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LEARNING FROM WITHIN

The Development of a Community of Practice for Systematic Reviews

Systematic reviews are one of the biggest areas of growth for interaction between Subject Librarians and staff and students at Trinity College Dublin. And not just in the health sciences; more and more librarians in the sciences and social sciences are being asked for advice on systematic reviews (Adams, Smart, & Huff, 2017) – and other types of literature review that use elements of systematic methodology (Grant & Booth, 2009).

The combination of expertise in developing search strategies coupled with knowledge of reference management software like EndNote mean that our skills are in high demand. Increasingly, librarians at Trinity College Dublin are being treated as part of the research team for studies, and their contributions acknowledged as a co-author on subsequent papers. However, systematic reviews are one of the most daunting types of literature review to undertake, and lack of confidence and skills need to be overcome to feel able to embark on one. Hence, while Subject Librarians at Trinity have long shared their knowledge and insights with each other, with a gentle push from our new Sub-Librarian for Teaching & Research Support, we have come together in a more formalised Community of Practice...

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP)?

Communities of Practice 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 by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). This isn't new or particularly innovative - you may well have been meeting as a CoP without realising it!

ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF ADOPTING A CoP APPROACH

ADVANTAGES

1. Very effective way to achieve relevant Continuing Professional Development in an area that interests you
2. Opportunity for "newcomers" and "old-timers" to learn from each other simultaneously (Miller, 2011)
3. Fast-tracks an understanding of the organisation and its culture for newer staff
4. Helps in creating an atmosphere where members feel comfortable enough with each other to risk exposing a gap in their knowledge
5. Fosters and delivers a team approach with the end result that any individual bad practice is filtered out and the best is delivered to the end user

CHALLENGES

1. Everyone needs to understand the purpose of the group, and somebody needs to take charge of more formal aspects such as arranging meetings
2. Members can fade away as the Community may not be treated as high priority in a busy schedule
3. To keep the Community interactive and collaborative, all members should be encouraged to contribute, not just the more seasoned practitioners (Attebury, Perret, Kenyon, & Green, 2013)
4. Important to recognise and accept that some members will want to have a more passive role
5. There needs to be an element of fun and informality (but not too much!) so that the Community doesn't morph into just a series of random workshops or presentations

REFERENCES
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Some of the members of our Community of Practice, who have undertaken Systematic Reviews: