

TEACHERS, STUDENTS & ALUMNI: BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING A VIRTUAL ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores online learning communities as a basis for sustainable academic organizational culture wherein learning, multi-directional mentoring and ongoing social network development are foundational for complex problem solving and enduring relationships among community members. First, the challenges of creating a virtual and meaningful academic organizational culture are explored from faculty, student, and alumni perspectives. Various aspects of learning, with emphasis on whole persons and community, deep smarts, grit, and knowledge sharing are delineated. Multi-directional mentoring and social network development are considered as pertinent to complex problem solving. Community development is inspected as an end unto itself. Peck's community building model and Tuckman's stages of group development are investigated for their relevance to the online learning environment. Finally, future directions for research are considered.