

THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



A study of framing expectations and experiences by members of the Community of Practice at Wetlands International

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In 2007 I started with the bachelor Biology in Wageningen. With great enthusiasm I followed this program and at the end of my bachelors, the field of communication science captured my attention. In the following years I continued my studies with the master Applied Communication Science. This thesis made it possible to combine my background in biology with communication science because without my biology background it would have been difficult to understand what everybody was talking about in Wetlands International.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of how participants of the community of practice (CoP) of Wetlands International frame their expectations of the CoP and experiences with participating in the CoP. Wetlands International developed a CoP to connect people in the organization who work on similar issues. By connecting those people, the organization wants to increase knowledge sharing, become aware of best practices and identify new business opportunities as well as possible new partnerships. The CoP at Wetlands International consists of an online platform and of several webinars, group Skype calls and discusses topics around mangroves and coastal resilience. Approximately 35 people have access to the platform and approximately eight participate on a regular base in the meetings of the CoP.

After approximately one year of the CoP, Wetlands International was interested in finding out what the CoP brought them in their daily work and what motivates CoP members to participate in the CoP as well as what they expected and expect in the future of the CoP. Besides that, Wetlands International wanted to get recommendations for further development of the CoP. Starting point of the research is that reality is constructed through interactions and communications. How people make sense, interpret and give meaning to issues becomes reality through communications. Analyzing communications thus provides insight in the way how people understand, and develop meaning about the CoP and about the issues Wetlands International wants to know about.

The research question of the research was therefore: *“How do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame the CoP of Wetlands International and which recommendations follow out of the analysis of these frames?”*

This interpretative, qualitative, single-case study studied the frames that people involved in the CoP construct about expectations before participating in the CoP, experiences with participating in the CoP and expectations about the future of the CoP. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, personal observations and documentary analysis. The latter two data collection methods were used to understand the CoP and to put the interviews into context. In total, 12 people were interviewed who participate in the CoP and are from various offices across the world.

The results of this research show that expectations about what the CoP is and should enable differed among headquarter staff members, headquarter CoP members and regional CoP members. Regional CoP members mostly voiced personal expectations about learning, connecting and contributing to the organization. Headquarter CoP members framed the CoP as an organizational solution to existing communication difficulties. In contrast, headquarter staff members mostly voiced their expectations about the CoP in terms of ‘organization’.

Headquarters and regional CoP members tell that the CoP brought them value and clearly frame that the CoP has a right to exist in the organization. The value of the CoP is mostly voiced in terms of connections. Headquarter staff members mostly focus on the challenges of the CoP. These challenges consist of low participation and contribution in the CoP by CoP members and experts. Furthermore, the CoP members mention technical issues and issues related to organizational matter as well as cultural issues.

All respondents clearly state that the CoP should continue to exist in the organization and most state that the CoP could be way to develop the organization into a more connected, collaborative and democratic one. Respondents hold mostly the organization responsible for improving the CoP and the organization but also see the CoP members as a responsible party for developing the CoP. Respondents mention improvements about technique, organizational culture, priority setting and time available for participation.

With these results, recommendations were developed that focus on making webinars more attractive, stimulating and supporting participation and contribution, integrating the CoP into day to day work and to stimulate connections and collaboration in the organization.

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1 Introduction

Nowadays, business is taking place on a global level because of advanced technologies like the Internet. In order to adapt to the rapid shifting market caused by increased connectivity through the Internet, communities of practice (CoPs) attracted the attention of organizations the last decades (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) describe a CoP as a group of people who are informally bound together by a shared expertise and who can drive a new strategy, new lines of business, solve problems, promote the spread of best practices, develop professional skills and help companies recruit and retain talent [edited from pg.139-140]. These are key assets in today's rapid changing world because knowing how to deal with new challenges, innovating and being up to date with new developments in the field of interest while maintaining the organization internally, is supposed to be of great importance in order to keep up and to advance the competitive advantage of organizations. (Akkerman, Petter and de Laat 2008; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). CoPs are supposed to provide those key assets.

Like many other organizations, Wetlands International, a not for profit, global NGO dedicated to the restoration and conservation of wetlands worldwide (Wetlands 2013a), decided to develop a partly virtual CoP. They developed a CoP in order to connect people in the organization who work on similar issues. By connecting those people, the organization wants to increase knowledge sharing, become aware of best practices and identify new business opportunities as well as possible new partnerships.

At the closure of my Master Applied Communication Science, I have conducted a communicative research about the CoP in Wetlands International. In this introductory chapter, I start by providing necessary information in order to get to know CoPs, the organization Wetlands International as well as the objectives and starting points of my research.

1.1. Communities of practice

The use of a CoP as a partly virtual community that can be developed by an organization in order to facilitate learning and innovation, is not how a CoP was introduced in academic literature (Amin and Roberts 2008; Cox 2005; Kimble 2006). Originally, the notion CoP was part of a learning theory introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) defined a CoP as "a system of relationships between people, activities, and the world; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (pg. 98). As the description implies, Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that a CoP is autonomous and informal, emerging from the needs and wishes of its members. They argued that everyone is also part of multiple CoPs like various CoPs in the work field, CoPs related to church life, family and friends. It is within these CoPs that people learn in their everyday activities and in relation to these activities, according to Lave and Wenger (1991).

Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that knowledge should not be viewed as an abstract object that can be passed around but that knowledge should be viewed as mutable and socially created through interaction in the context of everyday activities. They perceived learning as an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations that develops over time in interaction. By participation in a community, newcomers learn from established community members and subsequently individual and collective identity transforms because interactions and the things that the community undertakes, binds people together (Lave and Wenger 1991). Bonding with each other also helps to facilitate trust, relationships and the development of praxis: collective ways of doing and approaching things (Handley et al. 2006). The development of collective praxis is important because based on such praxis, people learn their way out of problems or issues (Wals, van der Hoeven and Blanken 2009; Wenger 1998).

Lave and Wenger (1991) reasoned that shared experiences over time and a commitment to shared understanding, strengthens learning processes in a CoP; the self-emerging structure in which learning takes place. More recent, Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning has been criticised often because it only describes learning as apprenticeships in conflict free communities and does not take the possible

conflictive environment around and in CoPs into account as well as learning from 'equals' (Cox 2005; Handley et al. 2006; Roberts 2006).

Despite this critique, the concept communities of practice took a commercial turn towards a knowledge management approach during the last two decades (Kimble 2006). CoPs were claimed to be manageable and to be able to drive a new strategies, new lines of business, solve problems, promote the spread of best practices, develop professional skills and help companies recruit and retain talent (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). Subsequently, interest in CoPs grew explosively and the CoP became a 'tool' to manage knowledge and skills. In line with this commercial turn, Wetlands International developed also a CoP. The next paragraph provides information about the organization Wetlands International and the development of their CoP.

1.2. Wetlands International: dealing with complexity

Wetlands International is a global and independent NGO dedicated to sustain and restore wetlands in order to preserve wetlands resources and biodiversity as well as to enhance local livelihoods and tackle climate change (Wetlands 2013a). The organization focuses on wetlands which exist in every country and are among the world's most important environmental assets because they contribute highly too global biodiversity and provide for human survival (Wetlands 2013a). Increasingly, concern arises over the loss and deterioration of wetlands species, habitats and the indirect impact of wetlands loss and deterioration in ecosystem functioning (Wetlands 2013a). This loss and deterioration relates to increased demands for agricultural land and water as well to climate change. The deterioration and loss of wetlands does not only threaten biodiversity but also rural communities because wetlands provide water, food, and other function to rural communities nearby.

Sustaining and restoring wetlands thus asks for integrating conservation and developmental knowledge in order to make wise trade-offs, find innovative and lasting solutions that meet the various needs of the different stakeholders, according to Wetlands International (Wetlands 2013a). In order to deal with these complex challenges, Wetlands International is said to combine local community action, know-how scientific research and policy advocacy (Wetlands 2013a). Through this combination, Wetlands International hopes to enable communities, governments and the private sector to take actions that sustain and restore wetlands by linking up with various actors.

Not only does the organization tackle complex issues, the organization itself is also complex with 18 offices across the globe. The headquarter office in the Netherlands provides guidance, support and coordination to this network of offices. In order to deal with such a network organizational structure, Wetlands International has an Organizational Development Program (ODP). The purpose of this program is to (1) facilitate a well-managed, transparent network with a (2) clear governance structure, (3) enable easy access of knowledge between the offices and (4) efficient collaboration between the offices supported by modern ICT systems. The program also focuses on effective and collaborative resource development among the offices, systematic evaluation and learning as well as effective internal and external communication (Wetlands 2013b).

The ODP is of importance for Wetlands International that has to deal with complex challenges, various interest and various stakeholders, according to themselves (Wetlands 2013b). As mentioned, knowing how to deal with new challenges, innovating and being up to date with new developments in the field of interest while maintaining the organization internally, is supposed to be of great importance in order to keep up and to advance competitive advantage (Akkerman, Petter and de Laat 2008; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002).

By developing a partly virtual CoP, Wetlands International strives to work on the goals set in the ODP but also on the goals set in their Strategic Intent 2011-2020. During the development of this global strategy, that binds its 18 offices worldwide together, Wetlands International recognized that knowledge sharing does not happen '*systematically and sufficient*' between the office (Wetlands 2011). Because of that, Wetlands International chose to give attention to '*mobilize knowledge*' in its Strategic Intent besides the attention given to this issue in the ODP.

Therefore, Wetlands International initiated a CoP around the topic of coastal resilience in spring 2012. This CoP consists of online Skype meetings, the webinars and an online platform Huddle. Approximately, 35 people from various offices are invited to the webinars and have access to Huddle. The next chapters explain the CoP of Wetlands International in more detail.

1.3. Research objective

The goal of the CoP at Wetlands International is that the CoP should lead to added value of employee's on-going work (Hoitink 2012; Wetlands 2012a). However, implementing a CoP does not guarantee that such organizational expectations are met (Bourhis and Dubé 2010; Handley et al. 2006; Kimble 2006; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). Recent studies showed the influence of (e.g.) context, circumstances, relationships on the emergence and success of a CoP. Starting up a CoP and keeping it 'alive and kicking' is a challenging process which is influenced by various factors (Wenger 2012).

Around Christmas 2012, I discussed the possibilities of a thesis about the CoP of Wetlands International. Wetlands International was interested in finding out whether the CoP members perceive the CoP as useful and what the CoP brought them in their daily work. Furthermore, the organization was interested in knowing what motivates CoP members to participate in the CoP as well as what they expected and expect in the future of the CoP. Besides that, Wetlands International was keen to find out 'what keeps the clock ticking' of the CoP, according to its members, and to get recommendations for further development of the CoP.

Around these questions from Wetlands International, this thesis was developed. Starting point of the research is that reality is constructed through interactions and communications. How people make sense, interpret and give meaning to issues becomes reality. By conversing with each other, we give meaning to facts and create the world we know (Ford 1999). Analyzing communications thus provides insight in the way how people understand, interpret and develop meaning about the issues Wetlands International wants to know about. Through communications, people construct reality like their experience about participating in the CoP as well as the CoP itself and the expectations they have of the CoP.

In this research different interpretations about the CoP might emerge that refer to the expectations about the CoP and the experiences with participating in the CoP among the people involved in the CoP. The aim of this research is to gain insight in how these perceptions relate to each other, what the consequences of these, possibly different, perceptions are and what they teach Wetlands International. The research objective of this research is therefore: *to gain insight in the perceptions of the CoP members concerning the CoP, in order to develop communicative recommendations for the future development of the CoP of Wetlands International.*

Because the research was developed in order to answer questions from practice, insights and recommendations that come forward from the perceptions of the people involved in the CoP are explained in chapter eight using literature that connects with these insights. This literature was sought after the results of the research became clear; the results were leading in the search for literature.

1.4. Structure of the report

In order to study various perceptions on the CoP of people involved in the CoP, theoretical starting points have been developed. These starting points are based on the concepts framing and frames, and are formulated in chapter two. With these theoretical points, several research questions were formulated in chapter two as well. Chapter three discusses the methodologies used in this research. After chapter three, four chapters follow in which the CoP and perceptions of the people in the CoP regarding (future) expectations and experiences of the CoP are described. Chapter eight analyzes and discusses themes that stand out from those previous chapters, with the help of literature. Chapter nine provides conclusions and recommendations of the research. The last chapter attends to a discussion and reflection of the research.

2 Theoretical starting points

To attain the goal of this thesis that was formulated paragraph 1.3, theoretical starting points are necessary. Starting point of the research is that reality, like the community of practice (CoP) and how people experience it, is constructed through and in communications (Ford 1999). By conversing with each other, we create the world we know. This means that all reality is constructed and the world we know is our invention. Within this constructed reality, a first and second-order reality exist according to Ford (1999).

2.1. Constructing reality

First order reality is composed of facts and data that are measurable and verifiable (Ford 1999). An example of this first order reality is e.g. the shape of an object, a square for example. How the term square is understood, requires some sort of agreement on what constitutes a square. This agreement is constructed by and in language. We construct second order reality, when we attach meaning, value or significance to this square. Second order realities are not in the situation or object but are interpretations of people of this first order reality including evaluations and assessments (Ford 1999).

These second order realities provide the context in which first order realities are present, according to Ford (1999). Second order realities can change and subsequently, first order reality can be understood differently as well. Whereas the square has not become a circle, there can be different second order realities; different understandings, interpretations or evaluations about the square. This replacement takes place in dialogue, like the construction of both realities also does (Ford 1999). Those conversations do not only include what is spoken, but act in a network of background conversations according to Ford (1999). These implicit conversations are part of our everyday dealings and deal with gender issues, organizational culture and position for example. So, our conversations are shaped by past conversations and shape future conversations and we can do something with those conversations namely constructing reality.

Analyzing communications thus provides insight in the way people construct reality like their experience about participating in the CoP as well as the CoP itself and the expectations they have of the CoP. The theory of framing provides the basis for analyzing these conversations. This theory connects with the constructivist perspective, as explained above.

2.2. Framing

Framing is about making sense, interpreting and giving meaning to reality. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in order to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or solution (edited from (Entman 1993) pg.52). The purpose of selecting or promoting a particular interpretation can vary from creating credibility, promote a certain interest, shift responsibility, accuse people or construct a particular identity (Dewulf et al. 2009). Furthermore, frames link up with people's specific set of values, norm, objectives, interests and knowledge at a certain moment (Aarts and van Woerkum 2006).

The concept of a frame allows for understanding the rules that guide the perception and representation of reality (Goffman 1974). A frame is thus never neutral neither shows reality objectively and 'true'. It shows how people interpret and make sense of first order reality around them.

Approaches to framing in research can be divided in two; a cognitive and interactional view on framing. The cognitive approach, following Minsky (1974), proposes that when someone encounters a new situation or a change in a known situation, one selects from memory a structure called 'frame'. Frames are assembled cognitive building blocks in the memory that are adapted to fit reality. This approach involves the content of the interaction as well as the cognitive background of the actors (Aarts and van Woerkum 2006). In contrast, the interactional approach proposes that framing is about exchanging cues that indicate how on-going interaction should be understood (Bateson 1954). This approach considers framing to be about shaping meaning in and through interactions. Frames are argued to be iterative; they are formed in

interaction and by experiences, expectations and purposes at that moment (Lieshout, Aarts and Woerkum 2006)

According to Aarts and van Woerkum (2006) the two approaches to framing are not contradictory but highlight different aspects of the framing process. According to Aarts and van Woerkum (2006) frames are constructed in interaction by combining and integrating cognitive building blocks that refer to previous experiences and expectations (content), the actors involved (relations) and the process that takes place (process). Both approaches come forward in this research.

2.3. Frames

When providing insight in *the perceptions of people involved in the CoP* different interpretations of the CoP might come forward that refer to the experiences and expectations of the people involved in the CoP. This might entail perceptions of the content of the CoP, the actors involved, the organization of the CoP and the process that takes place. These perceptions might relate to the different backgrounds of the actors and their interests and purposes. In order to understand these possible different or matching interpretations of the CoP, this research will determine various frames based on what is framed.

Frames can be about (1) issues, (2) identities and relationships and (3) interaction processes (Dewulf et al. 2005).

- Issue frames are used by people to give meaning to agenda items, events, problems or the context (Dewulf et al. 2005).

An issue frame is also used by people to construct a certain issue or event as problematic. Furthermore, possible causes of the problem at hand are discussed and those responsible are also labelled (Dewulf et al. 2009). By identifying these issue frames, it is possible to find out how people construct and perceive the CoP, its context, problems and solutions.

When people frame issues, social interaction occurs because through conversing and communication people make sense of what is happening around them (Ford 1999). In these social interactions, the second category of frames, relational frames, are present. These relational frames entail identity, characterizations and power frames (Aarts, Lieshout and Woerkum 2011; Gray 2003).

- Identity frames are about a person's own identity or the group they belong to in relation to the issue at stake (Gray 2003).
- Characterizations frames are statements of 'the other', which might be a person, group or organisation and are often constructed in a normative or evaluative way (Gray 2003).
- Power frames are statements of someone's own ability or the ability of the other to influence the issue at hand (Aarts, Lieshout and Woerkum 2011; Dewulf et al. 2009).

These frames about issues, possible problems, solutions, identities, power and relations might come forward in this research. They are important to explore because they constitute *the perceptions of the CoP members, concerning the CoP*.

2.4. Research questions

As explained in chapter one, questions from practice of Wetlands International formed the basis of the research. With these issues in mind, this research started with the theoretic starting point of constructivism and theory about framing and frames. As explained, frames about issues, possible problems, solutions, identities, power and relations are important to explore because they constitute *the perceptions of the CoP members, concerning the CoP*. With insights in the perception of the CoP members, *communicative recommendations can be developed for the CoP of Wetlands International*.

By linking the research objective to the theoretic starting point and the explorative nature of this research, I defined the following research question: *“How do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame the CoP of Wetlands International and which recommendations follow out of the analysis of these frames?”*. In order to answer this research question, several sub questions were defined that connect with the issues that Wetlands International wants to know more about specifically. The leading themes in the research are therefore (1) the expectations of the CoP members before participation in the CoP, (2) the experiences of the CoP members with participating in the CoP and (3) future expectations of the CoP members about the CoP.

It might be that different interpretations emerge regarding the content of the CoP (content), the actors

- *How do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame their expectations about the content, process and relations of the CoP before participating in the CoP?*
- *How do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame their experiences with participating in the CoP in terms of values and challenges of the CoP?*
- *How do the CoP members frame their expectations about the content, process and relations of the future of the CoP?*

involved (relations) and the process that takes place in the CoP like the set-up of the meetings (process). Expectations of the CoP can thus be about the content (topics e.g.) and relations of the CoP (whom participates e.g.) and about how the CoP is organized (frequency of meetings e.g.). Experiences with participation in the CoP can be categorized in terms of values and challenges of the CoP. Subsequently, the following sub research questions were defined in order to explore the perceptions of the CoP members and develop recommendations.

