

**Title:**                    **Enhancing the Experience of Merger in Academic Workgroups: a sociocultural approach**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Understand an adaptation of Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework to analyze academic cultures of teaching and learning.

Gain insights into the difficulties experienced in merging academic workgroups using this framework.

Explore the value of this framework for enhancing learning in academic workgroups in rapidly changing organizational contexts.

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

This presentation outlines an approach to enhancing professional learning in academic workgroups in the context of merger in a South African university. The approach was developed out of research into the impact on academic cultures of teaching and learning of the merger of workgroups from very different organizational contexts, of a historically black and a historically white university. The research was based on semi structured interviews with academics across four merging disciplinary workgroups, and surfaced issues that were often not being discussed effectively in the merging workgroups, to the detriment of teaching and learning.

The research developed a modified community of practice framework for understanding issues in teaching and learning cultures in this context. This framework used concepts adapted from Wenger (1998) to identify differences in the joint enterprise, shared repertoire and ways of relating in relation to cultures of teaching and learning, and the difficulties these differences created for the merger of workgroups. In addition, issues of power and interest were identified as significant factors in merging workgroups. The research mobilizes Wenger's (1998) concept of organizational learning in communities of practice to explore the problems experienced in merging workgroups, and the potential for encouraging academic workgroup cultures that can enhance learning in the context of rapid change in organizational contexts.

One of the outcomes of this research was the development of a workshop that could be run in merging workgroups to surface differences in understandings of the joint enterprise of teaching and learning in the discipline, differences in the shared repertoire of approaches to teaching and learning, and different approaches to engagement between academics in the development and delivery of academic programmes, as well issues of power and interest that surfaced in the merger.

Participants are engaged in group discussion using the tools generated for the workshops run for merging workgroups.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

15 minutes: powerpoint presentation of theoretical framework

15 minutes: explore the tools in group discussion

15 minutes: plenary discussion

Group discussion will involve using the workshop tools to identify participants' different understandings of the joint enterprise, shared repertoire, forms of mutual engagement and power relations in their own disciplinary workgroups in relation to teaching and learning cultures.

### **References**

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Trowler, P. (2008) *Cultures and Change in Higher Education: Theories and Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.