

Do CoPs Yield a Good Return On Investment?

Findings from 2008-09 PEJE Evaluation of CoPs

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Introductions



Sheila Alexander





Judith Zorfass



Suzanne Kling



Please Participate!

- Please press *1 to mute your phone.
- Press *1 to unmute to participate.
- Please do not put your phone on hold during the call.
- Please participate using the hand raising icon  or posting in the chat .

Agenda and Goals

- Setting the Context
 - CoPs
 - Focus of the Evaluation
- PEJE Evaluation Findings
 - Implementation
 - Satisfaction
 - Impact
 - Factors, Lessons Learned, Recommendations
- Are CoPs Worth the Investment?

SETTING THE CONTEXT

- CoPs
- Background
- Focus of the Evaluation

CoP's



A CoP is a community of practitioners, led by a designated facilitator, who interact on an ongoing basis to learn from and with each other in order to **improve their practice and the performance of their organization.**

PEJE CoPs: Background Information

Seven CoPs

Admission, Financial Management, Leadership, Development, Diverse Learners, Professional Development, Israel Engagement

Members

Each CoP had a designated facilitator; members included professional and volunteers leaders of Jewish day schools

Activities

- Monthly virtual meetings (e.g., webinars)
- Online discussion (Google Groups)
- Occasional face-to-face meetings (conferences and PEJE Assembly)

Focus of Evaluation



I. Implementation

II. Satisfaction

III. Impact

Factors,
Lessons Learned,
Recommendations

PEJE EVALUATION FINDINGS

- Implementation
- Satisfaction
- Impact
- Factors, Lessons Learned, Recommendations

Implementation

Background Information

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Implementation Research Question

How do CoPs operate and how do they vary by content and members?

- Method
- Findings

Implementation Research Method

- Review of CoP member lists
- Review of Excel spreadsheet:
 - Title/date of each call, topic, speaker, number of participants
- Interview with CoP manager
- Interviews with seven CoP facilitators
- Review of Google Group discussions

Implementation Findings of CoPs

- CoPs are structurally similar (facilitator, conduct web-based conference calls, use Google Groups).
- CoPs differ in number of members, levels of participation, and diversity of participants' positions
 - homogeneous in Admission, Financial Management
 - heterogeneous in Israel Engagement and Diverse Learners

Satisfaction: Research Question

How successful are CoPs in terms of members' satisfaction, use of the knowledge, and influence in their schools?

Satisfaction Research Method

- Interviews with CoP members
- Analysis of online survey results
- Analysis of comments/unsolicited feedback

Satisfaction Findings

High satisfaction—high quality, useful information

- Offered an important source of information
- Liked knowing that there were people out there addressing some of the same issues
- Kept members “up-to-date” with information
- Provided ongoing professional development
- Was a “go to” source for questions, problems
- Provided a way to connect to others (social networking)
- Reinforced and validated practices being used

Impact Research Question

To what degree do members use the knowledge themselves and disseminate the knowledge within their schools? With what effects?