Because the research was developed in order to answer questions from practice, insights and recommendations that come forward from the perceptions of the people involved in the CoP, are explained using literature that connects with these insight. This literature is sought after the results of the research became clear and the results were leading in the search for literature.

3 Methodologies

In order to collect the data that is necessary to answer the research questions, several methodologies were defined before the start of the research. These research methodologies were developed further when collecting and analyzing the data because during the research I talked to various people about the community of practice (CoP) which I did not plan beforehand. For example, I spoke to several people of Wetlands International about the CoP during lunch or when I met them in the city center of Wageningen. This chapter provides information on the research design, data collection and the analysis of the collected data.

3.1. Single case study

In order to answer the 'what', 'how' and 'why' research questions, I chose a qualitative approach to the research. As Green and Thorogood (2004) argue, qualitative research tries to find 'answers to questions about the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of a phenomenon, rather than questions about 'how many' or 'how much' as it is in quantitative research. With a qualitative approach it is possible to find out how the CoP brought value in the working life of its members rather than to find out how many people participated in the CoP, for example. Furthermore, I used an interpretative approach to qualitative research. This means that the focus of the research was not on the 'reality' of what's happening but on people's interpretations of what is happening and what this means (Green and Thorogood 2004; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006); on how they understand the CoP.

Besides an interpretative approach, I chose an single case study design as a research strategy to study the CoP. The CoP of Wetlands International can be seen as a single case; a phenomenon bounded by space and time which acts in a real life context like the organization Wetlands International with its 18 offices (Yin 2003). Furthermore, the context of a case does not allow manipulation of the behavior of those involved (Yin, 2003). Besides that, a case study allows an in depth, holistic, context related approach (Flyvbjerg 2006) which is necessary for answering the 'what', 'how' and 'why' research questions that stand central in qualitative research.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection in the case study can be interviewing, documentary analysis and observations (Green and Thorogood 2004). By using multiple methods to collect data, methodological triangulation is accomplished (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Triangulation provides a more detailed and balanced picture of the case, which increases the credibility of the research and enhances confidence in the ensuing findings. Therefore, I choose to collect data by (1) interviewing, (2) documentary analysis and (3) observations.

Perceptions and frames are constructed through and by communication so with interviewing CoP members about the CoP I wanted to obtain these frames. Documentary analysis allowed me to get an idea of the 'history' of the CoP, to put the interviews and frames into perspective and to elaborate on certain issues. Observation of the CoP allowed me to understand what the respondents were talking about and to ask questions about my observations during the interviews.

The use of three different data collection methods allowed me to cross-analyze the data and to get a more-sided view and understanding of the case. I used the interviews as main source of data and checked whether my understanding of the interviews matched my observations, the informal conversations and interviews I had and with the documents I found and read.

3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

Set-up

As explained in chapter one and two, this research tries to find out how CoP members perceive the CoP by gaining insight in how the CoP members frame their expectations and experiences of the CoP. With this information, recommendations can be developed. In order to collect those frames, I chose semi-structured interviews because this allows for two-way communication between the respondent and the researcher

(Case 1990). Furthermore, by using open-ended questions and having the space to ask clarifying questions, I facilitated the emergence of new topics not pre-determined or biased by the perspective of the researcher, me.

Before carrying out semi-structured interviews, I constructed an interview guide (Appendix 1). I choose to adapt a chronological way of talking to the respondents about the themes. First I asked how they became involved and what motivated them to participate. Secondly I asked about their experiences when participating in the CoP and thirdly, I asked about their future expectations of the CoP. During the interview, I asked about process, content and relational related issues.

Selection of respondents

The CoP of Wetlands counted numerous people involved in some way and in order to get as much variation as possible among the respondents - in line with the qualitative approach of this case research and to prevent bias - I used the following criteria to select the respondents: (1) gender, (2) nationality, (3) place of office, (4) function, (5) length of employment and (6) the amount of participation in the online and offline meetings of the CoP. I choose to invite people for the semi-structured interview after consulting with the organizational developmental officer. She did have the more insight in the people involved in the CoP and subsequently she helped me to select respondents using the criteria explained above.

I sent out an invitation email to the twelve selected people across the world, taking the above mentioned criteria in mind. At the Ede office, where I sat three days a week during the data collection part of the research, I invited four people involved in the CoP in person. Four people of the twelve who were invited, did not participate. Two of them were not able to participate because of scheduling issues e.g. an foreign trip. One of them declined because of family related issues and another declined because he was not involved in the CoP anymore due to heavy workload.

In total, I interviewed six males and six females from various offices; four people from the Ede office, two people from the Indonesian office, two people from the Malaysia office and one person from the China office, the Africa office, the Guatemala office and the Panama office. The function of these people also varied from a communication and advocacy officer, a technical officer (senior or junior) to a head of office. The age and length of employment also varied but I got more recent employed people than expected.

Executing the interviews

Before the start of the interview, I explained to each respondent who I was, what the purpose of my research was and that everything would be handled confidentiality. I also asked permission to record the interview with a voice recorder. Every interview took approximately one hour. Most interviews were conducted through a Skype call (without video) and in some occasions the Skype chat was used as well because of a bad connection or some kind of technological failure. I interviewed the respondents at the Ede office in person. I did have some difficulties with the accent or English proficiency of some of the respondents. Nonetheless, after transcribing the interviews by every word that was said, all the interviews were useable and they became the primary source of data to analyse in order to answer the research questions.

Because most of my respondents had a different cultural background, I tried to keep this in mind during the interviews. Asking opinions or direct assessments of what is going on in the CoP would not give me the answers some other Dutch person would give. Therefore, I often asked opinions in a less forward way and often asked people about their daily use and participation in the CoP.

Informal interviews

According to Green and Thorogood (2004) informal interviews are natural conversations that happen naturally in the field when gathering data. During the research, I also had some informal interviews with people from the Ede office. This often happened during lunch but I also sought out several people during lunch, after some people declined the invitation of the semi-structured interview, to talk about the CoP with me. Furthermore, I talked to several CoP members at the Ede office after the webinar that I observed was finished. I kept the interview guide in mind when talking during lunch and wrote down what was being said after the informal interview and what my thoughts and feelings were about it in order to reflect on these conversations at a later stadium.

Through the research I identified seven, informal conversations as informal interviews. Those informal interviews did not become part of the formal analysis but they helped me to reflect upon the case and the context. As explained earlier, having more than one data collection method allows cross-checking the data. These informal interviews also allowed me to follow up during the interviews and ask more about certain issues.

3.2.1. Observations

Besides executing interviews, I observed several meetings of the CoP and conversations between CoP members. According to Green and Thorogood (2004) observation is “the ‘purest’ form of data is that gathered from naturally occurring situations, in which behaviour and responses can be observed in situ. I did not participate actively when I observed the meetings of the CoP. For example, I did not contribute to discussions about the technology or other issues of the CoP. At the same time I did not isolate me from what was going on. I tried to go with the conversations but was keen not to provide concrete critique or advise because I did not feel comfortable doing so as a student and as an ‘outsider’.

In my role as active observer, I obtained like Green and Thorogood (2004) predicted, a wealth of information about the case that I could use in the interviews. I observed the CoP mostly before but also during the time that I was executing the interviews. The observations gave me insight in the people of the CoP, how the CoP functions, how the CoP is organized and what it ‘feels’ to participate in the CoP. After each observatory action, I wrote my observations down as well as my thoughts and feelings about it. The observations helped me to understand how the CoP functions in practice, to put what is being said in the interviews in context but also to follow-up on my observations in the interviews.

3.2.1. Documentary analysis

Besides interviews and observations, I also obtained all documentary, approximately 30 documents, of the CoP. I found these documents on the online space of the CoP but I also got some documents I missed from people in the office. The documents available on the CoP varied from documents about what the CoP is, rules and regulations for participation and contribution, reports of meetings and the Skype chats of the meeting. Furthermore, I looked at what was being said on the online forum of the CoP. I collected and read these documents and chats in order to gain better understanding of what had been going on in the CoP and the organization before I started to observe the CoP.

The document analysis allowed me to get an idea of the past of the CoP and to compare what people said about the CoP with how it was documented. Furthermore, document analysis helped me understand how the CoP should work, formally.

3.3 Data analysis

During the data collection period, I collected a great amount of data (interviews, observations and documents) that all together would allow me to answer the research questions. During my research, I tried to grasp and understand all this data in order to answer the research questions and understand the CoP. Some data, like the interviews, became the primary source of data whereas the documents, observations and informal interviews were used to check and contextualize the data of the interviews. I did not analyse this data according to a certain method but re-read this several times during the analysis of the interviews to connect the data and cross-check the analysis.

The analysis of the interviews started after I transcribed all the interviews. First I read all the interviews a few times in order to familiarize myself with the data and what was being said by the respondents. With my supervisors, I determined several read threads and tried to extract those read threads from the data. To do so, I used codes relating to the read thread, and labelled the data of the interviews in the computer program Atlas using Miles and Huberman (1994) practical tips for coding. I selected all relevant sentences when making a code to grasp the context. But after coding the data, I realised it was not very helpful because it was still too messy and I could not get a grip on the data.

I decided to start over by writing short summaries of every interview with some detailed background information of each participant as Miles and Huberman (1994) advise to do after every interview. After that, I read the summaries several times in order to form a better category scheme for analysing the data. I choose to order the data in different categories: (1) motivation to participate in the CoP, (2) expectations about the CoP, (3) experiences of participating in the CoP, (4) difficulties of the CoP, (5) positives and values of the CoP, (6) future of the CoP and (7) organizational related issues.

Ordering the data according to these categories allowed me to grasp the results and I was able to write a first concept of the results. However, the data was still too much presented as data and an analysis was missing. Going through theory again and using the summaries as backbone, I decided to split the data a bit more and to make use of 'whom' was talking. As explained, our norms, values, positions, knowledge, relations and social surroundings link up with how we talk (Aarts and van Woerkum 2006); the frames we construct relate to our position in the (social) world around us. When exploring and interpreting the data, I realised that the respondents could be divided in three different groups which relate to their regional position in the organization and their amount of involvement in the meetings of the CoP.

- CoP members at headquarters who are also part of the management and were involved in the set-up of the CoP. Those CoP members did not continue to participate in the CoP or only participate from the side-lines. In the following chapters I will refer to this CoP members as 'headquarter staff members'.
- CoP members at headquarters who are not part of the management and were less intensively involved in the development of the CoP. Those CoP members participate more often in the meetings of the CoP than the 'headquarter staff members'.
- CoP members who are not employed at the headquarter office but at a local office. Participation of those CoP members in the meetings of the CoP varied. I will refer to these CoP members as 'regional CoP members'.

Division of the respondents in three groups connects with the qualitative and interpretative approach which tries to interpret data in the context of their own production (Silverman 2013) and does not try to make generalization, develop an average interpretation or tries to answer 'how many' think about an issue the same. As explained, the aim of this research is not to determine how many people share a perception but rather to gain insight in and show how these perceptions relate to each other.

During exploring the data I came across several ambiguities and I choose to email or talk to some people to get more context and clarity about those issues. Those specific informal interviews provided me with the missing link in order to analyse the data. Furthermore, when representing the data I choose to refer to every respondent as 'him' because the gender could relate back to the person in this research.

So, after coding and categorising the data, I determined some patterns and thereafter analysed these insights with the help of literature, as explained in chapter one and two. The data was leading in this search for literature. In the next four descriptive chapters, this data is represented.

4

The community of practice of Wetlands International

In order to understand the frames that people construct in relation to the community of practice (CoP) it is important to know how the CoP is organized in practice and how and why it has been initiated and organized. In this chapter the development and the organization of the CoP is explained as well as meetings of the CoP and its participants, following observations, documents and informal interviews.

4.1 Developing a community of practice

During the last years, Wetlands International tried several times to develop a system that stimulates and enables easy knowledge sharing within its network of 18 offices. According to one of the respondents at the headquarters in Ede, the Netherlands this has been a difficult process so far: *“The effort to work with the offices, get information together, exchange, build capacity, is far from new. We have tried pretty much everything to make this work”*. In the Strategic Intent 2011-2020 of Wetlands International, the organization defines several objectives in relation to the process of strengthening the network (Wetlands 2011). For example, systematic learning and evaluation, developing a transparent network with a clear governance structure and effective internal and external communication are also objectives that the organization wants to work on. Additionally, a personnel satisfaction survey showed that the staff of Wetlands International wants more cooperation and collaboration in the network (Hoitink 2013). Subsequently, collaboration and cooperation in the network were taken up as goals in the Strategic Intent 2011-2020 of Wetlands International.

When funding became available for organizational development, *“it was some opportunity to roll something practical out”* according to one of the respondents involved in the development of the CoP. The CoP was set up *“specifically to foster exchange between practitioners across the network”* because *“sharing of knowledge within the network is largely limited to individual projects and does not systematically and sufficiently happen across projects and offices”* (Hoitink 2012). Additionally, the CoP should lead to (1) added value to the on-going work of the members of the CoP, (2) a track record of the organization, (3) identification of best practices and (4) new opportunities within and outside the organization. Additionally, (5) strategic interventions and joint activities should be developed within the CoP (Hoitink 2012).

The CoP would be organized around coastal resilience and mangroves because *“most topics we work on come together under that banner”*, according to a headquarter staff respondent involved in the development of the CoP.

Senior management and the organizational developmental officer of the organization have been most intensively involved in developing a CoP in order to work on the objectives defined in the Strategic Intent which are explained above. Most people who were present during the first kick-off meeting of the CoP did not continue to participate in the CoP and several ‘new’ members joined since in the following months because of various reasons. Some of the CoP members only joined the organization and thereby the CoP recently, for example.

4.2. Organizing communication

The CoP in Wetlands International kicked off in June 2012 and is a combination of online and real life exchange. Since the start of the CoP a face to face meeting took place as well as several group Skype meetings, the so called webinars. Additionally, the CoP has an online space ‘Huddle’, which enables discussions, updates and access to documents about various topics. Two facilitators are responsible for the organization of Huddle and the webinars. The technical facilitator is from headquarter office and headquarters asked a process facilitator from a regional office. The technical facilitator focuses on the content and sets the example in discussions and peer reviews. The process facilitator designs the activities, provides feedback on the CoP and takes care of *‘the growth of the community of practice’*, according to the terms of reference of the CoP (Hoitink 2012). Facilitation should rotate after the first six months of

facilitation as discussed among the participants. Nonetheless, facilitation has not rotated yet according to one headquarter CoP member.

Because the organization is project based and dependable on donor money, there is no constant flow of money. Subsequently, there is no constant amount of money available for the CoP and therefore there is no official time available for participating in the CoP. Because of that, the CoP members have to participate in the CoP in their own time except for the facilitators of the CoP. They have some time for the CoP, which is written down in their contract, according to the process facilitator.

4.2.1. Participants of the community of practice

The participants of the CoP were invited by the headquarter office by email and are all employees of Wetlands International. A general invitation was sent to all offices and people involved in coastal resilience and mangrove work. Some regional CoP members mentioned that participation in the CoP was discussed and regulated within their office. Some CoP members were told to join whereas others voluntarily choose to participate.

After one year of having the CoP, approximately 35 people from offices in Panama, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, South-Asia, Africa and headquarter office in Ede, the Netherlands have access to Huddle, the online space of the community. Those members are from different layers in the organization. Head of office are members as well as technical assistants. Additionally, the participants have different functions within the organization and work in various fields. Not only people with a technical function participate, also people with an advocacy communication function or with a manager function are members of the CoP.

Approximately one third of the 35 CoP members participated in the face to face meeting and are involved in the webinars. Half of them did not participate in the kick off webinar which discussed the purpose and set up of the CoP. Some of those CoP members joined the organization, and thereby the CoP, after those meetings had taken place, for example. The other two third of the members have access to Huddle but do not tend to participate in the meetings of the CoP and do not post anything on Huddle. Participation of people tends to vary in time and is non-committal. During the last year, several people started or ceased to join the webinars or their contribution on Huddle.

4.2.2. Organization of the webinars

From June 2012 onwards, six webinars of about one hour took place via a Skype group call. The dates of the webinar and the topic are determined via a Doodle poll that is sent approximately two weeks before the webinar, by one of the facilitators of the CoP. The time and date and the topic with the most votes is chosen by the facilitators and an email about the date and topic is sent to all the Huddle members. Who participates during the webinar varies but approximately eight people participate. Not everyone who would participate and filled in the Doodle, does participate. Some sent a notification of absence whereas others did not. Subsequently, the amount of participants varies each webinar.

The agenda of the webinar is available a few days before the webinar or sometimes the same day. Often participants have to read an article or download something, depending on the topic. Sometimes participants have to prepare questions, an example of their own or an opinion.

During the webinar, one or two people present a project or topic for about 30 minutes. The slides can be watched online and one of the facilitators or sometimes a headquarter CoP member types down what is being said in the Skype chat. Because of that, people who have troubles with the Internet or Skype connection are able to follow the presentation. The microphone of the participants is also muted to prevent rumour and the video option is turned off in order to maintain the Skype connection with all participants.

After the presentation, there is space for questions and discussion via the Skype chat. The facilitator leads the discussion and the question round. He repeats the question or remark in the chat in order to make clear which question or remark is picked. The person who is presenting, responds to it, via the Skype and the facilitator again types down what is being said. The presenter and the facilitator are thus the only ones speaking during the webinar. Additionally, the facilitator asks people who did not ask a question if they have something to say or add to what is being said.

4.2.3. Organization of Huddle

Besides being in charge of the webinars, the two facilitators also take care of keeping people involved in the community and keeping Huddle updated. As explained, Huddle is the online spaces of the CoP where the Huddle members are able to post documents or upcoming meetings and comment on posts. For almost every change in Huddle a notification email is sent to the CoP members. In this email the first lines of the comment, update or document title are shown and people can click on it to go to Huddle.

In order to have access to Huddle, the members have to log in. Every CoP member has his or her own log in with a profile page linked to it. On this profile page CoP members can add a photo up and put up contact information. Most CoP members put up a photo and their contact information so you know whom you're talking or chatting to.

When logged into Huddle, the workspace overview pops up. This overview page shows that the Huddle is organized around four pillars: (1) the track record, (2) knowledge focus, (3) global voice and another pillar (4) the way of working. The same organization is used in the file page of the Huddle. Additionally, there is a whiteboard page where the webinar meetings are posted and the agenda is posted. There is also an external meeting page where global or national meetings related to coastal resilience and mangroves are presented. On both the whiteboard page and the meetings page a few comments or meetings are posted during a month. The file page is used to put up some scientific articles and also function as the archive of the CoP. Some documentation of the face to face meeting and the webinars is stored in this page. Both pages contain a few documents and once in a few weeks a CoP member put something down on those pages like a meeting or a document.

