

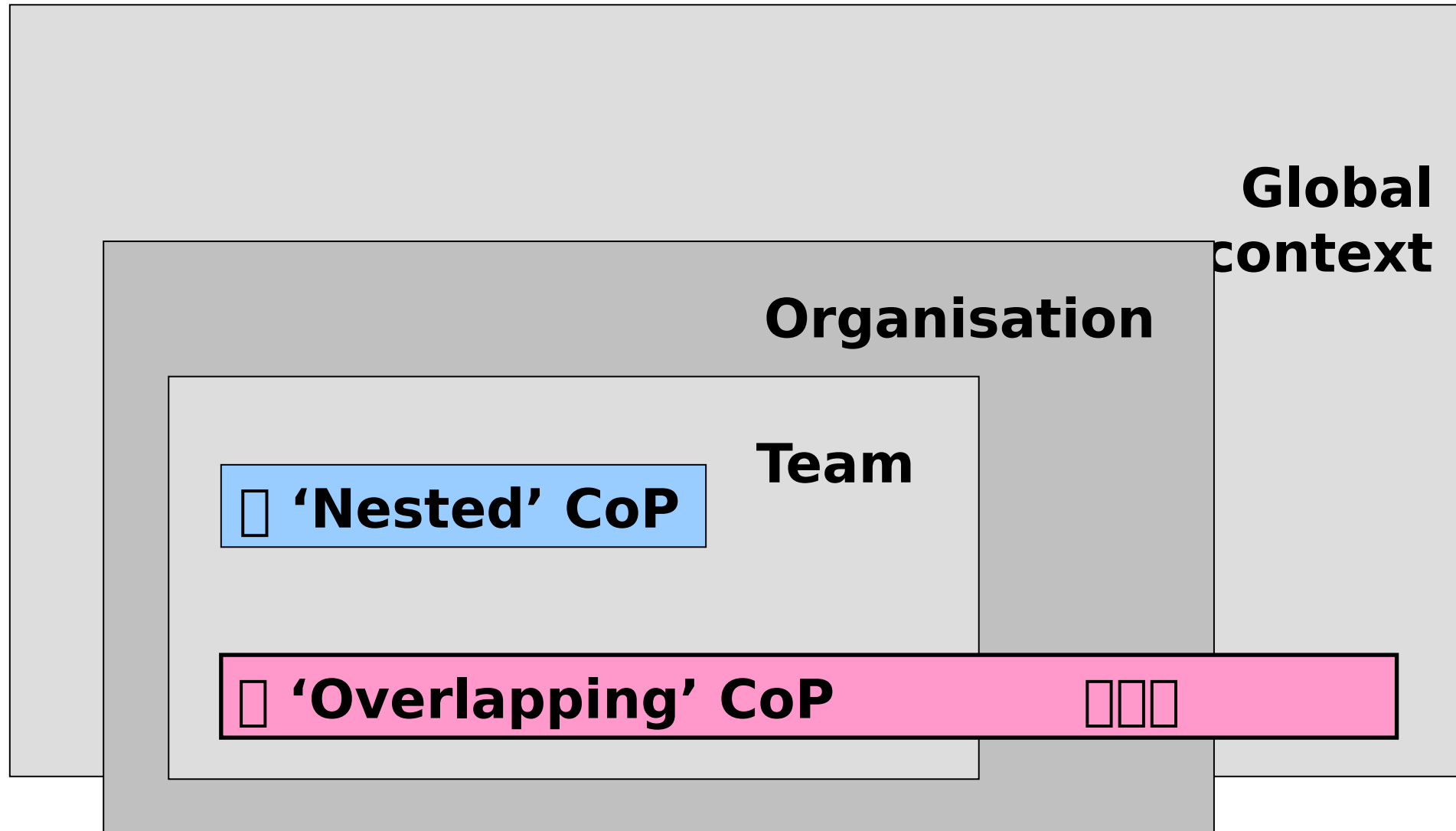
# Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis”.

*(Wenger et al, 2002)*



# Nested and Overlapping CoPs



# Organisational Benefits

<b>Short-Term Value (Improved Outcomes)</b>	<b>Long-Term Value (Develop Org Capabilities)</b>
Arena for problem solving	Ability to execute strategic plan
Quick answers to questions	Increased retention of staff talent
Improved quality of decisions	Forum for 'benchmarking' against development partners
More perspectives on problems	Knowledge-based alliances
Coordination, standardisation and synergies across units	Capability to develop new strategic options
Strengthened quality assurance for existing processes and systems	Emergence of unplanned capabilities
Ability to take risks with the backing of the community	Ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities

# Benefits to Community Members

Short-Term Value (Improved Experience of Work)	Long-Term Value (Foster Professional Development)
Help with challenges	Forum for expanding skills and expertise
Access to expertise	Network for keeping abreast of field
Better able to contribute to team	Enhanced professional reputation
Confidence in one's approach to problems	Increased marketability and employability
Fun of being with colleagues	Strong sense of professional identity
More meaningful participation	
Sense of belonging	

# Structural Elements

A Community of Practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements:



**Domain** of knowledge which defines a set of issues



**Community** of people who care about the domain



The shared **practice** that the community develops to be

effective in their domain

# Key Ingredients of a healthy CoP

- **Common purpose** - clearly defined objectives for the community and should be linked to specific outcomes and tasks that can be collaboratively developed.
- **Trust** - build on familiarity and shared experience
- **Safe** - networks must be safe spaces for practitioners to share experience and seek answers to questions
- **Common identity** - building common identity beyond the electronic exchange of

# Key Ingredients of a healthy CoP

- **Face to face** - most effective form of knowledge sharing; should be used strategically with technology
- **No hierarchy** - a sense of hierarchy can kill networks
- **Quality** of the product should be emphasised over quantity
- **Co-ordinator** to call meetings and facilitate the network

# Pitfalls to avoid



- Top-down direction
- One-way communication
- Lack of incentives and failure to recognise members contributions
- Too many interactions on process and a lack of substantive content
- Lack of direction (no mandate nor objectives)



# Pitfalls to avoid



- Weak or no co-ordination
- Lack of internal leadership (all members can play a leadership role)
- Lack of a sense of belonging to the community (too many members)
- Launching initiatives and not following them up