- Method
- Findings

Impact

Tracer Study Research Method

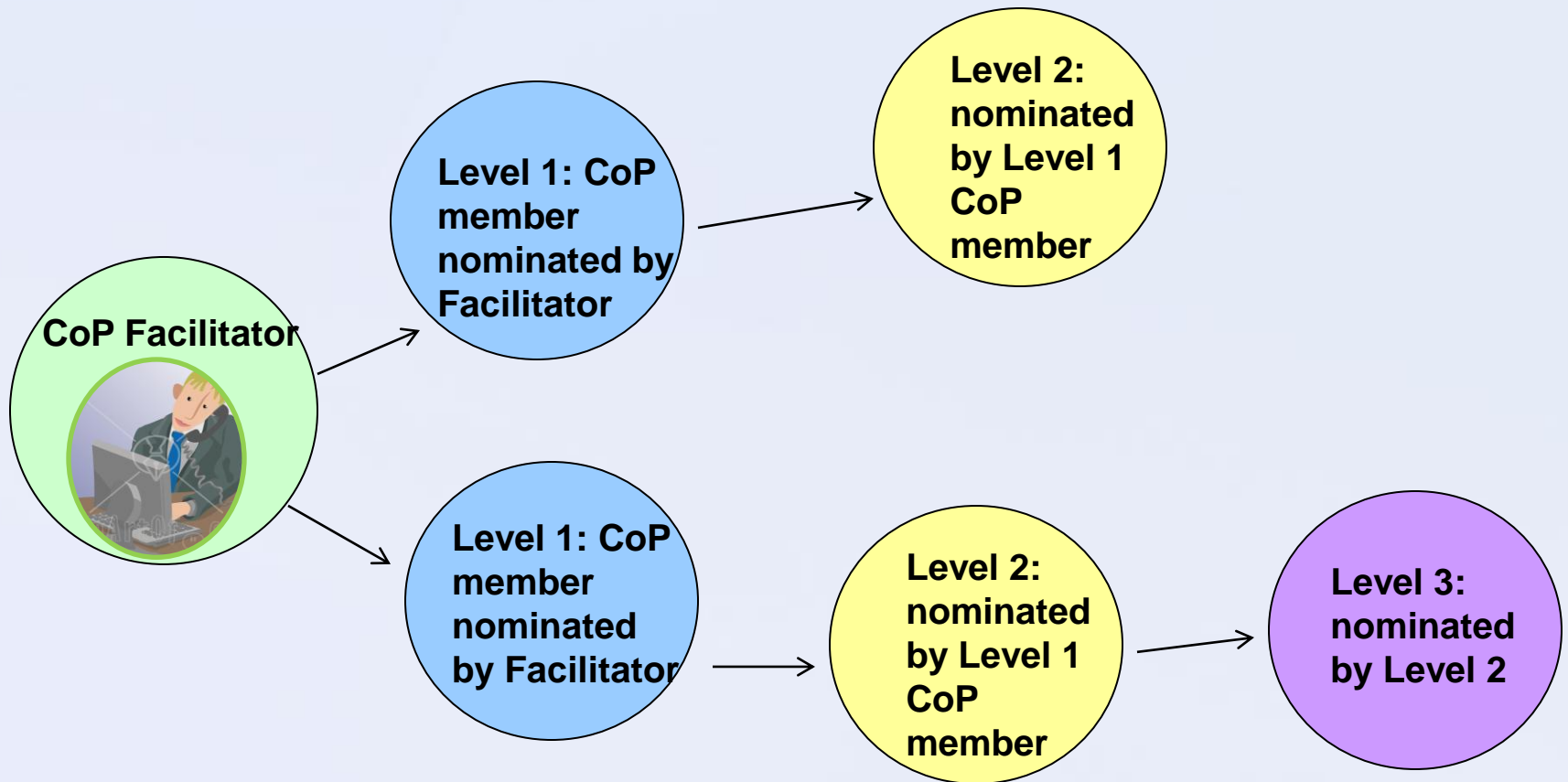
- Understand how **knowledge is exchanged** and used
- Explore the degree to which different strategies result in more or less **dissemination** of knowledge beyond the direct recipients
- Understand the **outcomes and use of knowledge** exchange events
- Determine the **factors** that affect how knowledge is exchanged and used

Tracer Studies

Research Method for CoPs

- Select a number of conference calls
- Conduct interviews with a sample of direct (level 1) participants (information recipients) regarding their assessment, use, and sharing of the information
- Conduct interviews with a sample of level 2 recipients (those which whom they shared) regarding their assessment, use, and sharing of the information
- Conduct interviews with level 3 recipients and further, if possible