4.3. Meetings of the community of practice

Before the invitations to participate in the CoP were sent out, several meetings took place at headquarters to determine how the CoP would be organized and what its function should be. A consultant was hired to help the organizational developmental officer and several headquarters employees involved in starting up the CoP. The consultant explained tips and tricks about e-learning like keeping rhythm, encouraging people and valuing different roles of people in group processes.

4.3.1. Kick-off webinar

As mentioned, the CoP kicked off during a kick off webinar in June, 2012. During the webinar sixteen people were involved from various offices. Those people were mostly senior employees, heads of offices and people from the management layer. Topic of discussion was what the CoP would like to achieve and how. During this webinar, three objectives were defined, according to the proceedings document. The first objective is to make the knowledge and expertise that is already available within Wetlands International accessible. The second objective is to develop and maintain a track record in order to harvest experience, learn, define niche and knowledge gaps and to communicate success stories to partners and donors. The third objective is to develop a joint global policy and communications strategy on coastal resilience. During the kick-off webinar, the participants of the webinar also talked about how they would achieve those three objectives.

The aims of the CoP and the way to achieve those aims were described in terms of tasks, responsibilities and 'ways of doing it'. Additionally, a deadline was set for completing the tasks. This deadline is in many cases not met, some tasks have been completed a few weeks later whereas others tasks are not finished around June, 2013. As mentioned, two third of the participants of this kick-off webinar on how to design the CoP, did not continue to participate in the CoP. In the next meeting, after the kick-off webinar, other people joined the CoP.

4.3.2. Face to face meeting in Bogor, Indonesia.

After the kick-off meeting, a face to face meeting was organized in Bogor, Indonesia. During the face to face meeting in Bogor, the three pillars discussed in the kick-off meeting were discussed in more detail (Wetlands 2012b) with most of the current participants of the CoP. The first pillar knowledge sharing was

kicked off with exchanging stories about work experiences. Participants had to ask the storyteller specifically about some element they are interested in like difficult moments, influence of Wetlands, ways to create commitment or which knowledge was applied. After reflection on the stories, a plenary session followed as well as a discussion on the development of a vision and a conceptual model. Additionally, the use of Huddle and webinar rules were discussed among the participants and the commitment was discussed to post regularly updates and comment on each other.

The second pillar track record was also discussed during the face to face meeting. The participants developed a timeline with different projects attached and important moments for the organization, the project or otherwise. Additionally, a field trip was planned to see actual work in practice. The third pillar global voice also got attention by presentation from two members about their experiences with communications and advocacy and a presentation about blog writing.

After the face to face meeting, actions needed to be taken up varying from developing part of a vision to writing a blog. Each CoP member present got a task to do. It is difficult to see whether those actions were taken up or whether the actions to do, changed. Additionally, it is not clear from the documents whether some loose ends or ideas discussed in the wrap up are executed or not.

4.3.3. Webinars

After the face to face meeting in Bogor, the CoP continued with webinars approximately every six to eight weeks. Five webinars followed after the face to face meeting until the end of June 2012, and they discussed blue carbon, disaster risk reduction and stories from the field. One webinar on blue carbon used an external person to inform the CoP members about blue carbon. It is not known whether this external person, led to a higher attendance because attendance varies a lot. Whereas sometimes up to twelve people participated, sometimes five people participated. Reasons for this varied attendance relate to scheduling issues e.g. and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapters.

The webinars often use a presentation and the Skype chat as explained. A CoP member from headquarters documents those presentations and chats as well as the transcription of some webinars and puts them at Huddle. For most of the webinars, the chats and transcripts have been documented. Furthermore, during the last five webinars action or follow up list are not used and during the webinar, previous webinars were not mentioned.

4.3.4. Summary

The CoP has been developed in order to work on the Strategic Intent and specifically to foster exchange and sharing of knowledge within the organizational network. The CoP is a combination of online and offline communication and kicked off with a webinar; a Skype group meeting regulated by two facilitators in which only one or two people type and the others react in the chat. During the kick-off of the CoP, senior employees and the management was most intensively involved; several persons did not continue to participate and new people joined the CoP over time. Some of those new members also joined the organization recently and in June 2013 approximately 35 people have access to Huddle, the online space of the CoP.

After the kick-off webinar, a face to face meeting took place with most of the current participants of the CoP. Approximately one third of the 35 CoP members participated in this face to face meeting and participate regularly in the webinars of the CoP that take approximately place once every six weeks. Five webinars followed after this face to face meeting until June 2013. During this webinars with various topics, discussions remained limited as well as organizational wide initiatives and the time that is available for exchange and discussion.

Contribution on Huddle tends to be sparse and limited to a few comments and documents during a month. Participation in webinars tends to vary from the start of the CoP until June 2013; in a few webinars more than ten people participate whereas in most webinars less than six people participate, including the two facilitators. Whether this was expected discusses the next chapter.

5 Expectations of the community of practice

Before participation in the community of practice (CoP), some respondents might have had expectations about how the CoP would function, how it would be organized and what it would bring them. Some respondents might have less expectation because they joined the CoP immediately when they started working at the organization or because they did not expect to participate in the CoP. This chapter discussed the expectations of the respondents about what the CoP would be, what the CoP would bring and how the CoP would be organized and function.

5.1. Expectations about the purpose and value of the community of practice

As explained in chapter one, the organization formulated the objectives of the CoP in relation to the Strategic Intent of the organization. The CoP should (1) lead to added value to the on-going work of the members of the CoP, (2) a track record of the organization, (3) identification of best practices and (4) new opportunities within and outside the organization. Additionally, (5) strategic interventions and joint activities should be developed within the CoP (Wetlands 2012a).

Those purposes of the CoP on paper are not reflected completely among most of the respondents. Respondents define the CoP in different ways and expectations about which purpose and value the CoP serves vary as well. The next paragraphs describe these expectations of headquarter staff members, headquarter CoP members and regional CoP members.

5.1.1. Headquarter staff members

Headquarter staff members were involved or engaged in the development of the CoP, as explained in chapter four. Because of their involvement in the development of the CoP, they do not tend to formulate their expectations about what the CoP is and which purpose it serves in terms of expectations. They talk about what the CoP is rather than what they expect what the CoP will become. They do so in terms of a 'tool' or 'way' to achieve certain objectives. One of the headquarter staff members explains that the CoP 'comes in as a tool to strengthen the network' and another headquarter staff member explains that the CoP is a 'mechanism'.

The perspective on what exactly the CoP should enable, differs among the headquarter staff. One of the headquarter staff respondents explains that the CoP is developed in order to bring people from regional offices together when talking about the development phase of the CoP. He mentions that relations and becoming connected was one of the reasons to develop the CoP.

"The offices amongst each other do not always have the means to community so yes we [headquarter staff members] did want to use the community to bring these people closer together."

Additionally, a headquarter staff member mentions that the CoP is developed to stimulate knowledge exchange.

"We [headquarter staff] felt there was a need to establish some sort of mechanism within the organization to exchange our knowledge and experience across the network."

So, perspectives seem to differ among headquarter staff members about what the CoP exactly should enable. In line with this, an headquarter staff member explains that there is no common vision at headquarters about the nature and purpose of the CoP.

"It has been always a discussion what do we [headquarter staff] want the community to be for. Do we want to tap from it by ensuring we generate knowledge at HQ level which we for example use for our external communications, do we want to use it to exchange scientific knowledge which you would want to do by bringing together the really hard core information, facts, figures, publications. Or do we want to do, to work on it, to exchange experience, learn from each other, and kind of create a group feeling. While I think that one could accommodate all those needs, of course the

focus you would adopt would put emphasize on any of these different possible application, but that could also mean that others are less much emphasized and kind of lose out a bit."

Furthermore, this respondent shows that his perspective on the CoP is that the CoP is something that headquarters staff developed in order to gain organizational benefits: *'what do we, headquarters, want the community to be for'*. The previous shown quotes of headquarter staff respondents are also formulated in terms of *'we, headquarters'* when talking about the development and purpose of the CoP. Whereas there does not seem to be a common vision among headquarter staff about the CoP, according to this respondent, he suggest by the use of *'we'* that they (headquarter staff) belong to the same group, nonetheless. The use of *'them'* to describe regional staff during conversations by headquarter staff, implies that regional staff does not belong to this group.

Furthermore the use of *'we'* when talking about the development of the CoP, as shown in previous quotes, suggests that headquarter staff feels that the CoP is owned by headquarter staff rather than by the CoP members or the organization as a whole. This implied *'ownership'* relates to statements about what the CoP should bring, by headquarter staff. Those statements are about organizational benefits rather than about personal benefits of benefits for the participants of the CoP. One respondent mentions that he personally does not *'need'* the CoP but that it is important for the organization to keep the group alive because than he assumes knowledge exchange to take place.

"The interest lies in keeping the group [current CoP members] alive and ensure that there is exchange, when it comes to knowledge gathering but I also have the means myself to access that knowledge elsewhere (..) so my main interest is for the group and not my personal interest."

Apparently, headquarter staff perceive the CoP to be something for the organization rather than something that can stimulate employee growth or themselves; the CoP is there to *'ensure exchange takes place'*. Furthermore, another staff member explains that less concrete outcomes like *'feeling connected'* was something that he expected to take place rather than the concrete output written down in the terms of reference in the CoP.

"I think indeed people would get to know each other better [through the CoP]."

When asked about those concrete outputs written down in the terms of reference of the CoP, the headquarter staff member explains that those objectives are side activities of the CoP in his opinion.

"Well of course, you hope is that [those concrete outputs also come forward but] I think that the concrete results or output like new projects among offices, created insights in the track record is, for me, a sort of side activity not something that you automatically do as a CoP, it is important to have (..) 'oké this is what I am working on, this is what my organization looks like'."

So, there is a discrepancy about the perspective of the CoP written down in the terms of reference and the perspective of the headquarter staff member on the CoP. Furthermore, statements about what the CoP will bring the organization are mostly defined in organizational terms, by headquarter staff. This relates to their role in the CoP and their position in the organization as explained; they are probably already well connected and developed the CoP in order to let the organization as a whole grow, as implied by headquarter staff respondents.

5.1.2. Headquarter community of practice members

Some CoP member were not present during the first webinar that discussed the set up and purpose of the CoP, as explained in chapter four. One of the respondents joined the CoP in a later stadium *'when the train was already going'*; he joined the organization when the CoP was already formed and functioning. This might clarify why some CoP members at headquarter office, have a different perspective on the CoP and expect different things from it compared to headquarter staff members, as the next section explains.

One headquarter CoP member expected the CoP to be a new way of communicating with various external partners in a project. Another headquarter CoP member explains that he did not have any expectations. He did not have the time to develop expectations because he joined the organization at the same time that the

CoP kicked off. Moreover, an headquarter CoP member expected the CoP to be a discussion group focussed on policy and advocacy, similar to a working group at his previous job.

“There it was just the way we worked, we had policy groups you know (..) so for me that was just the natural way of working.”

The purpose of the CoP does not seem to be clear among headquarter CoP members. One respondent explains that it is not clear what the people who developed the CoP wanted to achieve with the CoP. By using ‘they’ he shows that he was not involved in ‘them’, that he is not part of the people who developed the CoP like the organizational developmental officer and a few frontrunners.

“I have no idea what they had in mind, what did they have in mind actually?”

Another headquarter CoP member did know about some of the several objectives of the CoP, written down in the terms of reference of the CoP (Wetlands 2012a), but does not think of them as goals that are achievable in one year. He tempers the expectation that the goals set by the staff are achievable in a short time and explains that ‘connecting people’ is the first step. Thereby this headquarter CoP member implies that the organization is not connected yet.

“We need to look at them as long term goals. You cannot expect to do all of them in one year. Connecting people that is perhaps the first step and you know, you need to do it a bit step by step.”

Headquarter employees not involved in the CoP, also find it difficult to explain what the CoP is and what its purposes are, according to themselves. In informal conversations they explained that they did not hear a lot about the CoP from CoP members nor discussed the CoP with fellow colleagues. Nonetheless, all headquarter respondents do mention that communication difficulties ‘probably where extremely important’ when the CoP was developed. One headquarter CoP respondent also mentions these difficulties when talking about why the CoP was developed.

“I should not underestimate how difficult the relations between us [headquarters] and the regional offices are.”

Besides this respondent, more headquarter CoP members imply that one of the goals of the CoP is to alleviate communication difficulties between ‘them’ the regional staff and ‘us’, headquarters. Again, there tends to be a difference made between us, headquarter staff and them, regional staff. One headquarter CoP member further elaborates on these communication difficulties by explaining that ‘if you’re in the bush bush, you think about other things’. With this sentence he implies that the regional staff is responsible for these communication difficulties.

Besides alleviating communication difficulties between the regional offices and headquarters, one headquarter CoP member mentions that he does not expect any personal value of the CoP when talking about what the CoP would bring him.

“I did not expect anything of the CoP because I just don’t have the time (..) it is not even on my priority list.”

He explains that he did not expect anything of the CoP because he did not participate regularly in the CoP or would prioritize it. Another headquarter CoP member also did not have any expectations about the value of the CoP for himself or the organization because he recently joined the organization.

So, expectations differ among headquarter CoP members but all describe that the CoP was developed to diminish communication difficulties between headquarters and the regional offices. Furthermore, they mostly define the purpose of the CoP in terms of process like alleviating communication issues rather than in terms of content, like obtaining knowledge or technical information. Moreover, they have lower expectations about what the CoP will bring them or the organization compared to headquarter staff whereas they reside in the same office. This suggests that office wide communications about the CoP did not take place on a regular base in the headquarter office, of Wetlands International.

5.1.3. Regional community of practice members

Compared to headquarter staff and headquarter CoP members, regional CoP members tend to have different expectations on the CoP, its purpose and what it will bring them (value of the CoP). One regional CoP members expected that the CoP would be about understanding and developing the position of Wetlands International, regarding mangroves. He expected that the purpose of the CoP would be related to content. This respondent also expected to have discussion about the perspective of people on a certain issue and expected the CoP to be a platform for discussions and communications.

Some CoP members did not have any expectations at all beyond what was written in their CoP invitation. They joined Wetlands International around the time that the CoP kicked off and did not have the time to develop expectations because *'all was new'*.

"It is a way to share information and to learn from the different offices. I did not really have any expectations. I just wanted to see what it was all about, it was new to me."

However, most regional CoP members expected the CoP to be more of a platform to exchange knowledge and learn. They perceived the purpose of the CoP to be content and process oriented.

"I expected to build more knowledge on mangroves."

"Access to information and to be able to have a faster way of getting information."

Moreover, regional CoP members often mention different personal expectations about the content of the CoP like getting in touch and exchange with their colleagues in other offices across the globe.

"I expected opportunities for getting involved with initiatives in other countries. That is what I expected."

"My personal expectation was to understand what the position of Wetlands International is in mangroves, all over the world."

"I expected to get from this was for me to learn from the other colleagues from different parts of the world."

Those regional CoP members clearly express their need to belong to the organization as a whole. In order to satisfy this need to belong, people will try to form interpersonal attachment, like in the CoP, according to Baumeister and Leary (1995). This suggest, that the respondents did not feel connected or belonging to the organization and perceive the CoP as a way to connect and belong more.

In contrast to headquarter staff members, regional CoP members mostly mention personal expectations in relation to the CoP instead of organizational expectations or the objectives written down. Most regional CoP member define the CoP as a *'chance'* or *'opportunity'* for themselves, when they talk about their motivation to participate in the CoP. Apparently, the supposed benefits of the CoP are normally not within range for the regional CoP members. They have to take the chance or use the opportunity to have access to those benefits via the CoP. What kind of benefits they expected to obtain, varies among the CoP members. Some regional CoP members recently joined the organization and for them it is a chance to get into the organization, for example.

"Because I am new to Wetlands International it is a chance for me to learn more."

Regional CoP members also mention that they expect that the CoP offers them the chance to connect with colleagues from other offices and to work in the international environment that Wetlands International consists of.

"I think it is a good opportunity for me to work internationally."

"I think it is a good opportunity to link, to bring people together."

Another regional CoP member mentions that the CoP provides him with the opportunity to contribute to organizational issues.

“The CoP provides opportunity (..) to not only talk about the CoP but also about other things in the prime work of Wetlands International.”

The CoP provides regional CoP members with a chance to learn and exchange knowledge among each other. The CoP allows them the opportunity to be part of the organization as a whole and to connect with one and another and contribute to organizational issues, according to themselves. Those expectations are about process, content and relations and encompass themselves and colleagues.

Compared to headquarter staff and headquarter CoP members, regional CoP members tended to have more extensive, personal and higher expectations. Headquarter staff and headquarter CoP members formulated organizational expectations rather than personal expectations or did not have any expectations at all.

Besides expectations about the purpose and value of the CoP, respondents also voiced expectations about the organization of the CoP as the next section explains.

5.2. Expectations about the organization of the community of practice

Respondents also mentioned expectations of how the CoP would function and how the CoP would be organized. The next paragraphs describes those expectations of the respondents.

5.2.1. Headquarter staff members

The headquarter staff members share the expectation that the organization of the CoP turned out the way they expected it to be.

“I think procedure wise it turned out how I expected it to be.”

The amount of webinars, the group size and the facilitation of the CoP all went according to plan, following the headquarter staff members. With respect to participation and contribution of the CoP members, one headquarter staff member expected it to be ‘a bit more’. He refers to his experiences when talking about his expectations. Besides that, this headquarter staff member did expect that participation would be difficult for the members.

“It has been quite a challenging process to keep people together, to keep them motivated and to ensure they dedicate their time and that was very much what I expected to happen.”

“I expected it to be difficult and it proves to be difficult.”

Another headquarter staff member also explains that his expectations were more or less that the CoP members would take the lead more.

“You have to keep organizing it without, the six weekly or something event it is not so easy that people from all corners of the world say ‘hey I have come up with somebody’ and asking if he can give a talk in a webinar next time, maybe, I don’t know whether this are my expectation.”

One headquarter staff member explains that work load and the possibility to put the CoP ‘aside’ relates to difficulties with participation in the CoP when talking about the contribution and participation of the CoP members. This relates to the description about the non-committal character of the CoP in chapter four.

“I think it is, you don’t, how shall I say it, it depends on how busy people are, you’re busy all the time and then you put it aside easier.”

So, headquarter staff members expected this set-up of CoP which relates to their active role in the development of the CoP, as explained in chapter four. Furthermore, they expected that participation and contribution of CoP members would be difficult. One headquarter staff member mentions that CoP members would take the lead more than they tend to do at the moment. One headquarter staff members voices work-load, time and the non-committal character of the CoP as factors that contribute to less participation in the webinars and contribution on Huddle than expected.

5.2.2. Headquarter community of practice members

Headquarter CoP members have few expectations about how the CoP would be organized and function. One of the headquarter CoP members recently joined the organization and did not have time to think about the organization of the CoP, according to himself. Another headquarter CoP member did not plan to be involved in the meetings of the CoP and subsequently did not have any expectations about the meetings, facilitation and group size, according to himself. Another headquarter member was not involved in the kick-off meeting of the CoP and was asked to join the CoP in a later stadium. Because of that, he did not have any expectations according to himself.

