot Program and thus inform whether the Ambassador team became a CoP. These methods are interviews, observations, and document analysis. They will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Interviews. Of the seventeen participants, eleven were interviewed in person, two were interviewed over-the-phone, one responded to the interview questions with written responses via email, one declined to be interviewed, and two were willing to be interviewed but were never able to schedule a time to be interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was "to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…[and] to allow us to enter into [their] perspective" (Patton, 1990, p. 196; see also Merriam, 1998). The Ambassadors were asked to share their experiences from the Ambassador Pilot Program.

Each of the Ambassadors was prepared prior to their interview with information about the general questions that would be asked. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The in-person and over-the-phone interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Follow up interviews were not conducted.

Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) were conducted with the Ambassadors (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to have specific questions that he or she wants answered, but it also allows him or her to deviate and be flexible when asking the questions. Merriam (1998) states, "In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less

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structured questions…This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand" (p. 74). While the interview protocol (see Appendix C) includes specific questions for the interviews, as the interviews progressed, these questions were slightly adjusted to fit the unique aspects of each particular interview.

The questions on the interview protocol focused on the individuals' overall feelings about the Ambassador Pilot Program as well as their perceptions of the Ambassador Pilot Program when it first started and when it ended. The questions asked helped discover whether or not there was a change in the individual, group, or program over time. Questions on the interview protocol included questions such as the following (to see all the questions on the interview protocol see Appendix C): (a) In your view, what was the purpose of the Ambassador Pilot Program? (b) Tell me about your experiences with the Ambassador Pilot Program. What went well? What didn't? (c) Tell me your thoughts about the group. Were there any unique dynamics about the group? Did the dynamics change at all over time? If so, how? Tell me about the interactions. (d) Tell me about your relationships with the other Ambassadors. (e) Our Ambassadors were a diverse group of individuals from across Thanksgiving Point. In your opinion, how did that affect the program? (f) What, if anything, did you feel we valued as an Ambassador group? (g) What do you feel was the most meaningful activity that we did? Why? And (h) in general, what do you feel were the best things that came out of the Ambassador Pilot Program? The least beneficial things?

The responses from the interviewees were analyzed to see if they perceived themselves making the transition from a team to a CoP. How the interviews were analyzed will be discussed later in the data analysis section. Indications that the team did transform into a CoP would be evidenced by responses such as the following: "I felt like we became a more cohesive group over

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time," "As a group we were able to decide what it was that we wanted to do," "I felt like my comments were important and made a difference," "I felt like I could express my ideas and concerns freely without worrying that others would look down on them," "I enjoyed coming to the meetings because of all the new and important things that I learned," "I felt that I could share problems and get solutions to those problems when we met together," "It was nice not having management tell us what to do this whole time," "As a group, I felt like we had a reservoir of information that we had collected and could share with one another," etc.

Observations. The interviews with the Ambassadors were supplemented with observations. The benefit of observations is that, "observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview" (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). Lincoln and Guba (1985) agreed; they argue, "A major advantage of direct observation…is that it provides here-and-now experience in depth" (p. 273). Observations allow the researcher to gather additional information in areas such as motives, contexts, ideas, behaviors, emotions, beliefs, and impressions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1998).

Because the Ambassador Pilot Program was already completed, the observations had also already been completed. However, consent from the participants was obtained before the observation data was analyzed and reported.

During and after each Ambassador meeting, the co-directors took notes on the *physical settings*, the *participants*, the *conversations*, *personal impressions*, and the *activities and interactions* the participants engaged in (Merriam, 1998). The observation notes were shared between co-directors after each meeting. The observations were analyzed to see if there were indications that the Ambassador Group started as a team but then transformed into a CoP.

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Observations that indicate a transformation had taken place might have included the following: (a) at first the participants seemed reluctant to share information, but over time discussions became open and free; (b) over time the participants, instead of the co-directors, dictated the direction that the group should take; (c) participants applied what they had learned in their regular work; (d) the participants developed a repository of shared words, best practices, and documents; etc.

As researcher and co-director I took on the role of *participant as observer*. Merriam (1998) defines a participant as observer as follows: "The researcher's observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant" (p. 101). It was apparent to the Ambassadors that I was researching the process at the same time that I was participating in the program. The observations gathered were used in addition to interviews and document analysis in an effort to provide the reader with descriptive narrative, context, and insights.