Tracer Study of CoPs



Case Example

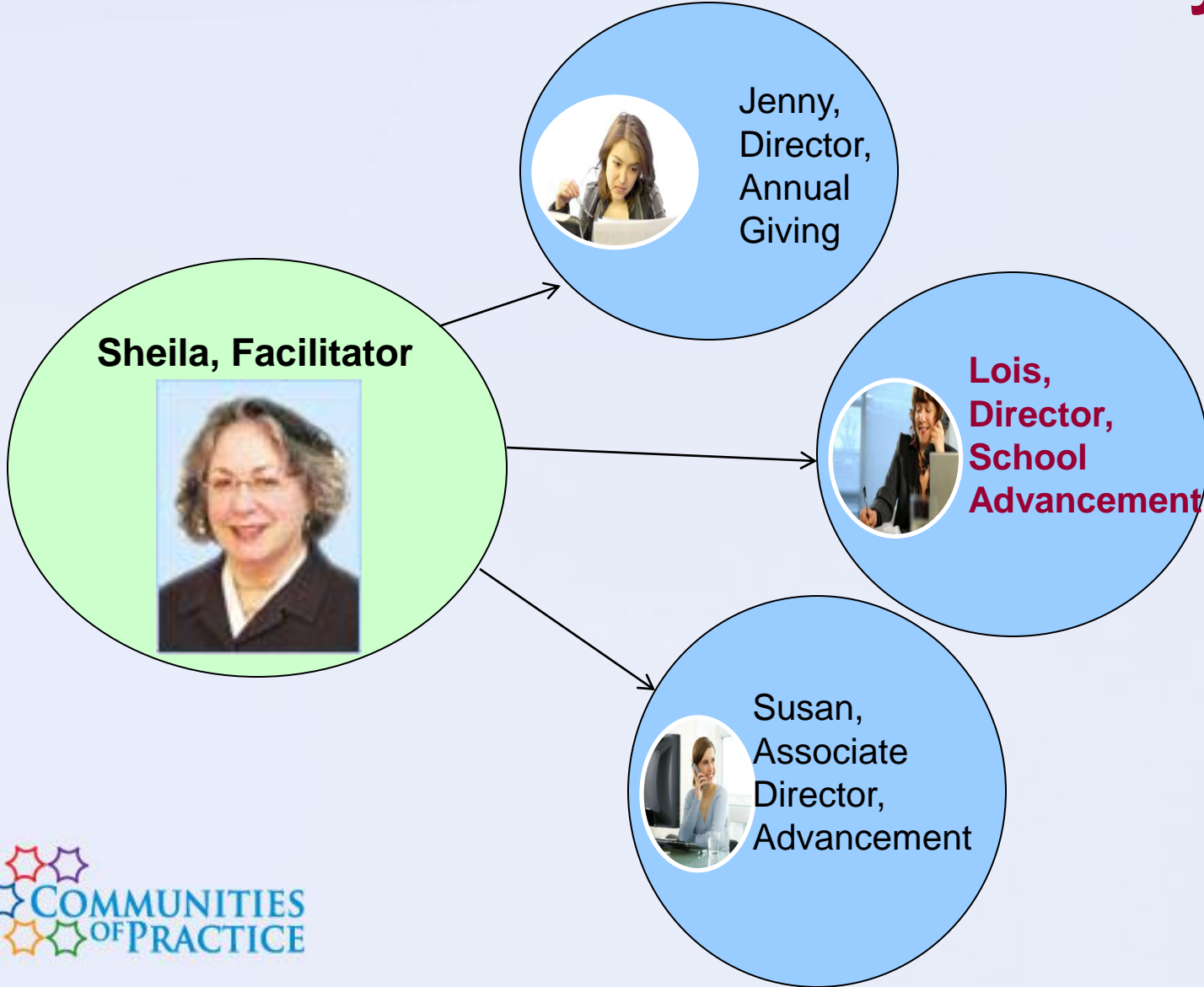
Development CoP

- Facilitator: Sheila Alexander
- Members:
 - Professional Directors of Development
 - School administrators involved in development
- Sample topics of calls:
 - Creating a Development Committee that Works
 - Using Facebook
 - Trend-Spotting
 - Alumni Relations