Nonetheless, some headquarter CoP members did have expectations about the contribution and participation of the other CoP members. Like headquarter staff, they also refer to their experiences with participating when talking about their expectations.

“What is happening between the meetings that is a bit, it is not as I expected because, maybe, there isn’t as much feedback or follow up as I thought there might be.”

In between meetings, the community is mostly silent except for a few posts on Huddle as explained in paragraph 4.2. One headquarter CoP member explains that he expected more contribution ‘like, two updates a week on Huddle’ in between webinars. Moreover, a headquarter CoP member explains that he expected the composition of the CoP to be more balanced,

“I expected it to be a bit more balanced. Right now I feel it is more like, you know, people wanting more to take than to give.”

According to this headquarter CoP member, there are less experts and more people who would like to learn in the CoP than he expected. Furthermore, headquarter CoP members mention that they expected more input from the CoP members. This might relate to the lack of official time available for the community and the non-committal character of the CoP, as explained in chapter four. Additionally, expert participation might be less than expected because ‘experts’ are already well knowledgeable and connected like the headquarter staff member mentioned in paragraph 5.1.1. Subsequently, they might have low incentive to participate or contribute in the CoP.

5.2.3. Regional CoP members

Regional CoP members also voice expectations about the amount of participation and contribution of CoP members and relate their experiences to those expectations. Reality is the cause of less participation than expected, according to a regional CoP member.

“Well, the expectation was that everybody would be engaged and that you would get different requests for information but than it ends up being reality.”

Another regional CoP member also voiced that he expected more participation and contribution from the other CoP members. A regional CoP member explains that he also had high expectations about the amount of information that would be shared. His expectations were content related.

“Expectation was high because you know that a lot of members in the network have something to bring to the table.”

Additionally, this respondent mentions that he expected more exchange to take place between offices while he evaluates his experiences. Time limitations are cause of this lack of exchange, according to him. Those time limitation relate to the time difference between the various CoP members and the setup of the CoP, as mentioned in chapter four.

“I expected that it would happen more, but in reality there is of course time limitations.”

Most regional CoP members did not seem to have expectations because according to them there was a small time difference between the invitations and kick off. Furthermore they explain that it is hard to remember what they expected back then. If regional CoP members mentioned expectations, these expectations related to contribution and content of the CoP. Expectations about how the Cop would be

organized or function, were not mentioned or answered with *'I did not think about that'*. Like headquarter staff and headquarter CoP members they did expect more contribution and participation of their fellow CoP members.

5.2.4. Summary

Summarized, expectations about the purpose, value and organization of the CoP varied among the respondents. Headquarter staff did not have a common perspective on the purpose of the CoP and mostly formulated organizational expectations about the CoP rather than personal expectations. This might relate to their already well connected position in the organization and their easy access to knowledge, as mentioned in paragraph 5.1.1; they might not need the CoP for themselves. Headquarter staff also mention that they expected more contribution and participation in the CoP when talking about their experience with the CoP. A lack of time and the ability to put the CoP aside are mentioned by headquarter staff as possible causes for low contribution and participation.

Headquarter CoP members explain that according to them, the CoP was developed in order to alleviate communication difficulties; several headquarters employees also mention this. Most headquarter CoP members joined the CoP in a later stadium or joined the CoP when they started to work. Because of that they did not formulate elaborate expectations about the purpose or value of the CoP. Headquarter CoP members also mention that they expected more input by experts and more contribution and participation of CoP members when talking about the functioning of the CoP. Expert input might be low because they are already connected and knowledgeable and thereby miss an incentive to participate, as the headquarter staff members suggested in paragraph 5.1.1.

Regional CoP members had elaborate and personal expectations about content, process and relations of the CoP. They expected the CoP to be a way to learn, share, contribute to organizational wide issues and by participation they expected to get to know colleagues and the organization more. Expectations about how the CoP would function were not mentioned because they don't remember them or because the time was too short to formulate expectations, according to the regional CoP members. Nonetheless, they refer to their experience when talking about their expectations; they expected that participation and contribution would be more in the CoP. A lack of time and day to day work are mentioned by regional CoP members as possible causes for this.

When talking about the development of the CoP, none of the respondents reflect the perspective on the CoP that was written down (Wetlands 2012a); they formulate their 'own' perspective'. Furthermore, it is interesting that respondents tend to talk about 'the other' when talking about regional colleagues or headquarter colleagues. By using 'we' respondents create their own group and thereby also create the other 'them' and distance themselves from the 'other'. By defining themselves as belonging to one group and not to the other, respondents create boundaries and distance within the organization. This is further elaborated and explained with the help of literature in chapter eight.

6 Experiences with participating in the community of practice

Whereas the expectations of respondents varied as explained in chapter five, the experiences of respondents about participating and contributing to the community of practice (CoP) are more uniform. All respondents tell that the CoP has value and thereby state that the CoP has a right to exist in the organization. On the other hand, the respondents explain that the CoP has its challenges and difficulties caused by various factors. Both the value of the CoP and the challenges of the CoP are described in this chapter.

6.1. The value of the community of practice

After approximately one year of participating in the CoP, the expectations described in chapter five can be linked with experiences of participating in the CoP. This paragraph will describe the perceptions of the respondents on the contribution and values of the CoP after approximately one year of participating in the CoP.

6.1.1. Headquarter staff members

As mentioned, headquarter staff members were involved in the development of the CoP and mostly participate in the CoP from the side-lines. They formulated expectations about what the CoP would bring and what its value is in organizational terms but did not tend to reflect on the objectives written down. One headquarter staff member explained that those objectives are side activities and that his main expectation of the value of the CoP was that people would be *'getting connected'*. When talking about his experiences, this headquarter staff member mentioned that the CoP brought him a feeling of being connected to his fellow CoP members.

"I mean, I feel much more connected to people, the CoP members. So you have better understanding of daily work, it is much easier to contact them for things."

Through feeling connected and having contact, it is easier for this respondent to contact the CoP members for *'things'*. Apparently the CoP enabled this headquarter staff member to contact the CoP member easier compared to the situation before the CoP; he mentions a relational value of the CoP.

Other headquarter staff members focussed more on the challenges that CoP faces when asked about what the CoP brought them or the organization. This might relate to low personal involvement of headquarter staff in the CoP, as explained in chapter five. Headquarter staff perceives the CoP as a *'tool'* for the organization and do not mention personal expectations.

6.1.2. Headquarter community of practice members

Headquarter CoP members expected that the CoP would be a way to communicate within projects, share issues and discuss about advocacy or did not have any expectations because they were recent employed by Wetlands International. Furthermore, they did not have elaborate expectations of what the CoP would bring them but after participating in the CoP for approximately a year, they formulate various things that the CoP brought. One headquarter CoP members tells that he sees the value of the CoP in having a group of colleagues to turn to.

"It is important to have that group of people to turn to, to have you colleagues. And I think especially after the face to face meeting that we had, it became really very clear how valuable it was to have that group of people and to really, to really know each other, and have, feel comfortable talking to each other, because, yes, it is different when you are on a telecom conference."

He explains that the CoP facilitated that it became clear that it is valuable to know each other and feel comfortable talking to each other. This respondent also mentions that because of the CoP, he now knows colleagues, which makes getting in touch easier.

"I know him better, I think that is really the case for many members of the community, it is now much easier to shoot them an email or if they are online on Skype to say 'hi, I need help with this or do you know, do you happen to know that."

This respondent emphasizes this value of the CoP by providing an example described below.

Being comfortable connecting with each other

"I was also involved, in a kind of course, training that headquarters organized and it was kind of web based, so also using Huddle, also using Skype, webinars, and it was about policy and advocacy influencing and there were very different people from different offices and it was quite interesting because many people in this course were from the CoP and others weren't, and it was very clear you know, for me, I felt much more comfortable discussing with people from the CoP but I also had the distinct feeling that among themselves it was much easier to communicate and you know, small things like, we had homework for example and with people saying well I am having this trouble with my homework and does anyone want to help or does anyone have suggestions, it always came from the people of the CoP it never came from the other participants. It could have been coincidence you know, it could be just individual, you know, but I thought that it was visible that those people knew each other and the others didn't." (Headquarter CoP member)

In this example, the respondent emphasizes that 'being comfortable connecting with each other' and 'helping each other out' is a result of the CoP. Another headquarter CoP member confirms this when talking about whether the CoP made a difference in his work.

"I think much more about contacting other people when I am working on something."

So, because of the CoP these respondents feel comfortable connecting to each other, helping each other out and reaching out for help themselves. Another headquarter CoP also explains that the worth of the CoP mostly is in linking people together what enables easier contact.

"It is really positive I find, in less than one year we really managed to get a group of people, who sometimes even didn't know each other, did not know, that the other existed and now those people know each other and feel comfortable to talk to each other."

Besides being connected and feeling comfortable to connect with one and another, a few headquarter CoP members mentioned briefly the worth of the CoP in terms of learning and sharing of knowledge; they perceive the value of the CoP in terms of contact and content.

"It is really been very enriching to find out about mangroves in general and our projects in particular, so that has been quite good."

So, headquarter CoP members mention that the worth of the CoP is in linking people together and in developing a group of people that know each other which enables easier contact. The value of the CoP is process related, according to the headquarter CoP members. Only a few headquarter CoP members briefly mention content related results of the CoP.

6.1.3. Regional community of practice members

Just like the headquarter CoP members, the regional CoP members also share various things that CoP brought them. The regional CoP members expected the CoP to would bring them information and learning. But the CoP brought more than only information and knowledge to the regional CoP members. They mention more values of the CoP like connecting and having the possibility to contribute to the organization.

Knowing whom to contact

Most regional CoP members mention that the CoP enabled them to have easier access to information. According to one of the regional respondents, it is easier for him to contact the right person for questions or information because of the CoP, which saves him time.

"We now know better, than it is easier to just approach people and ask the right person and not you know, waste so much time finding out who knows what."

Knowing whom to contact, is also something that the CoP brought another regional CoP member.

"Now we can connect to other offices, we now know where or whom we can turn to if we need some sort of advice."

Another regional CoP member explains that because of the CoP he is now more aware of the other projects that are going on and whom to contact for information.

"I am more aware of what other projects are doing and we can structure or own project relating, [we] are being able to relate information to what is being developed in other on-going projects or projects to be formulated. And also in terms of the contacts that you know which person you can ask more directly."

Apparently, regional CoP members were unsure or did not know whom to contact about certain issues before they participated in the CoP. This is not necessarily related to recent employment because the regional CoP members who are quoted above have been at the organization for over more than one year.

Connecting with colleagues

Besides knowing whom to contact, all regional CoP members mention that the CoP enabled them to get in touch with people and offices across the world.

"For the webinar of the CoP, I met some more people from other countries."

"It kind of gave me the opportunity to get connected and meet up with everybody."

"This is the contribution of CoP, because without CoP perhaps I have no reason to, to contact certain people in Wetlands International headquarters or the other offices, so in terms of providing opportunities to communicate with the other this is one of the good points, selling points of the CoP."

"I am talking with people from India for example, now I am talking with Panama [about] something [that] perhaps was not happening without CoP so I think in the communication, from this angle knowledge is something else, but communication is also something we can take the benefit from the CoP."

All regional CoP members mention 'connections' as something that the CoP brought them. Several regional CoP members also mentioned that the value of the CoP is in being connected to the organization as a whole. Thereby they imply that they did not feel connected to their colleagues in other offices before participating in the CoP.

"I think it is a good opportunity for me to become a member of the international community."

"I think [I joined] first because I am working with Wetlands International. I think the first [reason] is because I am working with Wetlands International, so I am not only [work on wetlands in my country, but also internationally, also work internationally]."

Besides being connected internationally, the CoP enables access to experts, according to one regional CoP member. More regional CoP members mention this and apparently, they do not have access to colleagues and to expertise knowledge without the CoP.

"I had the opportunity to make some questions and to get answers from just [the expert]."

A few minutes later, this regional CoP member explains that without the CoP, he would not have contacted this expert.

"You read from some people, you see their names in some reports and articles and everything. Than to meet them and have the opportunity to talk to them, made a difference, you know, you learn that they are reachable they are not those kind of celebrities, they are people like you, they are very nice and can share with you all the knowledge they have."

Apparently, the CoP lowers the barrier to get to know or contact people that are in the organization. This regional CoP member also explains with an example that through the CoP, he has access to colleagues and that other CoP members also find him for advice.

Getting in touch

“The CoP was a way of knowing each other but now as we work at similar programs at different countries it is easier to get in touch, so it was good to meet them at the CoP, and now I am in contact with them for other things that are not related with the CoP. The last example I have is the process of the midterm reviews of the Partners for Resilience program and Nicaragua and Guatemala were the first countries for this midterm views. So my colleagues from the Philippines asked me how the program was and I tried to give them some tips to help them with their own midterm reviews.”
(Regional CoP member)

So, these regional CoP members tell that the CoP enabled them to connect with colleagues from different offices. Apparently, feeling connected, knowing whom you are talking to is important in order to initiate contact for the respondents.

Learning and obtaining information

Besides knowing whom to contact and being connected, obtaining knowledge and information is something that all regional CoP members value of the CoP. One of the regional CoP members explains that this is of great importance for him.

“I believe this is one of the opportunity for me to get more information or knowledge from other countries offices, I realized that it is a very important opportunity for our office to get involved so we can get more information about what, even the report of the Water Bank we [have] now, because the headquarter staff supported us, they put it up and now [we can] download some documents and put on the webinar, so we can download and we can read the documents. And I think it is very important.”

Another regional CoP members likes the documents that are spread in the community.

“The ones, documents, I have the chance to see are very relevant, it is like a good filter, you have things with a nice quality, very good to apply, so it is not that people are just posting whatever comes in their mind, they take their time to choose very well the topic and put it up, because they know it is going to be useful for the rest.”

The regional CoP member explains that the documents he saw are relevant and that he thinks people consider what they put online. Besides obtaining knowledge from documents, this regional CoP member explains that he also learned through the CoP how others tackle a project.

“I am learning other things, for example, the way my other partners work with the government, the advocacy, how they do, it is very useful, to, and I think my first expectation was technical, but it is getting broader.”

He did not expect to learn about project approach, he expected to learn technical knowledge but the CoP is broader than he expected and he perceives this as useful. Another regional CoP member also explains that he learned from a project during the face to face meeting, when talking about what the CoP brought him. He also mentions that this project encouraged him.

“I was impressed by the policy influencing program in West Africa, where they achieved a lot and it is maybe not ready to be copied, but I think it is encouraging if they can do it, why can't we, don't do it here?”

Another regional CoP member also mentioned that he learned and values this. He emphasizes this with an example when talking about what the CoP brought him.

It all started with the CoP

"I can remember for example the topic about the blue carbon, that was very important for me, because it is something very new, there are not studied here in my country and that opened the door. Then we discussed it with some colleagues here at the private institute here and we are now proposing a proposal jointly and trying to start a blue carbon project. All that started for me with the things I learned at the webinar of blue carbon." (Regional CoP member)

Contributing to the organization

Besides connecting with colleagues, knowing whom to contact and having access to expertise, regional CoP members also mention having the opportunity to discuss organizational wide issues as a value of the CoP.

"This is one opportunity to link to bring people together and then talk about certain things and again, because we are now talking as in Wetlands International, the organization, so I think again in the past we are more talking mostly on our function but now we are also thinking about thematic things so I think CoP has the benefit, has the addition value in the relationships, to talk about certain issues in thematic, in function of each member."

According to these regional CoP members, the CoP offers a chance to share ideas and perspectives about thematic issues with people who have a different function.

"Head of offices only talk to head of office, for example, then the other CoP we talk about certain thematic issues from different angle and different layer of function at Wetlands International."

Not only the possibility to talk to various people in the organization is mentioned by regional CoP members, they frequently mention the topics of discussion as well. Not only 'thematic issues' but also 'general matters' are topics for discussion, according to the respondents.

"Yes I think that is the reason why I involved in the CoP, you have more communication, but we are also talking about general matter through this CoP."

This suggests that office wide discussions or communications with a variety of people do not take place on a regular base because regional CoP members mention this as something that the CoP brought and as a 'chance' or 'opportunity'.

"The CoP provides opportunity, we are not only talking about the CoP but also about other things in the prime work of Wetlands International, which I think, this is the contribution of the CoP."

So, regional CoP member are not only positive about the fact that they can connect with others, but also that the CoP enables them to discuss general things of the organization and contribute to the organization. One regional CoP member explains that this is of importance for him and for the organization.

"I think it is really important that we come to a shared vision about the positions (..) it is kind of serving all the member on the progress of the knowledge on the mangrove. I think that is very important for me, not only for the CoP, but more generally on the progress of WI."

All regional CoP members mention connecting to the organization and the possibility of being able to contribute to organizational issues as something that the CoP brought them whereas learning and obtaining information is mentioned less often.

6.1.4. Summary

All respondents mention that the CoP has value and brought them something during the last year. What exactly those positive points are, varies among the respondents. Headquarter staff members tend to focus less on what the CoP brought them or the organization. They often mention challenges of the CoP whereas headquarter CoP members explain that the CoP enabled them to (1) link up with colleagues and (2) to get a group together for asking questions and helping each other out. Apparently, linking up with colleagues and

having a group 'to turn to' was not readily available for headquarter CoP members, before they participated in the CoP.

Regional CoP members are most extensive in explaining the positive points of the CoP. They explain that the CoP enabled them to (1) know whom to contact, (2) to connect with colleagues and experts, to (3) learn and obtain information and to (4) contribute to the organization as a whole. This suggest that regional CoP members do not seem to take part regularly in organizational wide discussions nor seem to know their colleagues in other offices before participating in the CoP.

Process related values of the CoP are mentioned more than content related issues. It these issues are mentioned by respondents, they are mostly being mentioned by regional CoP members. Besides explaining what the CoP brought them, the respondents also explain that the CoP has its difficulties and explain what causes those difficulties. The next paragraph describes those challenges of the CoP.

6.2. Challenges of the community of practice

Besides the value of the CoP, respondents also mention various difficulties they encountered while participating in the CoP. The challenges of the CoP that are mentioned by the respondents vary from technical difficulties to cultural and process related difficulties, as the next paragraph describes.

6.2.1. Headquarter staff members

Headquarter staff member offer a few challenges that the CoP faces. Most often they mention current amount of participation in webinars and contribution on Huddle as challenges. Furthermore, they mention technical issues with Huddle and the composition of participants in the CoP as factors that pose challenges for the CoP. Headquarter staff members also mention several factors that cause these difficulties.

Low amount of participation and contribution

During the last year participation in the webinars varied and contribution on Huddle remained sparse, as mentioned in paragraph 4.2. One of the headquarter staff members explained that he did expect that participation would be one of the challenges of the CoP.