Document analysis. The third method that was utilized to gather data about the Ambassador Pilot Program was document analysis. Merriam (1998) explains, "Documents are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator" (p. 112). There were a large variety of documents that were analyzed in this study, some of which were researcher-generated. Types of documents included, but were not limited to, the following: pre- and post-Ambassador surveys, interview notes, design documents, course syllabus, agendas, emails, presentation slides and notes, meeting summaries documents, training documents, attendance rolls, and various meeting handouts. The documents analyzed helped "ground [the] investigation in the context of the problem being investigated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 126). Merriam (1998) further suggests that researchers ask themselves the following questions

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when considering which documents to use and how to analyze them: "What is the history of its production and use? How is its use allocated? Is its selection biased? How might it be distorted or falsified?" (p. 121; see also LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Document analysis, in addition to the interviews and observations, was used to provide *thick descriptions* regarding the experiences of the Ambassadors (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary of data collection. In summary, a combination of qualitative data collection methods was used to describe the experiences of the Thanksgiving Point Ambassadors. These methods included interviews, observations, and document analysis. Merriam (1998) explains, "In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts…qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences" (p. 6). This case study used thick descriptions with the goal to provide the reader with the opportunity to make his or her own conclusions.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this case study was analyzed using two methods: *constant comparison* (Merriam, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978) and *category construction and analysis* (Merriam, 1998). The following paragraphs outline the methods and procedures that were used to analyze the data.

Constant comparison. Constant comparison was used throughout the entire data collection and analysis portions of the study. With constant comparison, new data was compared against old data that had already been collected. The result was that comparisons and contrasts were made between the two sets of data. Merriam (1998) further explains, "These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances.

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Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated" (p. 159; see also Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978).

When the interviews were conducted, the results of the interviews were compared against the findings of the observations and document analysis. With constant comparison, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Each interview was partially analyzed after it occurred, but because of the close scheduling of the interviews a bulk of the coding and analysis occurred after all of the interviews had been conducted. However, conclusions were drawn after each interview, and the learned insights influenced the remaining interviews. Questions were altered and emphases slightly adjusted. Further interviews either confirmed or reject the findings from previous interviews. As a result, interview questions and document analysis evolved as additional data was collected and analyzed. As the findings from the interviews became increasingly clear they were compared against the observation data as well as the data contained in the documents. With constant comparison, the data was always compared against itself as the research study progressed.

Category construction and analysis. As the data was collected and constantly compared against itself, different categories of information emerged. Merriam (1998) explains, "Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 179).

Merriam (1998) further explains, "Category construction begins with reading the first interview transcript, the first set of field notes, the first document collected in the study" (p. 181). When the data was analyzed for this study, it was sorted into a number of different categories and subcategories based on similarities and differences. After the interviews, the dialogue from

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the interviewee and interviewer was transcribed. Common themes and ideas were then identified by coding the interview. The themes and ideas were placed into categories. Similar category construction methods were used for the data obtained from the observations and documents. The names of the categories came from the researcher, the participants, and from the literature.

The categories generated adhered to the following guidelines, as outlined by Merriam (1998). They were (a) *exhaustive*, meaning any piece of data could be placed in one of the categories; (b) *mutually inclusive*, meaning data could only be sorted in one category; (c) *sensitizing*, meaning the category name gives the reader the sense of what is in that particular category; and (d) *conceptually congruent*, meaning the categories were aligned at the proper hierarchical levels.

The system for managing the data and placing it into its corresponding categories was accomplished using qualitative data coding software and word processing software.

Trustworthiness and Qualitative Standards

The following section outlines the trustworthiness and qualitative standards that were followed in this study.

Credibility. It is important to produce a credible document that shows the research was done appropriately. On explaining credibility in qualitative research, Williams (n.d.) states, "The credibility standard requires a qualitative study to be believable to critical readers and to be approved by the persons who provided the information gathered during the study" (Chapter 5 – Credibility, paragraph 1). To maintain the credibility of the research, the following techniques were implemented: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and progressive subjectivity checks.

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Prolonged engagement. Williams (n.d.) states, "Prolonged engagement means being present in the site where the study is being done long enough to build trust with the participants, experience the breadth of variation, and to overcome distortions due to the presence of the researcher in the site" (Chapter 5 – Credibility, paragraph 2; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a researcher I followed the standard of prolonged engagement in a number of ways. First, I had already been employed at Thanksgiving Point for about two years. For the most part, I was already privy to the "culture" and "context" at Thanksgiving Point (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 301-302). Second, due to my employment I knew many of the participants before the Ambassador Pilot Program was initiated. Trust had already been developed between many of the Ambassadors and me. Third, the program lasted long enough, and the Ambassadors met frequently enough, that trust continued to increase. It therefore became easier to share information and insights with one another.