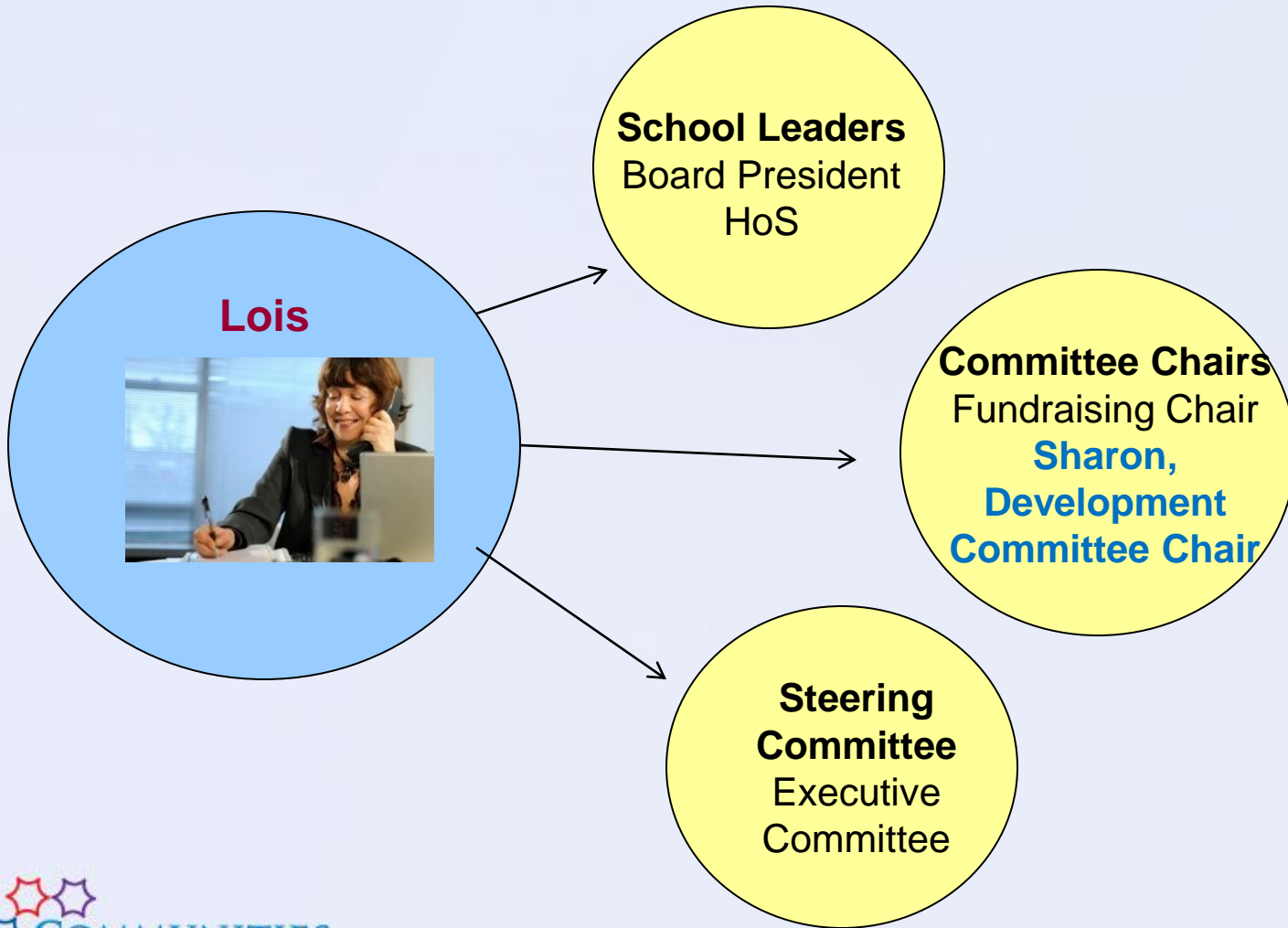


Tracer Study

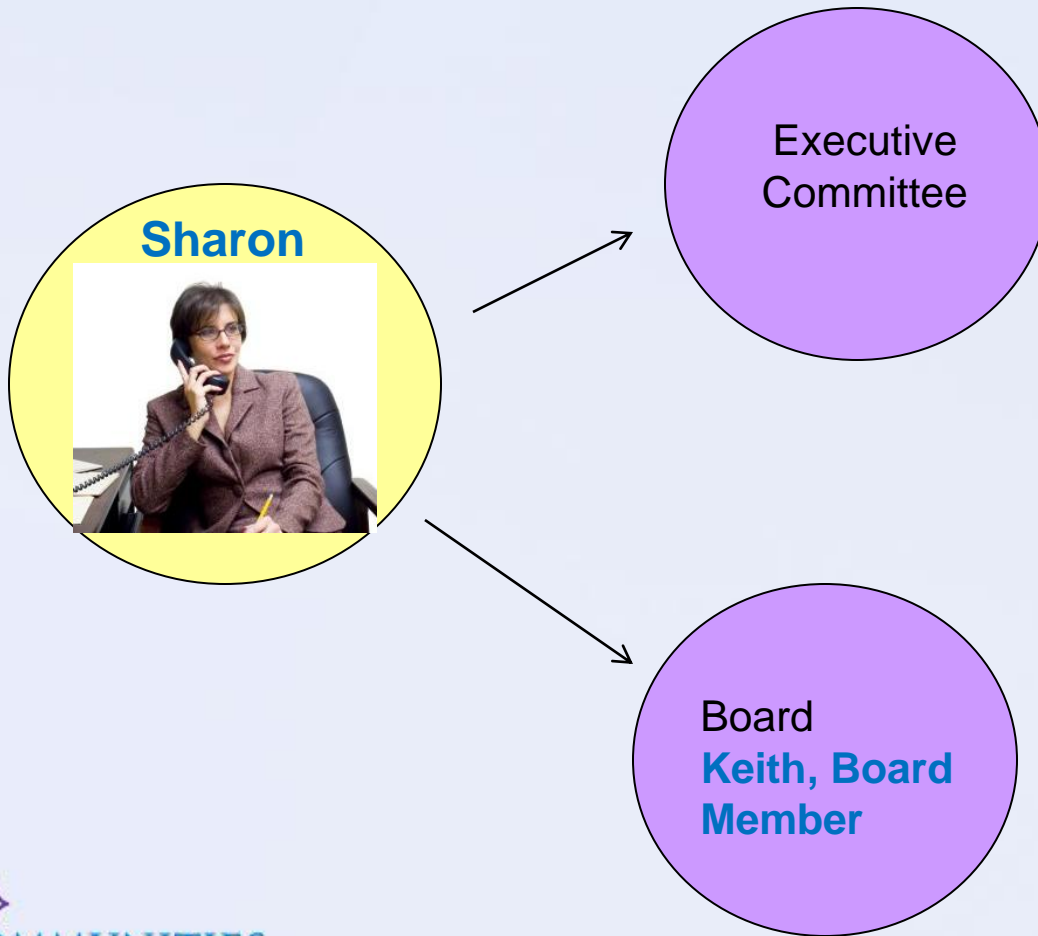
CoP Members Referred by Sheila



Tracer Study: Lois (Level 1) to Others (Level 2)



Tracer Study: Sharon (Level 2) to Others (Level 3)



Tracer Study: Keith (Level 3)

Keith



Factors, Lessons Learned, Recommendations: Research Questions

- What factors influence the successful outcomes of CoP participation?
- What lessons have been learned about how to create successful CoPs across dispersed organizations?
- What recommendations can strengthen CoPs?

Factors, Lessons Learned, Recommendations: Research Methods

- Interviews
- Observation
- Survey
- Anecdotal evidence

Factors: What Affects Operation

- Credibility of PEJE
- Skill level of facilitators
- Meta CoP support
- Ease of use of web-based conferencing and online discussion

Factors: What Promotes Participation

- Topics chosen to meet members' needs
- Use of interactive strategies that take advantage of technology tools
- Expectations set to distill and use knowledge (e.g., “nuggets”)
- Community connection
- Respect for guest experts and convening organization
- Some face-to-face contact

Factors: What Hinders Participation

- Voluntary participation
- Competing demands for time
- Scheduling calls across time zones
- Technology
 - Access
 - Skill and comfort level

Lessons Learned

- Facilitators can use a variety of strategies before, during, and after CoP events to encourage ongoing conversation.