"I expected it to be difficult and it proves to be difficult."

Headquarter staff members offer various reasons for the variance in participation in the webinars and the low contribution on Huddle. One of the headquarter staff members explains that he thinks that CoP members find the CoP important but give it low priority because it is not obligatory: 'there won't be complications'.

"I think it is really simple, people find it relevant and important but when they compare it to all the other tasks they have if they are busy, this is the first thing that can be postponed. I mean, if they don't do it, there won't be implications whereas you don't meet the deadline you are in trouble, so people are fighting that all the time."

Another headquarters staff member shares this perspective and describes that having a choice of being committed to the CoP is strength and a weakness at the same time.

"The nice thing, you are only a member if you want to be a member of and that is the weak and the strength at the same time."

Nonetheless the choice to commit, participation is 'not living up to it', according to this headquarter staff member. Furthermore, this headquarters staff member explains that several other issues influence participation and contribution in the CoP negatively.

"Because everybody is fully booked , this is for you [and] for me, they have their daily work, daily tasks and daily deadlines and people asking your attention and that takes you [time]. There are the four quadrants of the things that are important and things that are urgent, things that are urgent tend to take over and things that are almost physically near to you, also tend to be more urgent [like] things that are related to donor money and the prospect of losing or winning that is more urgent and important but important things [like] investing in relationships is a deeper and

slower layer that you really deliberately have to pay attention to and it can sometimes feel like a luxury knowing that so many urgent things are waiting for you but it is not, and if you don't have a culture where that [investing in important things] is supported, there you go."

This headquarter staff member uses the time efficiency matrix of Stephen Covey (Covey 1989) to explain low participation and contribution by the CoP members. According to this respondent, people tend to focus on urgent things like donor money, daily tasks and deadlines instead of focusing on important things like investing in relationships. In his opinion, the CoP is an example of such a long term, important issue whereas daily tasks, deadline and donor money are urgent issues. According to this respondent, urgent issues take over important issues, like the CoP, in Wetlands International. This respondent argues that 'organizational culture' is not supportive of employees giving more priority to long-term issues like the CoP. This might relate to the lack of official time to spend on the CoP, as mentioned in chapter four.

Another headquarters CoP member mentions a different issue that influences contribution on Huddle. He thinks that the characteristics of Huddle form a barrier for CoP members to participate.

"Huddle is not something you automatically access, I mean you have to log in, you have to search through the database and given that people are really busy it is sometimes challenging to convince them to use it on a regular basis."

So, from the perspective of one headquarter staff member participation and contribution is 'not living up to it' and this relates to organizational culture of giving low priority to long-term issues that are important, like the CoP. Furthermore, participation in the CoP is optional which also contributes to the current amount of participation and contribution, according to this respondent. Another headquarter staff member explains that the characteristics of Huddle prevent easy participation. Both respondents thus hold the set-up of the CoP responsible for low contribution and participation and one respondent also holds the culture of the organization responsible as well.

Composition of the CoP

Another headquarters staff member mentioned that the composition of the CoP might not be balanced when talking about difficulties of the CoP.

"I think it also continues to be a point of attention because if there are too little experts and [the expert] has the feeling that I am only giving I am not taking because I can't discuss my knowledge intellectual, nor my technical questions, I can't share it with anybody, that is a pity than."

The participation of experts needs to be a point of attention, because if the expert cannot 'take' anything than it is a 'pity', according to this headquarter staff member. Apparently, this headquarters staff member perceives low expert input or the level of the CoP as worrisome because it might scare off the expert. This staff member acknowledges that he does not know whether this is the case at the moment, he talked from a hypothetical point of view.

Organizational matters

Besides that, headquarter staff members mention organizational related matters when talking about the challenges of the CoP. One headquarter staff member explains that the organization does not always sign smart contracts.

"We are also not very smart at the same time and we are signing contracts with donors that allow for sufficient time for our own learning for example, you know, spending time on learning and on courses is, not many people following courses (..) this one person said 'wow it is the first time in five years I work with Wetlands International that I receive training'."

According to this respondent, the organization does not often obtain enough time and money for its own learning in contracts. Because of these contracts there is not money and time available for the CoP, as described in paragraph 4.2. Furthermore, he explains that there are other organizational issues that form the basis of low investment in the CoP 'and processes like the CoP' in Wetlands International.

“Discussions on strategy on strategy and more deeper thinking about what do we really want to achieve and checking your assumptions (..) those discussions take place in, it is always far too much discussion in far too little time and the rest of the organization is not often involved.”

Furthermore, he explains that the organization is ‘*hierarchical*’ and ‘*does not tend to listen very well*’ when talking about how the organization functions. Further down in the interview, this respondent explains that the organization tends to be focussed more on content and outputs, rather than on process related issues like discussions and feedback sessions. The latter does not provide immediate concrete results or output but rather facilitates results and output; the organization does not yet invest enough in such discussions and feedback sessions according to this respondent. Another result of this ‘*culture*’ is also that the organization does not have a clear perspective on its identity and value, according to this respondent.

“At this very moment we are also trying to work on the annual plan and support people working on that, what did we achieve, what are we proud of, what really made you tick, why are we working on it, when is it yes this is what I am working for? Really difficult! ‘No we just starting, it is a tough struggle, it is a long process.’ Yes, but you have been doing it for twenty years! Something must have been achieved and if not, maybe we are too specialist, too scientific and were are too purist and perfectionist. We don’t see the results so.”

Another headquarter CoP member confirms this from a slightly different angle when talking about the ‘*backdrop against which the CoP acts*’.

“We do not always have a common vision in terms of what our institutional mandate and our way of working is, the fact that the level of strategic thinking differs amongst individuals within the organization and these are all challenges that prevent us from working as one team one group. For example, joint priority setting with regard to the themes that we address as an organization but also the way we express ourselves as an organization. Are we a knowledge broker, are we an activist organization doing campaigns like Greenpeace does, are we a critical friend working along with government or private sector, or do we keep a kind of distance and kind of shout things from a distance? That is just not a transition that you can make through a small CoP and a little bit of staff support throughout the year. It’s really about institutional change and this is difficult.”

This respondent explains that the organization is not always on the same page with respect to its identity when talking about the challenges of the CoP. He suggests that the CoP is developed in order to change this organizational issue by saying that ‘*is just not a transition that you can make through a small CoP*’. He suggest that the CoP might not be able to change the organization because it has a ‘*little bit of staff support*’ and because this is ‘*about institutional change and this is difficult*’.

So, the CoP faces difficulties with participation and contribution as well as with technical difficulties and organizational issues, according to the headquarter staff respondents.

6.2.2. Headquarter community of practice members

Headquarter CoP members also voice various challenges that the CoP faces. Like the headquarter staff members, all headquarter CoP members mention low participation and contribution as the most prominent challenge of the CoP. They also mention low input and participation of experts as a difficult point. Besides that, they have a personal account to offer about participation and contribution because they participate regularly in the CoP in contrast with headquarter staff members who participate from the sidelines in the CoP.

Low participation – individual accounts

All headquarter CoP member mention their own reasons for not participating in some webinars. One headquarter CoP explains that he does not often react on notifications of Huddle because of time, the workload and because he cannot contribute on a technical paper. This respondent does not have a technical background and does not have a technical position at Wetlands International.

“Often it is that, that it is just, you know, there is a notification of Huddle saying someone uploaded something and you, you see it see but you say ‘but oke that’s one out of hundred emails and I

need to move the others along', yeah, sometimes because I don't have much to say, sometimes it is just news or a new report that came out and I can't read the report so, you know and I have, you know, not a lot of content feedback to give so."

Not being able to contribute relates to the different work field and functions that the CoP members have, as explained in chapter four. If the topic is technical in nature, some CoP members with a policy or communication background might find it hard to contribute, for example. Another headquarter CoP members also gives a personal account of his participation and explains that he has no time to participate in the webinars and also does not know what he can contribute during the webinars.

"The invitations? I dismiss them because I just don't have the time for that and I don't know what I can contribute (...) I have always been very interested in a lot of things. So yeah, I should, I am really open minded to learn about mangroves and coastal resilience but actually, I have never really the time to look through what is posted (...) but then I just click it away so it is not, I am not feeling sorry.

It is not that he is not interested because he is 'open minded to learn' but he cannot contribute because of a lack of time. He emphasizes that it is not 'in him' by explaining that he does not feel sorry; he has no time and therefore should not feel sorry at all. Furthermore, he explains that 'I just click it away' which relates to the non-committal character of the CoP.

So, headquarter CoP members do not participate and contribute because (1) they cannot or do not know what they can contribute, (2) a lack of time and the workload and because (3) the CoP is optional, they can click it away without any consequence.

Low participation in general

Besides personal accounts of their participation, headquarter CoP members also talk about low participation in more general terms. Most headquarter CoP member explain that one of the reasons of low participation is that people are busy and focused on their work.

"I think people are terrible busy and very focused on their national or country work, you know, there is a level of engagement, you know, that is evident, but it is just difficult as you say, to take the time to sit down and think and you know, process the information and think were they want to take it further because it is not engrained in the culture."

This headquarter CoP member mentions that 'it is not engrained in the culture' to 'sit down and think' in order to find out 'where to take it further'. Interestingly, a headquarters staff member also mentioned the 'organizational culture' in relation with low participation as explained in the previous paragraph. This headquarter CoP member elaborates that the organization is 'fast paced' and that there is no time available to reflect and think strategically.

"I think it is a very fast paced organization you know, you can see that everybody is busy, you know. And that, it means that we do a lot but the negative consequences of course is that we don't have the time to sit back and think and especially not with our colleagues you know. It is very difficult to find time and to get people together in the room to sit down and to think what did we really achieve with this, you know, and how will we take it forward?"

Time for reflection and discussion is sparse in the organization, according to this respondent which is in line with what another headquarter staff member also mentioned. As explained in chapter four, there also no official time for the CoP what this headquarter CoP member also mentions in relation to low participation and contribution.

"People have their full work schedule and on top of this they are asked to do this and there should be, you know, project time for this, it should be part of the task list and not something that at the end of the day when you're completely exhausted and you want to go home you go like, o yes I still need to do something for the community of practice so, yeah."

Furthermore, this respondent implies that the culture of the organization is focused on output and results which is also in line with what the headquarter staff respondent mentioned.

"I think people really want results so that is why it is also, you know, this organization is also very project based, so people are like outcome, you know, achieve something and report, tell you founder you have done Gods know what and this is how you say, a completely different approach, this is a structure, this is you know how the organization works and it is structured and so it not to come up with an outcome, it is more to facilitate outcome, yeah, and that makes it difficult for the culture of the organization but it also makes it difficult to fund, you know."

This output oriented approach makes it difficult to support the CoP and fund it, according to this respondent; the CoP facilitates results but is no result itself. Furthermore, a headquarter CoP member explains that cultural differences between CoP members might play a role in low participation and contribution. Some CoP members might not feel comfortable exchanging and discussing ideas, according to this respondent.

"In some cultures, people are more used to, you know, talk to whomever and share their ideas and in some cultures it is not done, you don't tell you're superiors this could be better."

Moreover, some headquarter CoP members mention that scheduling and technical issues make participation and contribution difficult.

"I think a lot of it is scheduling issues you know, it is very difficult to find a time and a date, you know, even here in the office if you want to meet someone it can be very difficult to find a time and a date and the more people the more difficult right? So I know that for example in Malaysia and Indonesia they do, or in Guatemala, they do a lot of fieldwork so sometimes they are in a location when there is no access or where the internet is very unstable and yah, sometimes you cannot foresee that or sometimes, you know, you don't know if you're going or not until the last minute so in the doodle maybe 'I can do it', you know."

Apparently, several CoP members work sometimes in the field and cannot participate because of that. Furthermore, this respondent mentions that 'even here in the office' it is hard to find a time and date. This implies that scheduling issues are not only caused by 'work in the field' but might also relate to other factors. Perhaps, do the priority setting culture in the organization and the CoP as something optional contribute to these scheduling issues.

Additionally, an headquarter CoP member mentions that people might not feel like they own the Co when talking about low participation and contribution.

"There does not seem to be a sense of ownership by everyone, like 'I am really part of something'."

So, headquarter CoP member give various reasons for low participation in general. Most of them mention the culture of the organization and the set-up of the CoP as responsible factors. Organizational wide, priorities are giving to other, short term, issues like daily task and deadlines and they have to participate in the CoP in their 'free time'. Besides that, cultural reasons are mentioned and various CoP members work from time to time in the field and are therefore not able to participate, according to some headquarter CoP members.

Low input of expertise

Besides low participation, headquarter CoP members also mention a low input of experts in the CoP as a difficulty of the CoP.

"So, we have a few members of the community who are really, well very active ones I should say, who are really experienced and could really share a lot. And then you have a reasonable amount of people who are thinking mm, maybe it would be nice to have a new project in my office and they want to learn from it."

According to this headquarter CoP member, the balance between people who have something to share and people who want to learn is not optimal in the CoP. Low input and participation of expert relates to what these experts get back or not, according to this respondent.

"For them it is less interesting, because of course they can share their experiences but don't get a lot back right? So, it is always a more difficult position to be in and less interesting and if you have a tight deadline maybe you don't prioritize it."

According to this respondent, experts do not prioritize the CoP because they don't gain that much from the CoP and they can do so because participation is optional and priority is often given to more urgent issues.

Besides that, a headquarter CoP member expected that the CoP would give more results than it has done so far. When talking about the track record, he explains that he expected more to come forward.

"In principle it is a very achievable exercise, so I did to expect it to move forward a bit more, and the reasons it didn't, well as I say, well sometimes the right people were not there or, it is also a feeling of you know, headquarters does not want to push too much you know. On the one hand we see the value of this community we want to make the most out of it, but we also don't want to be the ones with the whip, saying contribute to the track record now. So you ask, yeah, how pushy can you be?"

According to this respondent, regional CoP members are partly responsible for low results because he suggests that headquarters has done enough already: 'how pushy can you be'. Further down in the conversation this headquarter CoP member explains that the process of keeping people engaged is like 'pulling a dead horse'. Apparently, this headquarter CoP member wants the CoP to be carried by all participants and does not want, or headquarters, to be the one leading and pulling all the time. According to this headquarter CoP member, regional staff does not seem to take the lead besides headquarter staff.

6.2.3. Regional community of practice members

Similar to headquarter staff and headquarter CoP members, regional CoP members also mention several difficulties of the CoP. They also mention low participation in webinars and low contribution on Huddle as the most prominent challenge of the CoP. Besides that, they mention several other challenges of the CoP and give a personal account of their participation.

Low participation – individual accounts

Most regional CoP members mention scheduling issues as one of the reasons that prevent them from participating in the webinars. Moreover, more than half of the regional CoP members mention that they do not have any experiences with mangroves or coastal resilience or do not have a project going on in that field. This prevents those regional CoP members from participating and contributing in webinars and on Huddle, according to themselves.

"I am not working in coastal areas, I don't work with mangroves, it is sad to say but I don't work in mangroves, so I don't know, you, have personal experiences to share right know, that is a problem I have."

"I am more involved in peat."

Besides that, several other regional CoP members explain that they have limited knowledge about mangroves when talking about their contribution to the CoP.

"I have very limited knowledge about mangroves. I have quite limited experience and knowledge so I cannot make a lot of concrete contribution to the CoP."

Another regional CoP member explains that could not share yet because his projects did not involve mangroves or coastal resilience or were not started up yet.

"Because in the beginning I wasn't yet really working on a project yet, but now both in the Philippines and in Malaysia the chances are really big that I will start shortly and then I can both share what I have learned and I can learn from other people about the next steps because I have never done a mangrove project before."

Besides that, several regional CoP members mention that they are sometimes in the field for several weeks and are not able to contribute or participate in the CoP.

"I couldn't join it, because I was in the field."

On the other hand, one regional CoP members gives a different explanation of his lack of participation and contribution. He explains that he is not comfortable participating on Huddle because he is not a 'social network person'. Thereby he implies that he perceives the CoP to be a sort of social network like Twitter and Facebook. He explains that in other social networks he responds more because he has closer relationships with the people. He emphasizes this point by explaining that in his previous job, he would have responded more whereas at Wetlands International he does not because he is still trying to get in to the organization and develop relations. This respondent recently joined the organization.

"I am more like a passive member (...), I am not active, that is what I am trying to say (..).I am just not interested in putting comments in, I don't even do that with Facebook and Twitter, I am not a social networking person say that (..) I think maybe just because I am new, I am not, I don't have the personal in depth relationships with the members just yet and I feel that in others social networks I am involved if I am already close to other members I generally respond more. (..), for instance maybe if this was done in my previous organization were I was in for more than 4 years it would be a different feeling."

Moreover, he also explains that one of the reasons for his lack of participation is that he does not prioritize the CoP. He is juggling between his work and the CoP and also does perceive getting used to the CoP and Huddle as time consuming and not very interesting.

"But yeah, I don't know. I don't know, the CoP is new to me, and I think maybe just making myself used to it, there can be a lot of information to absorb and it can take a lot of time and I think that would be one thing that makes it not very interesting, not juggling, but between the work I am doing and sometimes looking into Huddle it can be like I'll do this later something like that. I put it aside more then, that is my general comment."

So, participation and contribution of regional CoP members is influenced by low amount of experience, projects or knowledge to share, according to the regional CoP members. One respondent finds the CoP more a social network and does not feel comfortable participating in such a network because relations are not close enough and because time is lacking, according to himself. More regional CoP members also mention that they 'just don't have the time', and thereby imply the organization to be the cause of low participation and contribution. As explained in chapter four, the CoP is set up to be optional and the members have no official time for the CoP.

Low participation in general

Regional CoP members mention several reasons to explain the lack of participation in general. Most often they relate the cause of low participation and contribution to a lack of time and priority setting issues in the organization.

"If people just do it on their own time, it is a bit difficult."

"Yes, as I said we are all overwhelmed with our day to day work, and I think that is the most difficult part of trying to be an active member of the CoP, it is as I say, sometimes you know, it can be you now, like a hobby, something you really like and then you work is together and then you, if you can do the other thing it is nice but I think this is happening with some of the members. The community is the last point on their list of priorities and we are as I said overwhelmed with our day to day work."

According to this regional CoP member, the CoP can feel like a 'hobby' but don't have the time for. He explains that it is difficult to give the CoP priority because of 'overwhelming' day to day work. So, he implies that both the organization and the CoP members are responsible for low participation and contribution. The organization does not make enough time available for participation and CoP members do not prioritize the CoP and are letting themselves become overwhelmed by day to day work.

As explained in chapter four, the CoP is optional and the members do not have official time for the CoP. Another regional CoP member confirms this and explains that in his opinion headquarter support and a priori time reserved for the CoP would help to raise the amount of participation and contribution.

