Data Governance for Gardeners: Bridging Information Systems and Technical Communication

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DATA GOVERNANCE FOR GARDENERS: BRIDGING INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT
In this poster presentation, the author examines how core competencies of technical communication incorporate project management and data governance. The presentation explores particular data governance concepts that can be used to expand upon Hart-Davidson's (2001) core competencies of technical communication and Redish's (2010) four elements of successful technical communication. Data governance defines roles and assigns responsibilities for decision areas to these roles, while establishing standards and ensuring compliance with strategies on an organization-wide basis (Weber, Otto, & Osterle, 2009, p. 9). Technical communicators should be versatilists and add value to their organizations and products (Dubinsky, 2015, as seen by the growing variety of competencies identified by Brumberger and Lauer, 2015). These competencies connect technical communication to information systems and project management, as well as other fields. The presentation explores how this added value correlates to Nardi and O'Day's (1999) idea of the workplace “gardener,” an individual who grows productivity in his or her workplace. Specifically, this presentation demonstrates methods of bridging the fields of technical communication and technical communication, elevating technical communication from its traditional support role by utilizing data governance concepts and versatile workplace “gardener.”

SELECTED REFERENCES

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
Technical communication (TC) has been defined as a broad field, including any form of communication: a) communicating about technical or specialized topics, b) communicating by using technology, and/or c) providing instructions on how to do something (Society for Technical Communication). The Society for Technical Communication also states that TCers advance their organization’s goals by making information more usable and accessible.

COMPETENCIES
Traditionally, TCers are relegated to support roles within their organizations, but TC is going through what Dubinsky (2015) calls an “identity crisis” as the discipline continues to evolve alongside technological advances. As TC changes, so too do its associated competencies, or manifestations of our professional knowledge as practitioners of a field (Coppola, 2011, p. 127). TC has shifted away from having a few, broad competencies, to also encompassing newer and more numerous competencies. In 2001, Hart-Davidson looked at how TC activities correspond to the four symbolic-competencies: (1) conceptual (communication abstraction, and system thinking), and in 2010, Redish stated that successful TC requires: collaboration, the ability to communicate clearly, clarifying the complex, and openness to change. Brumberger and Lauer’s (2015) analysis of 1000 Monster.com job identified professional competencies expected by employers. Most common competencies across all five categories of TCers included: written communication, editing, project planning/management, subject matter familiarity, visual communication, and research.

DATA GOVERNANCE
Data governance defines roles and assigns responsibilities while establishing standards and ensuring compliance on an organization-wide basis (Weber, Otto, & Osterle, 2009, p. 2). This is done in order to promote desirable behavior that is consistent with an organization’s mission, strategy, values, norms and culture (p. 6); however, companies often neglect organizational issues critical to successful data governance by assigning it all to IT departments. Khatri and Brown (2010) argued for collaboration between departments and suggest that announcements and information be used throughout the organization, “to disseminate policy decisions and procedures, as well as to convey the organization’s data governance objectives” (p. 152). Brumberger and Lauer (2015) results show that the Style Guides and Standards competency was expected on average 31.8% of the time across all five categories (p. 236).

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Brumberger and Lauer (2015) found that approximately half or more job postings across all five categories requested project management (PM) expertise; however, only a fraction of TC programs require a PM course, and even fewer offer it as an elective (p. 236). Kampf (2006) explained that corporate structures are shifting to include an “increasing number of cross-functional projects” and that the demand for PM knowledge in undergrads is increasing as well (p. 120). Learning about PM will give TC students tools to “understand the rhetorical situations into which they are going more effectively, so that they can participate in and perform with more awareness of the genres and situatedness.” And indeed, TC students’ “strong background in the rhetorical situation, are capable and in some ways uniquely qualified to be able to synthesize their communication knowledge with the genres in project management” (Kampf, 2006, p. 122).

BECOMING GARDENERS
TCers add value to their organizations through their work. Dubinsky (2015) argued that TCers need to be versatilists in order to add value; Brumberger and Lauer’s (2015) research supports this. This notion of TCers as “versatilists” connects to Nardi and O’Day’s (1999) notion of workplace “gardener,” or individuals who grow productivity in their workplace. TCers are well-suited to PM. TCers are also well-suited to working with SMEs and standardization; this lends itself well to data governance. In embracing all of this, TCers become versatile, workplace “gardener.”

CONCLUSION
TC is changing, and so are its associated competencies (though some have more or less remained the same); different types of TC have different expectations by way of proficiency in each competency. Proficiency in PM is expected to a much greater degree for every category, and TCers are well-suited to PM. TCers are also well-suited to working with SMEs and standardization; this lends itself well to data governance. In embracing all of this, TCers become versatile, workplace “gardener.”

IMPLICATIONS
1) Education: internships, minors, electives
2) Academic & Industry Partnerships: Academia and industry collaboration to ensure that programs stay up-to-date with employer expectations
3) Bridging Disciplines: TCers must be prepared to work with individuals from other disciplines, and to work as part of multidisciplinary teams

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SM 38 jobs (4%)
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