- Facilitation strategies combined with the use of particular technology tools can support interaction.
- The combination of conference calls, online discussion, and meetings can reemphasize and reinforce ideas.
- Online discussions can serve to provide “immediate” responses to questions to support use of new practices.
- Using CoP members as guests provides a basis for credibility.

Recommendations

- Be clear about your definition of success
- Build shared leadership from within
- Create ad hoc affinity groups to meet emerging needs
- Provide support for technology use (for facilitators and members)
- Take advantage of face-to-face opportunities to build connections and community

Is the Investment Worth It?

- **Yes**, because knowledge
 - was **generated** within a community
 - was **used** by members within the CoP
 - was **shared** back at members' schools
 - **spread** to others in their schools and used to improve practice—**multiplier effect**



How can these findings inform design and evaluation of other CoPs in the day school field and beyond?

Resources

- http://www.peje.org/networking/communities_of_practice/
- Full PowerPoint and audio recording available on www.peje.org; report forthcoming
- Rosenblum Brigham Associates
 - Sheila Rosenblum, hsrosenbl@verizon.net
 - Nancy Brigham, nancyb288@hotmail.com
- Brigham, N. (In press). Tracer Studies: A Concrete approach to a virtual challenge. *A Handbook of Research on Methods and Techniques for Studying Virtual Communities: Paradigms and Phenomena*