



Learning the Ropes: Fostering Positive Culture Through Documentation, Leadership, and Socialization within Organizations

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Introduction

Virtual organizations enable e-science projects to bring dispersed experts together to maximize the knowledge available in order to solve real world problems (Lee, Dourish & Mark, 2006). This study examines how documentation, leadership, and socialization promote positive cultures within virtual organizations. When these aspects are implemented, a positive culture can be achieved, which, in turn, will allow organizations to reach their highest potential.

Theoretical Perspective

Promoting a positive culture within an organization does not happen overnight; efforts and strides must occur in order to fully establish a culture that will lead to a more successful organization. The current study examines documentation, leadership, and socialization as the main objects to fostering a positive culture. However, there are several other factors that can be attributed to the success of an organization. Past research has investigated the necessary components required to establish a positive culture, some of which include shared values, operational styles, and management philosophy (Wilkins, 2006).

Regrettably, failure to promote positive culture can negatively impact an organization (Barney, 1986). However, positive organizational culture can help members of groups feel more positivity in their workplace. Moreover, such a positive culture will lead to a more productive organization with higher performing members (Aragon, 1993; Blatter & Walter, 2015; Wilkins, 2006). Research of organizations has found that establishing a leader who promotes the core values of the organization can bring an organization to new heights (Blattner & Walter, 2015). Ultimately, leadership and culture are intertwined and essential ingredients in developing successful organizations.

This current study aims to examine how taking action can promote a positive organizational culture will further the success of the team. We ask the research question, “How can documentation, socialization, and leadership within an organization foster positive culture in order to reach their highest potential?”

Methodology

This poster employed the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), analyzing 133 interviews conducted with domain scientists (e.g., informatics researchers, computational chemists, theoretical physicists.) and computational technologists. Thirty-five of these interviews were member check interviews conducted in the final phase of the investigation. Participants were from across the US (including CA, IL, IN, SC, MI, TX, etc.) and a small portion was from the UK (Scotland). Interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone. Following the grounded theory coding techniques, we performed multiple iterations of data analysis and literature integration, yielding preliminary findings presented in this poster.

Findings

Throughout the coding process, three common themes were found within:

Documentation	Leadership	Socialization
<p>Through documentation, members of organizations can fully understand how to implement changes to a tool, as well as understand the functions and processes of an organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Provide support, right. It could be documentation, they may have to do training, those kinds of things. So those fall under user support type things, documentation, training, that sort of thing.” (Computational Technologist, CA, 7/17/14) • “Something where the software works well for the developer who knows all the ins and outs of the software to the point where it becomes mature enough that you can hand it off to somebody else. And they can use it together with the documentation and test problems they provide. But without having to be sitting there in the office next to you and constantly asking how to use the software.” (Administrator, CA, 11/13/14) • “It needs to be well-documented. It needs to be understandable – everyone working on there needs to understand what’s happening with that tool... So that’s the most important thing is that you at the very basic level you need to provide enough information out there that people can come in. They know the language, but they don’t know what you did. And they can read everything and say, ‘Okay, I understand where I need to make changes to add my specific stuff...’” (Adopter & Co-Producer, NM, 11/19/14) 	<p>Without leadership, organizations will struggle to reach their maximum potential. Leaders help each individual achieve their goals, while incorporating the organization’s best interests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think sometimes actually the leadership matters a lot. The leadership can set the right tone and I’ve seen – and actually this is true for any organization, you can look at any group, even the smallest group within [University A] or [University B], a lot of times who’s at the top influences how the rest of the organization looks like. So leadership could be an issue.” (Administrator, CA, 11/21/13) • “It does require collaborative leadership, but someone has to be elected leader. There’s still a primary leader who has the great virtues of leadership. Courage, passion, and intellect. Has to be altruistic, doing what’s in the best for everyone, not for themselves.” (Computer Technologist, GA, 12/9/14) • “Communication. So for this particular thing, I was the graduate student here at [University C] and co-PI on the XSEDE project. And this basically was a large part of my Ph.D. work, so my advisor let me basically take lead on communication. And so for me it was really helpful to have one person to be like the -- to distribute. ‘Hey, can you help me with this, or that, or the other?’ And try to get us all on the same kind of page -- which it took a while to actually get us all on the same page. But it worked.” (Scientist-Developer, AR, 7/11/14) 	<p>Socialization balances the understanding of norms throughout an organization, establishing a culture which can further enhances positivity within the workplace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Sometimes there are cultural issues. Scientists who come together from slightly different cultures, backgrounds, they may have different set of expectations and different ideas as to how this work should happen. So that sometimes can inhibit the relationship.” (Co-Producer, WA, 3/26/14) • “So maintaining the existing ones, we have a lot of ways to do this. People complain about meetings, but we all kind of enjoy them too. It is a way to get people together. It forces you to talk, get everybody up-to-date. We have face-to-face meetings. We have webinars.” (Administrator, CA, 11/13/14) • “And so, we have to spend a lot of time socializing those sorts of things within the organization so we can develop that shared understanding and can develop a bit more of a shared culture of the organization, and I think we’ve been fairly successful with that in XSEDE.” (Administrator, IL, 7/16/14)

Conclusion

Although more research is necessary to understand how to foster a positive culture in an organization, it is apparent that learning the ropes relies significantly on documentation, leadership, and socialization. Each organization is unique and its culture is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors; therefore, it is imperative that practitioners fully understand each aspect of this guide in order to implement and promote a positive culture in e-science projects. Regardless of an organizations current state, it is possible to access and then improve an organizations culture (Sadri & Lees, 2001). The literature and interview data suggests that positive cultures lend to successful organizations, further demonstrating the importance of learning the ropes.

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