"It is a combination, so everybody would say, I don't have enough time, I am too busy with other things but that is also priority. And maybe one thing you solve that with, I don't know if that works in Wetlands International, you have clear support by headquarters and maybe you also should have some time a priori to spent on the CoP, it should be on your work plan something like that."

Besides workload, priority setting and scheduling, some regional CoP members mention cultural and language related issues that prevent participation and contribution in the CoP. One of the regional CoP members with a western European nationality explains that nonwestern people are less likely to give opinions.

"Nonwestern people are less vocal than less western European people, they have less the feeling that they know what best is, that they should be heard or contribute, also a bit more comfortable in just listening what the other has to say. (..)some people are less experienced, they just want to hear what others people have to say. It is a cultural thing and a knowledge thing. So, the being afraid of saying something stupid, saying something incorrect that is related to being more comfortable to what others have to say, the less experienced people will also feel that they perhaps have less the position to do so, but it is, yes, that is a cultural thing."

According to this respondent, some CoP members might contribute less because they are less experienced or feel like they are less experienced. One of the regional CoP members also explains that he thinks experience is related to being more talkative in the CoP.

"People from Indonesia are also very active, because they have more experience."

Another regional CoP member also explains that some people do speak more often than others. He also relates being talkative to being experienced. Furthermore, he elaborates that there were some 'rules' about contribution and participating but that the CoP 'did not get around to that'.

"A lot of people say more than others and speak very often. I think they are very experienced and want to share it though sometimes it may be irrelevant. Previously, we agreed that for every session, there is to be a repertoire but we didn't really get around to that."

Language related problems are also mentioned in relation to low participation and contribution, by regional CoP members.

"When our English is not as good as we wish, it is not very easy to participate."

"Countries with the language problem and limited knowledge, they cannot give more comments."

In addition, to what is already been explained about the various reasons that cause low contribution and participation, one of the facilitators of the CoP explains that some people only 'take' and do not want to be actively involved in the CoP. She thereby characterizes non-CoP members and CoP members and separates the two of them.

"As I mentioned you when, some of them don't answer the doodle polls for example, I have to send personal emails and sometimes and once or twice I get answers like 'hey yeah I am sorry I didn't answer but I, Sibrenne invited me I am just happy part of the member reading the articles I don't want to get very active with the webinars', so yeah, that is, I received that answer once, they are not members, it is that something, they want some pieces of the cake let's say that, and they choose what is useful for them so they don't want to get involved with everything, they have not time for all the webinars, they just pick up what topic they are interested in and that's it, so they are not very active with everything but at least with the things that are most relevant with them."

So, according to regional CoP members low participation and contribution is caused by a variety of factors. The regional CoP members most often mention a lack of official time provided for by the organization and the non-committal character of the CoP. Additionally, a few regional CoP members mention language and cultural issues.

Organizational matters and other challenges of the community of practice

Besides low participation and contribution, regional CoP members mention several other challenges that

the CoP faces. One of them is the time difference at the various parts of the world. Because of that, some CoP members have to go out of bed very early or have to stay up late in the evening in order to participate in the CoP. Furthermore, regional CoP members mention technical difficulties like trouble with opening Huddle, the internet connection, the Skype and the online organization of Huddle. Moreover, one regional CoP members mention that the current set-up of the CoP underutilizes knowledge.

"Through the webinar, we could not really see the level of knowledge of the participants because you have very limited time, so people get on but only one can tell on Skype, it could not really explore the knowledge of each participant. So I think it kind of underutilizes knowledge."

Further in the conversation, he explains that the time of the webinar is limited and that the connection does not allow members to speak freely. Because of that, it is hard to get knowledge sharing going, according to him. Furthermore, a regional CoP member explains that the CoP does not have a concrete activity or work on which everybody can participate and contribute.

"There is no joint project, activities or joint work were we could really work with a member of the CoP. For example, like with the mangrove capital project, not everybody is working on the project, so not everybody can make a contribution, I am not talking about good or bad or right or wrong but just about the observation, and then it seems in the CoP we only talk about CoP once a month, only once a month, sometimes we forgot what we discussed during the last month."

As mentioned in paragraph 4.2, there does not seem to be a follow up after the webinars as this respondent mentions as well. This respondent brings this up when talking about difficulties that the CoP faces, so apparently he perceives this to be a difficulty of the CoP.

Moreover, when talking about the challenges of the CoP, several regional CoP members bring organizational related issues to the table. Time for discussion is sparse, according to this respondent.

"We are too much involved in doing our own projects and our own work, we're sitting here with people and we also don't have regularly meeting where we update each other and I also don't think that it is the case in headquarters, except for the management team. And I think those things should be, every two weeks sitting together 'what kind of projects do you do, what are your difficulties', things like that."

Additionally, this respondent explains that a lack of communication and organizational strategy are 'pitfalls' of the organization.

"Nice discussion. Lack of communication and a lack of space for a real organizational strategy are, I think, the biggest pitfalls of Wetlands International."

According to this regional CoP member, the organization is too much involved in projects and work and could invest more in updating each other. Other regional CoP members also make use of the opportunity to raise organizational issues.

"I think the CoP should set the standards and stick to it. Wetlands International is always changing, we never really stick to something for long. It can be both good and bad. I think it is important to first think things through before we really start something. Having some general rules is also good but having people commit to them is another issue (..) I would first ask everyone if this is really what they want or need? Who wants to be in? Who is willing to commit to it before anything else. Realistically, how many of us can really commit to this in top of our duties and responsibilities in our offices?"

According to this regional CoP member, the CoP should be an example and should not change because the organization changes too much. He implies that the CoP is not thought out well enough nor discussed beforehand with him. He explains that commitment is not explicitly asked nor whether the CoP is what people want and need.

6.2.4. Summary

CoP members explain that the most prominent challenge of the CoP the current amount of participation and contribution on Huddle, by the CoP members. Respondents accentuate the cause of this differently. All CoP members mention that they are not always able to contribute because they have no knowledge or experience with the topic that is discussed or do not have a project going on. Headquarter staff tends to hold the set-up of the CoP responsible; the CoP is optional, Huddle might not enable easy participation and members have no time for participating in the CoP. CoP members confirm that having no official time for the CoP and day to day task makes participation and contribution difficult; they put the CoP aside in order to do their job or other urgent issues.

Furthermore, respondents mention challenges that relate to organizational culture or organizational matters. Headquarter staff members and headquarter CoP members mention that the organizational culture does not support long term priority setting which causes low participation and contribution in the CoP, according to them. Regional CoP members voice that having no time available for the CoP makes participation and contribution difficult. Regional CoP members also mention having no time for discussion in the organization, no follow up after webinars and no concrete project or joint activity to work on as challenges of the CoP.

So, respondents mostly hold the set-up of the CoP and organizational matters like priority setting to urgent issues responsible for the current - low amount - of participation and contribution. Furthermore they mention having no knowledge or experience to share, scheduling issues, low expert input and cultural and language barriers. Low expert input is also mentioned by headquarter CoP members as a challenge of the CoP. These challenges of the CoP might strengthen each other. Low expert input relates to low amount of knowledge exchange, which makes the CoP more a social network in which the members can strengthen relations rather than their knowledge. Subsequently, making time available for the CoP and giving the CoP priority becomes difficult which might enforces low participation and contribution.

Nonetheless the challenges of the CoP, most CoP members would like to see the CoP continue in the future and tend to have a perspective on how the CoP should be improved, as explained in the next chapter.

7 Improvements and future of the community of practice

Besides the expectations and experience of the community of practice (CoP), respondents also talked about possible improvements of the CoP and the future of the CoP. The next paragraphs describe what the respondents talked about when asked about the future of the CoP. Again, the respondents have different perspectives on the future of the CoP and possible improvements. However, all respondents answered the question whether the CoP should continue with an absolute 'yes'.

7.1. Headquarter staff members

One headquarter staff member is very clear about how to develop the CoP and improve it.

"I would institutionalize it in that the resources and investments required for making it work, would be part of the projects and initiatives the people are engaged in. And I would ensure that there is really something for people to get out of the community beyond knowledge exchange, so for example by ensuring that proposal development or strategy would become part of the community than there is really something to gain also in institutional or monitoring terms for the community, luring people into the group. So than it is not a very interesting bonus besides the work you are already doing but it becomes part of your work."

This headquarter staff member argues that the CoP should be institutionalized in order to ensure that the CoP is engrained in the daily work of people. According to him, this is 'required' for making the CoP work. Additionally, he proposes that in order to 'lure' people into the community the CoP should provide a 'gain'. This suggests that this respondent thinks that the CoP does not offer enough for its members at the moment. Thereby he implies that the set-up of the CoP is responsible for the current state of affairs in the CoP rather than the CoP members.

Another headquarter staff member has a less clear perspective on the improvement of the CoP.

"I am aware that it could slide off and even then I am not sure whether it should be like a failure and you know, it is unrealistic expectation that this is going to be an ever growing and enthusiastic, you know, sometimes time is up, and it is time for something else as long as the, as the methodology, as a form of working together has established itself and people are enthusiastic, yes, yes, yes, we should do more and at the same time."

This staff member explains that the CoP could slide off or that there might be no time left for the CoP to grow. But at the same time, he hopes that the 'method' will continue to exist in the organization. He explains in more detail why he hopes that the CoP will continue to exist a few minutes later in the interview.

"It is a body of evidence that I can also use in a slow effort of 'we can't talk content all the time and we have to take attention to process and invest in the people in the relationships in the communication and in the training'."

Apparently, this headquarter staff members hopes to gain leverage with the CoP to change the organization into one who invest more in processes and relationships.

"I may hope that in five years, we have a good intranet or a Facebook page or whatever we have in that time, that there is something, maybe focus more on content, I hope that we just, just have more time, I think also that it should be like this, if we want to continue to exist we have to communicate well, we have to give more attention to this sort of things, it should be built into the organization and whether it is a CoP or not, because Partners for Resilience is also a project that is used in six or seven countries, they also have workshops which is sometimes sending and

receiving, but that is also something, it has a different name, that you, would, just invest more intensively in learning and relations."

According to this staff member, becoming more communicative is essential for the future of the organization. This suggests that he thinks the near future of the CoP is to change and build the organization rather than to obtain concrete results. It is interesting that respondents often connect the future of the CoP to the future of the organization. For example, another headquarter staff member perceives the CoP to be an opportunity and a facilitating factor to connect people and offices within the organization more.

"And I hope the people in the organization will operate more as a team, so that people between offices are more in contact and that there is more exchange between the offices, the office here but also in the regions. And hopefully, the community than will kind of facilitate the process."

So, headquarter staff members hope that the CoP will develop relations and connections within the organization in the future. This contrast with their expectations that are more output and result oriented. With this perspective on the future they imply that the organization is not connected enough yet. Furthermore, some headquarter staff members tend to hold the organization responsible for improving and developing the CoP.

7.2. Headquarters community of practice members

Headquarter CoP members elaborate more on possible improvements of the CoP compared the headquarter staff members. One headquarters CoP member would like to have more interaction during the webinars.

"To have everybody feeding into, than rather, than someone saying this how I do it and the others 'o yeah agree'. So, I think I would like a bit more interaction than there is now."

As explained in paragraph 4.3, the first half of the webinar consists often of a presentation and thereafter there is space for questions or discussions. These questions and discussions are handled through the chat and this headquarters CoP member would like to have it a bit more interaction. Another headquarters CoP member mentions that the CoP should be engrained more in day to day work. He explains that the organization should work more on monitoring and evaluating systems. Thereby, contribution and participation in the CoP will grow, according to him.

"I think it would help if we have better systems at the level of the organization to monitor our progress, you know. If we had systems to include things this linking and learning from each other in our day to day life, in all of the offices, you know, because as I said right know it's an add on you know. People have their full work schedule and on top of this they are asked to do this and there should be, you know, project time for this, it should be part of the task list and not something that at the end of the day when you're completely exhausted and you want to go home you go like, o yes I still need to do something for the community of practice so, yeah."

Moreover, one of the headquarter CoP members proposes to have a face to face meeting more often.

"It would be great to have a face to face meeting every six months or so, you know it's not going to happen, also the carbon footprint is huge, we don't want to do that all the time. It's really, nothing beats a face to face meeting you know."

When talking about possible improvements, one headquarters CoP member mentioned who would be responsible for improving the CoP.

"Since January it died out a bit, so maybe we need to sit down and think how we can bring it back. Ideally the community, but maybe we need to, maybe first we need to discuss with the process"

owners with Femke with Raquel, (...) maybe we should you know, discuss among ourselves [headquarters] you know, do we see the need to intervene and if so what would be the best way to do it, it would be nice, yah I don't think it would be appropriate for us for headquarters to, this is not going the way we want it."

Apparently, this respondent thinks that headquarters should decide whether to intervene. At the same time, this respondent explains that it would not be 'appropriate' for headquarters to intervene. Thereby he implies that responsibility for the CoP a tender point is and that there might be some differences between regional staff and headquarters staff about when and how to intervene in the CoP.

Like headquarter staff, headquarter CoP members also mention the CoP as a way to change the organization. According to this headquarter CoP member, the CoP could set the example about working together in the organization.

"In the long term, I really hope that this is kind of the model for how this organization works, you know. That there is several kind of thematic groups, you know, that come together and think about issues, jointly and make it a WI issue rather than a headquarter, Senegal or India issue."

On the other hand, an headquarter staff member explains that he questions the future of the CoP if ownership and a feeling of being connected does not develop. According to this respondent, the current state of affairs of the CoP should change in order to continue with the CoP in the future.

"There does not seem to be a sense of ownership, like 'I am really part of something', that has to change because if it won't change than you keep it like it is now, than it is the question whether you want to continue this yes or no. Than you really will ask yourself, that whether you want to continue this in a year."

To sum it up, most headquarter CoP members connect the CoP to their perspective on how the organization should function in the future. Several headquarter CoP members perceive the CoP as a model for the organization or as a way to change the organization into a better connected one. Headquarter CoP members mostly perceive the organization and CoP members as the responsible parties for improving the CoP.

7.3. Regional community of practice members

In contrast to headquarter staff members and headquarter CoP members, regional CoP members mention practical improvements of the CoP. More than half of the regional CoP members mention technical improvements of the CoP.

"Well the Skype needs a stronger platform, teleconference, for sure."

One regional CoP members argues that the 'organization' is responsible for 'resourcing' and the technique of the CoP.

"The organization bets on this type of knowledge management and sees the value added then of course than it has to make some decisions about resourcing and then on the technical part I think it does require sometimes a bit more robust way of communication."

Another regional CoP member explains that facilitation should continue in the future and that the webinars need stricter scheduling.

"To have the facilitation support, because that is key to keeping it alive, and then to have more strict scheduling of webinars, probably."

Having more regular contact is also what another regional CoP member proposes in order to get more

information out of the CoP in between webinars.

"For the CoP I think it the main time we should have a more regular [contact]. So we have a more regular contact, so from the CoP can bring us together more close, so we could get more information about what we have done in the Latin America, Africa and East Asia and China, so I think it is very important we need regular contact, so we need regular contact, and yes."

This regional CoP member uses 'we', when talking about his vision of the CoP. Thereby, he implies that the CoP members and himself included, are responsible for having more regular contact. Moreover, another regional CoP member mentions changing the content of the CoP into project development in order to be able to harmonize projects at a global level.

"I mean we are always going to have to develop projects, that is a way to sort of discuss more the practical aspects and that would be a way to be able to, you know, at least get people involved in different project development discussion because we do try to harmonize what is done across the network on a certain topic so that we can sort of raise common issues at a global level so in theory, you know, you have to coordinate project development. We try to do that but maybe it can be done a bit more systematically through the CoP and then you get the people interacting more often."

Two other regional CoP members also propose to enlarge the scope of the CoP and to develop more CoPs.

"Perhaps we should also enlarge the topic and perhaps we should have other CoPs on water and biodiversity."

Furthermore, a regional CoP member would like to add more people to the CoP in order to 'spread the word'. Thereby this regional CoP member implies that the CoP has the value to connect people and thereby spread and share information more easily.

"Maybe if there are a lot of members there also might be a lot of members that are not really active but well the positive side is that information, even though there not very active, they receive the information from notification, the spread of the word is, will be larger rather than it is in a small community. So yeah, I think it is a good idea to add more people to the community."

Another regional CoP member mentions that the CoP should be developed into the 'think tank' of the organization.

"Yes, I can see that the CoP will be influential, if the CoP can provide contribution to the statement of position of Wetlands International in related matters. For example, if we have problems or issue on mangroves or coastal issues it might be good if CoP provide a real contribution on paper or position making. (..) If we have a common problem, if we have something which needs a solution from all offices, and then all, perhaps give the management of Wetlands International, give an input from, example from, the CoP and I think that gives the opportunity that the CoP would become the kind of think tank of Wetlands International instead of special group, of something technical."

This respondent implies that the CoP does not have a real task at the moment. It is a 'special group' but according to him, the CoP can grow to be influential if headquarters will give the CoP mandate; he does not frame himself or the CoP members as parties that have power about this.

Most regional CoP members answer with a very firm yes when asked about whether the organization should continue with the CoP. One of the regional CoP members explains that the CoP has potential for the organization but that it does need some effort to let the CoP grow.

"I think it has a lot more potential for really integrating the way we work, the network, so for now it is a good start but I think we really need to fine tune a little bit about how to make it you know more an active part of the way that we work in the network."

Another regional CoP member shares the perspective that the CoP needs 'more effort'. Furthermore, this respondent explains that the members should and should give the CoP more urgency to let the CoP 'move forward'. Thereby, he implies that CoP members are also responsible for keeping the CoP going.

"I see the CoP will continue. But we still need a lot of discussions and coordinating on how to move forward from here. At this point, the CoP is still something that we put in the back of our closet and take it out to use when we remember it. That is very much for me and also a lot of other people I believe due to other more urgent issues and work that we are involved in. But I think in order for the CoP to grow, we need to put in more efforts."

Furthermore, another regional CoP member also sees more potential in the CoP. This respondent implies that it is not the of people in the CoP that prevents the CoP from reaching its potential; apparently other factors are at work according to this respondent.

"I see much more potential for it, you know, I think it's a great group of people and certainly a lot of experience and expertise so we could get much more out of it."

Another regional CoP member hopes that the CoP will continue to exist in order to make various processes easier. This respondent also formulates the CoP as a 'model' for the organization and thereby also implies that the CoP could help organizational development.

"This model for the organization that it becomes just a, you know, something well internalized in the way of working and reference community were we go look for what we need either for giving input to external parties for developing proposals but also for keeping track of how well we are fulfilling our Strategic Intent."

Another regional CoP member has lower expectations of what the CoP will be or should be in the future.

"I hope and I assume that it remain to exist, at least don't stop with it, I don't think it will be much more active but as a shared library on Huddle it will save us time and once in a while there will be a real nice new project and it will be a challenge that somebody needs expertise from others and that is a good reasons to have another meeting or, meetings anyway. So it is just like a regularly team meeting, you don't have always things to say but at least you keep each other updated."

