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Crossing Occupational Cultures:
A Workshop for Conducting Basic and Applied Research

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What is your definition of occupational culture?

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About this Workshop

- Experience occupational culture
- In the process of doing so:
  - Define the term occupational culture.
  - Describe how terminology and language is representative of occupational culture.
  - Describe the role of processes in occupational culture.
  - Describe the role of values and beliefs in occupational culture.
  - Describe how these three insulate and privilege an occupational culture.
  - Describe the implications of occupational culture to research, teaching, and work in technical and professional communication.

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Several personal research experiences informed my own awareness of the issue

Museums	Microgenres	Metrics
▪ Explore the extend to which educational practices from formal education diffused into practice of designing exhibits for free-choice learning. ▪ Occupations: — Museum exhibit designers — Instructional designers	▪ Explore the design and reception of several instances of three emerging forms (genres) of online learning and communication ▪ Occupations: — Instructional designers — Technical communicators — Auditors — Nonprofit administrators — System designers	▪ Identify which measures of productivity and effectiveness are tracked and reported by managers ▪ Occupations: — Technical communicators — Trainers — Corporate communicators

Activity 1

In your group, determine whom you will interview— and what you will ask—for research to answer these primary research questions:

▪ What are the most commonly performed practices in instructional design?

▪ What are the most commonly used technologies used to produce instructional materials?

▪ What are the most common uses of reusable content in instructional contexts?

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Debriefing

▪ To answer the research question

What are the most commonly performed practices in instructional design

▪ What and whom would you contact?

▪ What questions would you explore with each of these?

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More Debriefing

- What technical concepts do you want to explore in this study?
- What do you call these concepts?

Terminology varies among occupations and hints at differences.

	Instructional designers	Technical Communicators
Initial research for a project	Needs assessment	Audience analysis
Evaluation of the benefits returned on a project	Level 4, ROI	Value added
Form for evaluating satisfaction	Level 1 Smiley sheet	Reader Comment Form
Emphasis of published processes	Assessment and evaluation (based on number of steps)	Design and development

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Differences in terminology can create confusion for practicing professionals.

It is difficult to find consistent instructional design nomenclature . . . and even though we are moving towards inter-disciplinary studies, we are far from bridging the gap of inter-disciplinary nomenclature . . . Consequently, it took me several weeks to familiarize myself with the appropriate resources and vocabulary that I needed to effectively search and retrieve the desired information (Kanter, 2010, p.24-25).

Professional and Technical Communication crosses disciplinary cultures.

By role—such as editor, writer, writer/editor, manager, or publishing assistant	*By industry*—such as defense, government, high technology, manufacturing, and hospitality	*By organization*—such as federal and state governments, specific companies and nonprofits.	*And as a field of study*—although primarily rooted in Professional and Technical Communication, also includes usability, translation, education, and cognitive psychology (among others)

About occupational culture

Occupation	"certain workers who have the exclusive right to perform certain kinds of work, to control training for the access to doing that work, and to control the way that work is performed and evaluated" (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 186).
Occupational culture	the "the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of" (Dictionary.com) the people who work in a particular field of work

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Three aspects of occupational culture arise during research and can impact findings.

- Language
- ?
- ?

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More debriefing

- To answer the research question

  What are the most commonly used technologies used to produce instructional materials?

- What and whom would you contact?
- What questions would you explore with each of these?

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Processes, practices, and relationships vary among cultures

	Instructional Designers	Technical Communicators
Ownership of content	Instructional Designers	Technical Owners
Process for developing materials	Needs Analysis ↓ Instructional Analysis ↓ Subordinate Skills Analysis ↓ Instructional Objectives ↓ Criterion-Referenced Tests ↓ Instructional Strategy ↓ Instructional Development ↓ Formative Evaluation ↓ Revision ↓ Summative Evaluation	Requirements ↓ Functional Specifications ↓ Documentation Plan ↓ First Draft ↓ Reviews ↓ Second Draft ↓ Reviews ↓ Final Draft ↓ Final Preparation for Printing ↓ Camera-Ready Copy or Golden Code ↓ Printing or Posting

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Three aspects of occupational culture arise during research and can impact findings.