Triangulation. Williams (n.d.) states, "Triangulation means verification of findings through (a) referring to multiple sources of information (including literature), (b) using multiple methods of data collection, and often (c) acquiring observations from multiple inquirers" (Chapter 5 – Credibility, paragraph 5). Triangulation standards were met in the following ways: (a) The findings from the study were compared against the literature reviewed. (b) Three varying forms of data collection were used: interviews, observations, and document analysis. (c) Although there was only one researcher, multiple people were interviewed, thus providing multiple points of view.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing refers to having the research reviewed by a peer who is willing to "question the methods, emerging conclusions, biases and so on of the inquirer" (Chapter 5 – Credibility, paragraph 6). The research was reviewed by a dissertation committee

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comprised of professors in the Instructional Psychology and Technology Department at Brigham Young University. Additionally, the research was reviewed by the director of programming at Thanksgiving Point, one of the co-directors of the Ambassador Pilot Program. Peer debriefing occurred during the data collection and analysis phases of the study as well as the write-up phase.

Member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "If the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognizable to audience members as adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities, it is essential that they be given the opportunity to react to them" (p. 314). Member checking was accomplished by reviewing the results with the other co-director, who was a member of the Ambassador group, and by showing the completed manuscript to all the Ambassadors with their quotes highlighted. All fourteen of the Ambassadors interviewed acknowledged their comments had been reported accurately and appropriately.

Negative case analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), negative case analysis means, "continuously to refine a hypothesis until it *accounts for all known cases without exception*" (p. 309, italics in original document). Conclusions and hypotheses were formulated as the first interviews were conducted. As new information was learned in subsequent interviews or document analysis that either confirmed or rejected the previous findings, the conclusions and hypotheses were adjusted.

Progressive subjectivity checks. Subjectivity checks involve "archiving the inquirer's changing expectations for the study…[including the] constructions or interpretations of what is being learned or what is going on" (Williams, n.d.). This was accomplished through taking notes throughout the research process and by writing drafts of the write-up that documented how my

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learning and thinking had progressed throughout the study. Additionally, field notes were taken throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the research. The compilation of field notes along with the various drafts written create an audit trial that can be reviewed to ensure the research was done appropriately. These subjectivity checks helped identify trends in the research findings, and hopefully helped prevent biases.

Transferability. The objective of the final write-up was to provide transferability to the reader. Transferability in data analysis refers to using "clear descriptions of the time and context in which working hypotheses are developed by the qualitative inquirer" (Williams, n.d., Chapter 5 – Transferability, paragraph 1). Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the inquirer should provide "the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether a transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316). To achieve transferability, detailed descriptions of what was observed and recorded was used to provide the reader with as much rich description as possible. Much of this comes in the form of a narrative. Rich descriptions allow the reader to transfer what they read into their own contexts and experiences. Information gathered in the interviews, observations, and artifact analysis was used to paint a picture of what was experienced. Ideally the reader will be able to make his or her own conclusions about the study.

Confirmability and dependability. If this research study is to align with qualitative research standards then it needs to be confirmable and dependable. The validity of the report was confirmed through the use of a literature review and an audit trail. The literature review identified how the study relates to the bodies of relevant research. An audit trail is used to show how and when the researched was conducted. Due to the observations that were already conducted, the audit trail had already begun. Williams (n.d.) confirmed the importance of an

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audit trail when he stated, “If such an audit [trail] attests to the confirmability of the study, it is more likely to be accepted by readers” (Chapter 5 – Confirmability, paragraph 1).

To determine if the research is dependable, “one looks to see if the researcher has been careless or made mistakes in conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and reporting results” (Williams, n.d., Chapter 5 – Dependability, paragraph 1). To maintain dependability, the methodologies outlined earlier in this paper were first approved by a dissertation committee, and then they were followed.

Considerations in Conducting Qualitative Research

Qualitative studies require that the researcher be upfront and open about additional factors that influence the collection and analysis of data, such as the role of the investigator, limitations, and ethics. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Role of investigator. As the investigator in this research project, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. There are some inherent advantages and disadvantages with this method of research. Advantages include the following: (a) the researcher is able to draw his own conclusions based on the interviews conducted, observations made, and documents analyzed; (b) the researcher is able to make adjustments to the research as he sees necessary, which is a vital part of qualitative research; (c) the researcher is able to pinpoint the parts of the research that he deems to be most important; (d) a holistic picture of the phenomenon can be painted as it is seen by the researcher; and (e) the analysis of this phenomenon will be better understood when there is more than just a comparison between abstract variables and principles. These were real experiences that were best understood from the viewpoint of real people, the Ambassadors and researcher. Concerning the investigator as the primary instrument,

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Merriam (1998) stated that the investigator "can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information" (p. 20).