This respondent hopes that the CoP will become 'just like a regular team meeting'. Apparently, those meetings do not take on a regular base in the organization.

So, the perspective on the exact nature of the CoP in the future tends to differ among the regional CoP members. Some perceive the CoP to be a model for the organization or a way to change the organization whereas others perceive the CoP to be a think tank or shared library. Nonetheless, all regional CoP members hope that the CoP in some form or way continues to exist in the organization. Thereby they clearly state that the CoP has value and a right to exist in Wetlands International and mostly hold the organization but also the CoP members responsible for improving and keeping the CoP going.

7.4 Summary

All respondents clearly state that the CoP as a right to exist in the organization and answer the question whether the CoP should continue with an absolute 'yes'. Perspectives on how the CoP will continue to exist in the organization, differs among the respondents. Regional CoP members mention that the CoP could act like regular team meetings or as a shared library or think tank. In contrast, headquarter CoP members and

headquarter staff members mostly talk about the future of the CoP in terms of the current purpose and set up of the CoP.

When talking about the improvements of the CoP. Headquarter staff and headquarter CoP members, mostly mention 'institutionalizing' the CoP as one of the main improvements of the CoP. Institutionalizing the CoP could stimulate more and easier participation but could also change the organization as a whole into a more connected one, according to the respondents. Regional CoP mention practical improvements of the CoP like switching from Skype to a teleconference call and inviting more people but also mention a better positioning of the CoP in the organization as an improvement. Regional CoP members explain that the CoP could grow and become more influential if it gets a more clear position and role in the organization.

Most respondents thus see the future of the CoP as more engrained in the organization and as a way to change the organization into a more connected one. Respondents have different opinions about who is responsible for these improvements. Most respondents mention that the organization is responsible but regional and headquarter CoP members both mention that CoP members could become more responsible for the CoP in the future as well.

8

Analysis of framing the community of practice

In the previous four chapters, several issues emerged that can be explained with the help of literature. Those issues came forward when talking about the expectations and experiences of the respondents involved in the community of practice (CoP) and will be discussed in this chapter.

8.1. Framing content and process

As explained, people expected different things of the CoP before participating in the CoP. Some expected the CoP to be a discussion platform whereas others thought the CoP was all about knowledge sharing. Also what the CoP should bring the organization and people involved, differed among the respondents. Some focussed on gaining knowledge, others thought the CoP to be a way to connect and discuss organizational issues.

These varying frames of the respondents, are not reflected in the set-up documents of the CoP that are about the short term and long term purpose of the CoP as well as the rules and decisions about the functioning – like rules of engagement - of the CoP. There tend to be differences between what is written down about what the CoP is, what it should do, how it should function and what it should bring the organization and how the respondents talk about these issues.

This difference between practice and paper relates to theory about framing. People base their frames on their own set of values, norms, objectives, interests, convictions and knowledge at a certain moment (Aarts and van Woerkum 2006). As explained in previous chapters, the position of the respondent relates to the interest he or she has with participating in the CoP or with cultivating the CoP but also to the objectives someone has of the CoP. Subsequently, different frames might exist among the respondents about the content, processes and relations of the CoP.

These frames are negotiated in interaction and in these interactions, the content, processes and relations of the CoP are constructed. How people talk about the CoP, becomes the CoP according to constructivism (Ford 1999). It is therefore not strange to discover that what has been written down is no longer represented in talk; communication has caught up with it. However, it is interesting to find out (1) that some things written down do not seem to be known by most people involved in the CoP and (2) that there are different frames but also common frames among the people involved in the CoP about the purpose, content, functioning and relations of the CoP.

As explained in chapter four, membership of the CoP varied in early stages of the CoP and several CoP members have been employed recently. This suggests that what has been written down is not presented to all the people that are currently involved of the CoP. Furthermore, the lack of common frames about the content and processes side of the CoP, suggests that there is no strong connection yet between the people involved in the CoP. According to Elias and Scotson (1994) relational connection comes forward in language. Common frames and speech express that people from a group belong together.

Ford (1999) also argues that people will think and talk the same over time when being strongly connected or becoming connected. Interpretative communities emerge in the network that is constituted of people who, through social interaction, try to maintain a certain interpretation of what is going on. Differences in frames about content and processes of the CoP thus refer to the relationships in the CoP and the people involved in the CoP. As explained in chapter six, being connected and linking up with colleagues is perceived to be the main value of the CoP. This suggests that people in the CoP did not feel well connected yet to each other and the organization. They did not make sense collectively of what is going on in the CoP, for example (Elias and Scotson 1994).

However, among the respondents several communities can be identified by the use of 'we', 'us' and 'them'; like headquarter staff and regional staff. Those 'groups' share a certain interpretation of themselves and

the other which suggest that they are connected and belong together (Ford 1999). The next paragraph explains this issue further.

8.2. Framing relations and identity

According to Ford (1999) organizations are constituted of networks of conversations. Those conversations constitute first and second order realities and provide the texture of the organization. Within conversations people negotiate about situations and making sense of those situations. As explained earlier, people who work together in a network – people who try to maintain a certain interpretation - tend to share the same language (Ford 1999). With language people can construct their 'own group' and thereby separate themselves from 'the others' (Elias and Scotson 1994).

Within an organization, like Wetlands International or the CoP, several 'groups' exist which also comes forward from chapter five. Headquarter staff tends to talk about regional staff as '*them*' and thereby suggest they do not belong to the group 'regional staff'. In return, regional staff also tends to talk about headquarter staff in terms of '*them*'. Within headquarters, headquarter CoP members also tend to distance themselves from headquarter staff by talking about '*them*', however this comes forward less prominent.

By using the words '*them*' and '*we*' dividing lines within the organization are constructed and boundary work occurs. All three groups distinguish and establish their 'group' identities by comparing and contrasting themselves to other people (Shirley 2010). Whereas this research did not focus on boundary work that is done by the respondents, some comparisons and contrasts can be determined by focussing on identity and characterization frames. Headquarter staff members perceive themselves, and thereby exclude others, as owners of the CoP. Headquarter and regional CoP members do not tend to see themselves like owners compared to headquarter staff; '*what did they [headquarter staff] have in mind with the CoP?*'

Furthermore, communication difficulties tend to be part of this configuration, according to headquarter CoP member. Those difficulties were '*probably extremely important*' when headquarter staff decided to develop a CoP, as explained in paragraph 5.1.2.

"I should not underestimate how difficult the relations between us [headquarters] is and the regional offices are."

Interestingly, headquarter CoP members now construct themselves to be part of the group 'headquarters'. This is identified in literature, which explains that identities are constructed in interaction with the context and subject at hand (Haar, Aarts and Verhoeven 2010). Depending on the topic, the boundaries are shifted. Interestingly, the organization wanted, with the development of the CoP to shift and cross those boundaries in order to increase collaboration within the network and thereby alleviate communication difficulties. The boundaries between these various groups in the organization that came forward in this thesis, suggest that the organization has not been successful yet. Nonetheless, the need to belong and to connect of the respondents shows that people are willing to shift boundaries. This is also expressed by the respondent in paragraph 7.1. when talking about the future of the CoP and the organization.

"I hope that the people in the organization will operate more as a team".

That changing boundaries and subsequently how people construct their own identity and the identity of the other, is not easily changed, explains the concept self-reference. Self-reference refers to the characteristic of people and organizations to perceive what is going on with own ideas about what is important and not (Aarts 2009). Subsequently, people and organizations continue to see issues and to not see other issues (Mens-Verhulst 1992). Because of that, people and organizations are prone to reproduce identities and boundaries rather than adjusting them.

In order to deal with self-reference, organizations have to stay in touch with what is happening continuously and react accordingly. Communication with the organizational environment has to go hand in hand with

self-reflection and according to Burnes (2005), organizational context has to support these processes. Subsequently, the identity and the course of the organization can be adjusted in order to stay connected internally and externally.

Because the respondent often mentioned the organizational context when talking about the CoP, the next paragraph discusses those perceptions in more detail. This is relevant because perceptions construct reality (Ford 1999); also the organizational reality. Furthermore, several authors (Bourhis and Dubé 2010; Handley et al. 2006; Kimble 2006; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002) argue that organizational context is one of the factors that influence a CoP and the functioning of the CoP.

8.3. Framing the organization and responsibility

All respondents mentioned organizational matters like organizational culture in relation to challenges of the CoP and the future of the CoP. Opinions vary from low attention to relations and processes, not being connected and knowing whom to contact for issues to ambiguities concerning organizational identity. Furthermore, several respondents mention that discussions, reflections and organizational wide discussion do not take place on a regular base in the organization. These perceptions, explain why many respondents perceive the CoP as a 'chance' to connect, link up and belong to the organization. Apparently, they perceive the CoP as a solution for an existing problem in the organization.

Especially regional CoP members explain their need to belong to the whole organization - not only to their regional office - clearly, as the quotes of regional CoP members in chapter five and seven show.

"I expected opportunities for getting involved with initiatives in other countries. That is what I expected."

"It kind of gave me the opportunity to get connected and meet up with everybody."

Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that the feeling of belonging is a fundamental human need. This need occurs when time and the ability to connect are sparse and when people are not considered on a regular base in organizational wide discussion and decisions. This need to belong influences the motivation of people and their satisfactions with their work negatively, according to Morrison and Milliken (2000). Because of that, people will try to still their need to belong by connecting with people in the organization like participating in the CoP or organizational wide trainings, for example. Furthermore, an organizational climate in which people do not feel connected and do not seem to be connected and where decisions making seems to be centralized, corresponds to Morrison and Milliken (2000) paper about organizational silence.

Whereas Wetlands International invests, with the CoP as an example, in increasing collaboration and cooperation, forces inside the organization might prevent her from doing so (Morrison and Milliken 2000). What those forces exactly entail in Wetlands International, was not the focus of this research but in the results, several issues come forward.

Some respondents explained (chapter five and six) that according to them, the organization functions hierarchical and does not involve or listen to all employees regarding position statements or organizational discussions. This suggests that there is low upward feedback from the respondents and that the suggested hierarchies in the organization might play a role in this configuration. Furthermore, it suggest that 'speaking up' would not make a difference which refers to managers implicit beliefs, according to (Morrison and Milliken (2000)). These beliefs are often 'espoused theories' rather than 'theories in use'; what we think we do and belief is often not what we truly do and truly belief.

Implicit beliefs might come forward in the perceptions of headquarter staff members on the CoP; they focus on output and on what the CoP will bring the organization and thereby might have an implicit economic perspective on employees, for example. Furthermore, having low upward feedback and no time for

discussion or reflection in the organization - according to respondents - might relate to the implicit belief that management might know better what the positions or decisions of the organization should be, compared to employees. These forces might prevent Wetlands International employees to cooperate between offices, departments and functions.

Furthermore, low priority to process and relations might enforce this organizational climate from inside. Because of this, there is no mechanism or time available to tap into conversations of employees that construct the organization and the CoP (Ford 1999) in order to adjust the internal and external identity, boundaries and processes (Burnes 2005; Haar, Aarts and Verhoeven 2010). This might relate to the continuous discussion about the identity of the organization and the identity of the CoP, as explained by some respondents. Question that came forward from respondents, as described in chapter six and seven, are: who are we as an organization, what should the CoP be and enable and how does the CoP fit into the organization?

Most respondents hold the organization accountable for the current organizational climate and the current state of affairs of the CoP but also for future development of the CoP; they suggest that the organization should work in the future on being more connected and democratic. Thereby they shift responsibilities and accountability of the situation to the organization (Potter 1996) as this quote from paragraph 7.3 of a regional CoP members shows.

"The organization bets on this type of knowledge management (...) then of course, than it has to make some decisions. "

Furthermore, they voice the hope that the CoP will change the organization for the best and thereby imply that the organization should enable more attention to discussions, collective development of mission statements and provide more opportunities to connect, share and exchange. The next chapter focuses on communicative recommendations for the organization to deal with these organizational issues and to develop the CoP further.

9

Conclusions and recommendations

In the previous chapters, the findings of the research have been presented with many quotes and some short stories of the respondents. In short, respondent want the community of practice (CoP) to continue and see potential in the CoP. In this chapters practical recommendations are described that could help the CoP of Wetlands International to grow further into its potential. Firstly, this chapter presents answers to the research question and summarizes those answers. From these conclusions, recommendations for CoP of Wetlands International followed. Together, the conclusions and recommendations answer the main research question of this study: *how do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame the CoP of Wetlands International and which recommendations follow out of the analysis of these frames?*

9.1. Conclusions

Starting point of the research is that reality is constructed through interactions and communications. How people make sense, interpret and give meaning to issues becomes reality in communication. Analyzing communications thus provides insight in the way how people understand, interpret and develop meaning about the issues Wetlands International wants to know about. Using theory about framing and frames, the following sub research questions were developed that connect with the issues Wetlands International wanted to know more about.

- *How do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame their expectations about the content, process and relations of the CoP before participating in the CoP?*
- *How do the CoP members of Wetlands International frame their experiences with participating in the CoP in terms of values and challenges of the CoP?*
- *How do the CoP members frame their expectations about the content, process and relations of the future of the CoP?*

In the following paragraphs, answers to the sub research questions are presented and summarized. With these insights that follow out of these conclusions, this research developed recommendations that are described in the next section.

9.1.1. Framing expectations before participation

Regional CoP members had elaborate expectations about the CoP, what the CoP would discuss and what it would bring them. They voiced expectations in terms of content; learning about projects, sharing information and knowledge. Only regional CoP members had expectations about content. Furthermore, they framed their expected in terms of process and relations; they expected to connect to colleagues across the world and contribute to international issues as well as organizational discussions. Regional CoP members voiced those expectations in terms of 'me', and 'I'; they had personal expectations of the CoP. This suggests that the content and connections that the CoP offers are not available on a regular base for the regional CoP members.

Headquarter CoP members framed the CoP as an organizational solution to existing communication and cooperation difficulties in the organization. In contrast, headquarter staff members mostly voiced their expectations about the CoP in terms of 'organization'. This reflects their position in the organization and the CoP; they were involved in the development of the CoP but participate from the sidelines in the CoP. Headquarter CoP members also might be better connected to people and knowledge, but this does not come prominent forward in the research.

These different perspectives on the CoP relate to Elias (1994) who argues that low amounts of common frames means that the organization did not make sense of the CoP collectively. The absence of most regional CoP members and some headquarter CoP members in the first meetings of the CoP explain this as well as the frame of regional CoP members about the CoP as 'opportunity'; this suggest that they do not take part regularly in organizational wide discussions. Wetlands International is with the CoP already working on becoming more connected, but these results show that there is much more potential and

willingness in the organization to connect. The CoP could help the organization with this process, as one of the recommendations describes.

Expectations about the functioning and the organization of the CoP were sparse among the CoP members. Headquarter staff expected this set-up of the CoP, which relates to their active role in the organization. Nonetheless their sparse expectations, CoP members refer to their experience when talking about expectations and then mostly mention challenges of the CoP which the next paragraph discusses.

9.1.2. Framing experiences with participating

All CoP members tend to offer various positive evaluations of their participating in the CoP. The headquarters and regional CoP members tell that the CoP brought them value and clearly frame that the CoP has a right to exist in the organization. Regional CoP members explain that the CoP enabled them to (1) know whom to contact, (2) to connect with colleagues and experts, to (3) learn and obtain information and to (4) contribute to the organization as a whole. Headquarter CoP members also mention becoming more connected and knowing whom to contact as positive things that the CoP brought them.

Headquarter staff respondents tend to focus more on challenges of the CoP and mention that participation and contribution by CoP members is not living up to it. Furthermore, technical issues of Huddle and low expert input are mentioned by them. Regional and headquarter CoP members also mention that the current amount of participation and contribution by CoP members and expert is lacking which prevents the CoP from working properly. All CoP members mention that they are not always able to contribute because they have no knowledge or (practical) experience with the topic at hand. Furthermore, scheduling issues are mentioned, a lack of time and the workload of urgent issues are mentioned by the CoP members as factors that influence participation. Besides that, they explain that the non-committal character of the CoP makes it possible to not contribute and participate; they put the CoP aside for more urgent issues.

The factors that influence participation and contribution strengthen each other in the CoP. Because of low participation and contribution, learning and knowledge exchange is low which in turn also influences participation and contribution; it reinforces this process. Moreover, all respondents also mention organizational matters in relations to the challenges of the CoP; the culture of the organization is not supportive for processes like learning, connecting and sharing according to the respondents. Thereby they imply that they hold the organization responsible for the current state of affairs in the CoP, as the next sections also explains.

9.1.3. Framing (future) expectations and improvements

All respondents answer the question whether the CoP should continue with an absolute 'yes'. In what form the CoP will continue and what improvements the CoP needs, differs among respondents. Headquarter staff members and headquarter CoP members mostly talk about institutionalizing the CoP and thereby integrate the CoP into daily work. In line with this, some regional CoP members mention that the CoP should get a clearer role and task in the organization. Other regional CoP members mostly mention technical improvements like improving Huddle and replacing Skype with teleconferencing. Furthermore, all respondents frame the CoP as a 'solution' or 'vehicle' to change the organization. Thereby they characterize the organization as something that needs developed more. This development is often framed as an organization that is more cooperative, democratic and connected.

Who is responsible for these improvements and 'institutional change' through the CoP, is mostly framed to be the organization. Regional CoP members frame themselves as having low power to change the current situation. Most respondents blame the organization for the current set-up and state of affairs of the CoP but also 'the CoP members' are mentioned as a responsible party.

9.1.4. Framing relations and the organization

Besides talking about expectations and experiences, respondents also often talked about the organization and the internal configuration in the organization. Chapter eight discussed several insights that come forward in the results with respect to relations within the organization and how respondents perceived the organization. The results show that within Wetlands International, as in all organizations and communities, several 'groups' are constructed by people; especially the group 'headquarters' and the group 'regional staff' came forward in this research. This construction creates boundaries within the organization, as explained in chapter eight.

Furthermore, several issues came forward in chapter eight that might influence becoming more connected within the organization. Those issues are about implicit beliefs about employees, low priority setting to relations and process and low upward feedback channels in the organization. Whereas those organizational issues were not the focus of the research, they do come forward from results like 'the need to belong' of regional CoP members.

Nonetheless these issues, all respondents clearly voice the hope to become better connected to each other and the organization. They mostly perceive the CoP as a way to enable these processes and this offers a chance for the organization to tune into this. In the next paragraphs, recommendations are described that help the organization to develop the CoP and thereby the organization more.

9.2. Recommendations

Taking the answer to the sub research questions into account, the following recommendations are developed for continuation and growth of the CoP. Together with the answers to the sub research questions, these recommendation answer the main research question of this research. The next paragraphs describe three recommendations for Wetlands International.