- Language
- Processes, practices, and relationships
- ?

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More debriefing

- To answer the research question

  What are the most common uses of reusable content in instructional contexts (a process supported by technology)?

- What and whom would you contact?

- What questions would you explore with each of these?

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Consider different occupational responses to reusable content.

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Analysis of content management

Performance expectancy	- Combination of content management and structured authoring helps manage workloads
	  — Ensures reuse of content on a variety of platforms and in a variety of contexts
	  — Manages approvals
	  — Provides version controls and archives
	  — Facilitates translation
	- While unfamiliar to (and resisted by) instructional designers, writing standards, genres, and structured authoring have long histories with technical communicators
	- Ultimately, represented an evolution not a revolution

Effort expectancy	- Both content management and structured writing required significant efforts; neither is inherently easy to use - Trade publications have clearly advised technical communicators of the challenges they face - Industry experts note that challenges persist (O'Keefe 2009)
Social influence	- High adoption and consideration rates for DITA suggest that a critical mass exists - Failing to adopt DITA could make technical communicators feel that they have been left behind - Having a sophisticated technology of their own provides many technical communicators with clout in technology-focused organizations
Facilitating conditions	- Organizations willing to invest in the technology and related consulting - Strong support from both professional associations like the Society for Technical Communication and academic associations like the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing

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Analysis of learning objects

Performance expectancy	▪ Standardizing content removes the creativity from the job ▪ Using standardized materials prevents instructors and learners from tailoring the learning experience to their own needs
Effort expectancy	▪ Both content management and structured writing required significant efforts; neither is inherently easy to use ▪ Trade publications promote the virtues of learning objects ▪ Industry experts actively promote learning objects ▪ Compliance with standards confuses readers
Social influence	▪ For those with a technological orientation, adopting learning objects enhances influence ▪ For those with a learning orientation, adopting learning objects means violating academic freedom ▪ For those with a technological orientation, concerns about academic freedom are frivolous
Facilitating conditions	▪ Only heavy e-learning users willing to invest in the technology and related consulting ▪ Mixed support from the professional community, with some acting as strong proponents of learning objects and others merely providing lukewarm to no support

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Consider the difference in values inherent in recognizing work.

Society for Technical Communication	American Society for Training and Development
▪ Content and organization ▪ Copyediting ▪ Visual design and production	▪ Alignment with the performance problem identified ▪ Alignment with other training, learning, performance improvement practices, and with organizational goals ▪ Alignment—partnerships ▪ Results—behavior of participants ▪ Results—impact on organization ▪ Shared learning

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Three aspects of occupational culture arise during research and can impact findings.

▪ Language

▪ Processes, practices, and relationships

▪ Customs and beliefs

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Another group activity

In small groups, ask participants to explain how occupational culture might impact:

- Research?
- Teaching?
- Work?

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To develop sensitivity, consider these practical tips when conducting research across occupational cultures.

- Before entry, read primers on the work of different occupations.
- Record terminology and its definitions.
- Map actual processes and relationships, then contrast them not only with those followed by other occupations, but also those recommended in the primers.
- After entry, read qualitative studies.
- Watch out for researcher bias.

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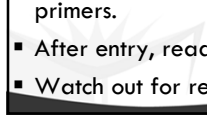
Take-aways

What insights about occupational culture will you take from this workshop into your work?

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Learn more about occupational culture.

- Trice, H. M. & Beyer, J. M. (1993.) *The Cultures of Work Organizations.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985.) *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hansen, C. & Lee, Y., eds. (2009.) *The Cultural Context of Human Resource Development.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Savage, G. & Kynell, T. (eds). *Power and legitimacy in technical communication: the historical and contemporary struggle for professional status.* Amityville, New York: Baywood Press.

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