The disadvantages of using the investigator as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis include the following: (a) it is impossible for the researcher to eliminate all biases; (b) the researcher may inadvertently omit important data or interpret it incorrectly; and (c) there is no set, established format that must be followed to produce meaningful results. As the author of this report and as one of the co-directors, I have some biases. I am the son of the founders of Thanksgiving Point, and I want Thanksgiving Point to be successful. I feel that the mission of Thanksgiving Point is worthwhile. I already feel that Thanksgiving Point fills a need within the community.

To prevent the potential disadvantages listed I followed the qualitative research best practices, methodologies, and standards that were outlined. I also sought to maintain academic integrity as I reported the findings honestly and as accurately as possible.

Limitations. There were limitations associated with this study. First, this study of the Ambassadors' experiences was conducted almost a year after the Ambassador Pilot Program initiated. The Ambassadors that were interviewed may not have remembered all the details of their personal experiences during the program. Second, three of the Ambassadors were unable to be interviewed. It is possible that they had thoughts about the Ambassador Pilot Program that were different than the other Ambassadors. Thus the final results may not be fully representative of the entire group.

The final limitation was related to my role as researcher and employee at Thanksgiving Point. Not only was I employed by Thanksgiving Point, but I am also a son of Thanksgiving Point's founders. Having the son of the founders help lead the Ambassador Pilot Program may

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have influenced the actions of the Ambassadors. Some employees may have felt they could not be completely candid with their interview responses, despite the promises outlined in the informed consent documents, due to my being the founder's son. To counter this I abided by the qualitative standards that I outlined, encouraged participants to be open and honest, and confirmed to participants that their responses will remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.

Ethics. I vow that I complied with ethical standards in all aspects of the research. First, in the conclusions that are drawn, special attention was paid to make sure they were based on the original research that was performed. Also, all quotations from the relevant research were cited properly. All forms of plagiarism were avoided. Second, a proposal for an Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Brigham Young University was submitted, accepted, and closely followed. By complying with the requirements set forth there, I received informed consent from the Ambassadors before they were interviewed and used pseudonyms in the write-up. All other codes of ethics were upheld as the research was performed.

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following protocol will be used to guide the interviews with Thanksgiving Point Ambassadors. The surveys will be semi-structured. As a result, probing questions will be asked that are not listed here. Additionally, because this is qualitative research, the themes of the questions in successive interviews will likely change as data is collected and analyzed.

1. What is your name?
2. What was your position at Thanksgiving Point during the Ambassador Pilot Program?
3. How long had you been employed at Thanksgiving Point when the program began?
4. In your view, what was the purpose of the Ambassador Pilot Program?
    a. Did we accomplish that purpose? If so, how? If not, why not?
    b. What did you feel were the results of the Ambassador Pilot Program?
5. Tell me about your experiences with the Ambassador Pilot Program. What went well? What didn't?
6. Tell me your thoughts about the group. Were there any unique dynamics about the group? Did the dynamics change at all over time? If so, how? Tell me about the interactions.
7. Do you feel like you experienced any changes personally? If so, what did you experience?
    a. Were the personal and group changes sudden or gradual?
8. Are your perceptions about the other venues and departments different as a result of the Ambassador Program? If so, how?
9. Tell me about your relationships with the other Ambassadors.
10. What did you perceive your role to be in the program?

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11. In your view, how was the Ambassador group organized?
12. As a group, what do you think we valued?
13. Do you feel the Ambassador group as a whole had any authority at Thanksgiving Point? Explain.
14. Has your communication with other venues/departments or Ambassador members been different since participating in the Ambassador Pilot Program? If so, how?
15. Did you feel that you had any sort of ownership in the program? If so, how?
16. Our Ambassadors were a diverse group of individuals from across Thanksgiving Point. In your opinion, how did that affect the program?
17. What effect did you feel that management had on the Ambassador Pilot Program?
    a. What role do you feel management played in the Ambassador Pilot Program?
18. What are some of the things that you learned while participating in the Ambassador Pilot Program?
    a. Did what you learn affect your regular work? If so, how?
19. In general, what do you feel were the best things that came out of the Ambassador Pilot Program? The least beneficial things?
20. What do you feel was the most meaningful activity that we did? Why?
21. Would you want to continue on as an Ambassador? If so, why? If not, why not?
    a. If you were to continue on in the program, what use would it have for you?
22. Do you feel that the Ambassador Program was successful?
    a. If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
23. Where do you see the Ambassador Program going in the future?
24. Are there any other comments you have about the Ambassador Pilot Program?

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