9.2.1. Integrate the community of practice in daily work

As explained, respondents find it difficult to participate and contribute because of scheduling issues, lack of time, workload, priority to more urgent issues and because of no experience or knowledge about the topics discussed. Integrating the CoP in daily work, projects and time will enable participants to contribute more automatically and easier because it becomes part of daily work routine, according to literature (Bourhis and Dube, 2010, Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2003). Furthermore, several respondents mentioned this as a possible solution to increase participation and contribution.

However, integrating the CoP asks for fine-tuning expectations and perceptions about the CoP. As explained, respondents have different expectations and ideas about what the CoP is and what its purpose is. Whereas the CoP can connect these multiple visions, fine tuning expectations and perceptions could prevent disappointment, increase participation and ownership of the CoP (Bourhis and Dube, 2010; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). Fine-tuning the CoP could take place during a face to face meeting, another international meeting or during two or three webinars through teleconference to ensure everybody can engage in discussions.

One way to integrate the CoP into daily work would be to negotiate for official time and support of the CoP in donor contracts. The CoP could be put under the 5-10% office costs in contracts, for example. With this official time (and money) for the CoP, people who work on similar tasks could share and ask input of each other on a weekly basis. Moreover, the CoP could be offered to a donor as a 'multidisciplinary team with global experiences' to deal with complex issues and challenges; it could be sold in some sort of commercial way.

In both solutions, the CoP could raise money and thereby time to participate and to solve its technical difficulties. In the latter solution, the CoP could work in cooperation with the project team on projects that need the expertise of such a multidisciplinary team. Thereby, the CoP will get (1) a more concrete task in the organization, (2) time and money to participate and maybe (3) attract expert input because of the

project that such expertise needs. Less experienced people could learn from these experts and subsequently, the organization would build its knowledge capital and increase collaboration and sharing.

Another solution is to integrate the CoP into the organization without the input of donor money and selling of the CoP. Several respondents explain that the organization should invest more into its evaluation and monitoring system, when talking about the future of the CoP. The CoP could be one way of investing in evaluation and monitoring. Evaluation and monitoring sessions could take place in the CoP, for example. How this exactly could be executed and regulated should be discussed within the organization. It is difficult to provide concrete solutions as an outsider to the project management praxis of Wetlands International.

9.2.2. Support people who participate and stimulate participation

Most CoP members explain that participating in the CoP outside regular working hours is challenging. Whereas, time differences across the globe cannot be changed, the CoP could split sometimes in two groups who are in a similar time zone to make participation easier. Those groups could report back to each other, as one regional CoP member proposed during the interviews. This could make participation easier for people who cannot make it to evening or morning webinars.

Besides time, having access to supportive technologies are important for the growth of the CoP, according to literature (Lesser and Storck, 2001; Bourhis and Dube, 2010, Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2003; Roberts, 2006). Investing in technologies like teleconference or an easier online forum, could pull people towards the CoP more. One example is to use Yammer as an online forum which is similar to Facebook. People can put Yammer on their computer desktop and can easily update photos, articles, links or videos. They don't have to log on when they have Yammer on their desktop, the interface works easily and people are able to (group) chat with each other. Furthermore, Yammer attends you that there is a new message or update which also might pull people towards the interface.

Furthermore, as explained above, the organization could give people official time to participate in the CoP by making the choice to do so or by selling the CoP in contracts and to donors. Many respondents show that having no time to participate prevents participation. Having time to participate should be connected with having responsibility for the CoP and its functioning. As the results show, the non-committal character of the CoP allows people to 'put it aside'. It would be prudent to connect having time with having to participate in the CoP; to give it priority and urgency.

Another idea to stimulate participation in the CoP would be to give people an active role in the CoP. Facilitation of the CoP could circulate as well as having the responsibility to make a report.

9.2.3. Make the webinars or meeting more attractive

As explained, participation might be difficult due to various factors. The CoP members mention several issues in the research that makes participation difficult like technical issues, low expert input, and no follow up of previous webinars. Whereas some issues like scheduling with people who live on different continents are difficult to solve, some issues might be good to look into. The quality of the Skype chat is one of those issues. According to respondents, it makes participation difficult. Often, the connection disappears or the sound is noisy. Investing in better technique is thus clearly one of the things that could make webinars more attractive.

Respondents also explained that they would like to participate in webinars in which an expert is invited to talk about a certain theme. Having different positions and expertise in the CoP might enable learning and sharing, according to literature (Wenger, 2012). The webinar on blue carbon was mentioned as an example by some respondents. If technique and time continues to prevent participation, the expert could upload a video on YouTube or on Huddle in which he shares his knowledge or presents a certain topic. People can watch in their own time, or within a set time of several days, and respond on Huddle to the video.

A live personal chat with the experts, for 10 minutes, might also increase knowledge sharing to occur. Furthermore, several respondents mentioned during the interview that the 'storytelling meeting' was of

great importance for them. It could be interesting to spend several webinars on storytelling; one person could share a story and then discussion could take place for example. Again, the storyteller could also record his story and share this beforehand with the participants in order to make the webinar more effective. One hour is a short to discuss and ask questions, according to respondents.

Furthermore, follow up on previous webinars during a webinar can make the webinars more attractive and stimulate putting the webinars in practice. This follow up can refresh the memory of the people and create a 'we are really doing something' according to several respondents. Moreover, concrete task or jobs for the CoP or some people in the CoP could stimulate participation, according to some respondents.

9.2.4. Spend time on connecting and becoming a team

In this research it came forward that the respondents want to work more as a team, connect and collaborate. It also came forward that headquarter and regional offices do not tend to perceive themselves as one group but create boundaries between headquarters and regional offices. In order to become more a team and create a group feeling, one of the webinars could be spend on growing as a 'team'.

For example, the CoP members could role play their different positions and how they see the other. Thereby, boundaries and difficulties can be discussed in a safe environment. Not only how they see each other, the we/them configuration, but also participation, cultural and language related issues might be discussed in this webinar. These issues also came forward in the results of this research. By making these issues explicit, the CoP could grow!

10 Discussion

This final chapter consists of a reflection upon the limitations of the research and a personal reflection on the research. In this personal reflection I also included some personal observations about the organization and issues I spoke about in informal ways with people that relate to the research. They might provide the organization with a perspective of an 'outsider'.

10.1. Limitations of the research and a reflection on the research

The community of practice (CoP) at Wetlands International is described in chapter one and four of this thesis. Whereas some things have been constant, most things have developed during the last year. New webinars took place, an extra facilitator was attracted and I talked to even more people about the research during an international meeting. During this international meeting I could explain some preliminary results and I received feedback from various people. Things also changed for the people I talked to, some left the organization and others gained a different function. They moved on when I wrote this thesis.

The frames determined and analysed in this thesis are not permanent but are continuously changing, as it is the nature of frames (Aarts and van Woerkum 2006). I collected the data from the end of March 2013 until the end of June 2013 which was half a year after the face to face meeting in Bogor, people were excited and hopeful but at the same time already felt challenged to participate. One limitation of the research is therefore the short time frame analysed in this thesis. It would have been great to follow the respondents over a longer time period in order to explore how the CoP evolved and how participants dealt with it.

Finding respondents was more difficult than expected, mostly because of the short time frame. Some respondents I would have liked to interview were not able to do so because of scheduling issues, for example. Nonetheless the diversity of the respondents is still good but having their input in this study would have been interesting.

After data collection, I had quite some data in the form of documents, transcribed interviews and observation notes. This data contained a lot of information on various issues related with the CoP. Each respondent had a different focus, background and perspective for example. I had to choose some topics to focus on during the research and therefore had to leave some aspects of the case out. For example, during the first phase of the research I focussed on how learning occurs in the CoP but I had to let this aspect out. The limiting time factor of the research also led to a narrower story compared to when I would have had more time.

Other limitations that are most frequently mentioned about a qualitative research and single case studies are the low generalizability of a case study and the direct involvement of the researcher which might result in bias (Flyvbjerg 2006). However, Flyvbjerg (2006) undermines these objections by stating with respect to a possible bias the opposite is more likely to be true. He argues that most researchers of case studies had to revise their initial views and ideas based on the information that was gathered instead of that they influenced the research. I count myself as one of those researchers; when going more in depth into the CoP I also had to revise my ideas about the CoP and the people involved in the CoP.

Moreover, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that single-case studies are mostly based on falsification than on verification; single-case studies more often challenge the ideas of the researcher rather than confirming them. He also states that single case studies can be generalized based in this principle of falsification. An in-depth study provides the perfect opportunity to identify examples where a statement or theory can be proven false, therefore allowing generalization to occur by use of that example.

Furthermore, I never wrote a master thesis, did qualitative research or analysed interviews. My social research skills and academic skills are still developing which is also limiting factor of the width and quality of this research. However, I learned a lot during this research as the next paragraph describes more in depth and I am sure that I gave the people of the CoP a voice and can provide Wetlands International insight in the CoP and recommendations.

10.2. Reflections on the research process and the organization

During the first year of my masters, I found it hard to think about a thesis topic. Most of the courses I took were quite abstract and to translate it into practice of a research topic, wide enough for half a year of research was something I found difficult. Halfway 2012 I discussed some topics and Wetlands International came into the picture. However, around that time I left for half a year to Helsinki to do some courses of European Studies and the end of 2012, I had some meetings at Wetlands International about the CoP and their purposes with my thesis. I found Communities of Practice an interesting topic and after some initial discussions, I started at the beginning of January with my master thesis about the community of practice.

During the first phase of the research I discussed several research approaches and focuses with my supervisors. During the proposal phase I read a lot of literature on communities of practice, learning theories and organizational learning. Most of it I found very interesting, because of my background in Biology, I felt that I had a lot to catch up with. Also, the idea of a community of practice was foreign to me and I felt that I had to read a lot about it. Furthermore, we discussed the possibility of doing action research. When the proposal took shape I had to let go of some ideas and focus more on what has become the topic of this research.

During the proposal and data collection phase of the research, I worked several days a week at Wetlands International. Often I observed what was going on, how people interacted and during lunch I talked to some people. During this phase I often found it difficult to separate my own feelings about the organization and the community of practice with the research. Balancing involvement and distance was hard for me. Because of that, I choose to participate not very actively in the community of practice during the time I executed the research. After a few months I had to transcribe the interviews and write the report at university, and I realized that this distance was good to reflect on my feelings and to write a report true to the data collected.

During my bachelors I learned a different approach to research and therefore I often felt insecure about the research. I was not fully prepared for the iterative process and the more free approach to the topic, like this research knew. Furthermore, applying literature and to give meaning to this case was difficult to me. I often found myself asking ' what is this case a case of' as Flyvbjerg (2006) described. Therefore, I choose to let the respondents speak as much as possible, that is the result of this research; a virtual reality so to speak. When the research came to its closure, I had the idea that I grasped the case much better and could relate it to theory more.

Doing this research was thus an interesting experience for me. I learned a lot about how to do research varying from proposal writing, going back to the design of the research and the literature, doing fieldwork, interviewing and writing a good report. I am happy with the research process and experience I had with this thesis because it allowed me to learn a lot about doing social research, my future career and also about how I personally handle a research.

During the time I did my research, I also experienced the organization from up close and some things I found remarkable are to some extent reflected in this thesis. Some things I would like to mention in this personal reflection of this research. First of all, I was really impressed with the dedication of the people of Wetlands International. At the Ede office I talked to many people who were passionate about wetlands, birds or nature but also the regional respondents were very passionate about their work. I remember the dedication and passion of some respondents very clearly!

This passion was also reflected at the webinars in which people enthusiastically responded and in the interviews I had with the respondents. All respondents were very concerned about the future of wetlands but also about the future of the organization. They talked about issues they did not like in the organization and they also mentioned several hopes for the future of the organization. The most prominent hope for the future is being better connected with one and another. Besides that, I also felt with many respondents the hope for developing a common organizational perspective or approach to certain issues.

In the talks I had with people at the Ede office, I also heard of their frustrations with the workload, specific people, the lack of time to do some things but also about the tension with regional offices. Several times I asked people about this tension and often I felt that people tended to hold regional offices accountable and responsible for those communication difficulties or tensions. Because I was interested in finding out the other side of the story, I email a regional head of office and got a surprising answer. I expected that the tension would be related to e-mail conversations, time of response or delayed reports but the regional head of office e-mailed me something different.

“There can be a different assessment of ‘good’. For example, [an] office believes a project is going well because there were some trees planted which involved the community, headquarters might not think all is well because the project is not scientifically justified and there is no continuation of the project proposed. Personally, I think you can resolve this to speak in advance about what is good and what you mean with it. Also, make SMART decisions which is not done always. I think that herein lies a task for headquarters to make appointments explicit and clear. Furthermore, I think that the regional offices think they are more independent than headquarters thinks they are. This may also be cause of the difficulties.”

Whereas I did not research the relation between headquarters and the regional office, I realized that the relation between headquarters and regional offices seems to be a point of pain for both. That appointments are not always very strict, is something I encountered personally. Most of my interview appointments were cancelled, most often at the time I called, and often I had to reschedule whereas I sent a confirmation e-mail of the appointment and a reminder e-mail beforehand. I encountered this at headquarters and the regional offices and apparently, this seems to be normal at the organization because people told me *‘this happens all the time’*.

During the conversations at lunch and with the respondents, I also heard about the internal communication difficulties. I also encountered this personally and this made me feel a bit disappointed. It felt that it was widely known in the organization that I studied the CoP but nobody updated me about decisions with respect to the CoP like the start of a second CoP, for example. From several employees at Wetlands International I heard that *‘this happens also all the time’* and that the organization does *‘not even have an intranet and project database’*.

Another thing I found surprising at Wetlands International is that besides the dedication people have to their work, they tend to have a great workload. There does not seem to be time for just a social chat about a difficult project; people do not tend to share challenges or positive work related things on the work floor. The open workspace does not enable more communications at Wetlands International, in my opinion. There seems to be a distinction between the left and right side open space; people from the right only talk to people from the right and the same counts for people from the left.

Nonetheless these communication issues, I think that the CoP is one of the mechanisms that could stimulate more and better communications within the headquarter office and within the organization as a whole. After webinars I often had the best talks with people and all the CoP members I spoke to are enthusiastic to work on better communications. Moreover, when I presented my preliminary results of the thesis in front of international Wetlands International employees, I felt that this feeling was shared by them. Many voiced the wish to develop more CoPs and become better connected and involved in the organization; thereby the CoP already has made an impact and I hope and wish it will continue to make more impact in the future as well.

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Appendix 1 Interview guide

First, I would like to thank you for your time. I appreciate it that you take the time to talk with me about the community of practice. The interview will take approximately one hour, it can be shorter or longer. Purpose of the interview is that I get an idea of your perspective on the community of practice; we will discuss various things that I am interested in like your expectations, experience and motivation to participate in the CoP. Feel free to talk and take your time to think about the question.

The interview will be recorded because then I can really take a look at what you say . What you say will be confidential, I won't share it with anybody and what you say can be quoted in my thesis but of course, it will be anonymous. So, do you consent that I tape the interview and use the interview for my thesis? Like I said, it will be anonymous and I will keep the interview confidential.

Date & place interview:

Name:

Age:

Nationality:

Education:

Function at WI:

Time worked at WI:

Anonymity asked:

Consent taping & use in thesis: yes/no

Motivation to participate in the CoP

- Can you tell me how you become involved in the CoP?
- Why do you think they asked you? Who asked you, and what did he/she told you exactly?
- What appealed to you regarding the content of the CoP? Did you find the topics interesting? Or the expert knowledge? Or something else?
- Did you join mostly because of the topics discussed and the content or also about the contacts?
- Did you think you should be in the CoP, and why? Or something else? Why?
- People say that the CoP is one of the first in its kind in the organization. It is a new way of connecting people. What appealed to you regarding the (new) way of working in the CoP? Like meeting people on a regular basis? Why so? Can you give me an example? What else?

Expectations about the CoP

- When the CoP kicked off, what did you expect of the content of the CoP in terms of the topics discussed? Did you expect to learn or gain something and if so, what exactly? Can you make it concrete? What else?
- When the CoP kicked off, what did you expect of the way the CoP is organized when you think about the webinars? The facilitation and frequency, topics of the webinars and how this is decided upon?
- Or what did you expect of for example the use of Huddle to chat, post documents and archive? Can you give an example?
- When the CoP kicked off, whom did you expect to participate? Why so? Can you give me an example? And what else?
- What did you expect of the amount of attendance in the CoP? And what did you expect of the contribution? For example on Huddle? And in the webinars?
- The CoP might not only take place via webinars or Skype, you also might have other ways of contacting each other. Did you expect something about this?
- Do you already have contact with some offices, and if so, which one? Or do you mostly have contact with Ede office? Or another office? Can you give an example?
- The CoP is in a sense a new way of working, what did you expect of this?

- According to literature you would expect that everyone would be allowed to give input, talk freely and that everybody is allowed to participate. Of course, opinions differ. What do you think or expected about this?

Experiences with participating in the CoP

- In what way did your experiences match your expectation?
- I am interested in how you experienced the content of the CoP. Which topics are on the agenda? And what is discussed? Can you give me an example of this?
- And the expert that are invited? What do they you talk about? What is your opinion about this?
- In which webinars did you participate and why?
- What is your contribution? Did you bring in new things that others could learn from? What exactly? And in what way do you contribute to the organization of the CoP?
- I also often see some documents flying by at Huddle and via the email. What are they about? Do you read them? Why? What do you think about them; are they relevant or boring? Are they too much? Do you send documents?
- Can you tell me more about Huddle? Do you use Huddle for something? Can you give me an example? Do you post something on Huddle, what? And why?
- Did you learn new things in the CoP during the last year? How did you learn this? What exactly? And do you use it in your daily life?
- Can you tell me whether the CoP made other differences in your work as well? What exactly? How do you feel about this?
- What would you change regarding the content, topics discussed of the CoP if you could? Do you feel like you can set topics on the agenda?
- Are you satisfied with this? And what else would like you to learn, maybe? Do you feel the freedom to say this? How so or why not?
- Do you feel like you can speak free and share things in the Cop? Do you think people take your words into account and listen to what you have to say? Can you give an example? What do you think about this?
- Are their people that have more to say than others and speak more often? Why is that? And who takes the initiative of issues regarding the CoP? And who takes up the work that needs to be done? What is your opinion about this?
- Do you think that the right people are in the CoP at the moment? Why so? Do you think some people are unnecessary in the CoP?
- What is your opinion about the contribution of others in the CoP in terms of frequency of joining, sharing perspectives, asking questions and taking initiative?
- Are you satisfied with this? What would be ideal according to you?
- What are things in the CoP that can be organized better, to your opinion? The facilitation of the webinar, the organization of the meetings and people involved? Basically how they CoP is set up?
- Are there others things that you would change if you should have control of the CoP?
- If you could design a CoP from the start, no limitation, how would you go about it in terms of the organization, the content but also in term of how people interact?

Expectations for the future of the CoP

- How do you see the future of the CoP, the near and the far? What do you expect of the content, the things that will be achieved, the way the CoP functions and the relationships among people involved?