Assessment 2: Context Analysis

EDTC 816

Christopher Farrell, Kerry Magro, Laszlo Pokorny, Rachael Sedeyn

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**Context Analysis**

Google Educator Groups, or GEG’s as they are referred to by the people who are involved with them as well as by Google, are learning communities where educators, “Learn. Share. Inspire. Empower. (About, 2018)” through sharing experiences virtually or in person. The online portions of the communities are places where educators who are proficient in their use of the Google Apps for Education Suite come together to engage, teach, and learn about how others are using these products. The hope is to encourage their acceptance, adoption, and usage throughout the education community. The initiative was started by Google to help inspire educators with other passionate educators. It is important to note that each enterprise is operated entirely independently from Google the corporation.

Educators who participate as GEG leaders, volunteer and organize local chapters who agree to work together online through Google+ and other online platforms. These independent groups choose to have in-person meet-ups or face-to-face workshops as deemed appropriate by the group and the leaders of the chapter. The Google Educator Group New Jersey, #GEGNJ, started in 2014 is a public online community with 3,256 members at this time, which strives to use technology solutions for students both within the classroom and beyond (Aviles, C., 2018).

The New Jersey Google Educator Group is a good example of a community of practice (Wenger, et al., 2009) as their singular overriding objective is shared by the community. This overarching desire as guided by the community leadership is to use technology, specifically the Google Apps for Education Suite, to help all students achieve success in the classroom and as useful tools outside of the educational setting. The GEGNJ engages beginners before or as they start training for their Google certifications; through shared interactions, collaborations, and engagement until the participants are experts and leaders in the community (Wenger, E., 1998).

**What is the Organization Seeking to Accomplish? A Shared Passion**

The New Jersey Google Education Group is represented by eight moderators who are a part of New Jersey’s education system. While not all of the community moderators are teachers some identify as educational coaches, consultants, professional development providers, and former educators. One of the commonalities noted among the moderators is their attainment of at least one of Google for Education certifications such as Certified Educator (Levels 1 and 2), Certified Trainer, and Certified Innovator highlighting their passion for G-Suite for Education. Interviews with Aviles and Mattina moderators of the group, provided valuable insight to the New Jersey Google Educator Group's goals. Within this online community, moderators and members continually share opportunities to support growth for educators modeling a community of practice by regular interaction through their shared methods as educators (Wenger & Trayner-Wenger, 2015).

Information overload has not been problematic to today’s online communities but has been an issue for online communities for more than twenty years driving two inventors to create a software program that enables users to filter the information and find the items relating to their search in 1996 (U.S. Patent No. 6308175B1). The ability to filter out the specific content when searching for a particular topic is an attractive design in online communities, and GEGNJ offers three filters, introductions, discussions, and resources. Members and moderators select the filter appropriate to the content as the posts are created. The first filter, introductions, allows members to introduce themselves and many also state why they have joined the group. Another filter offers community members an opportunity for discussion.

The central theme for the members of this online community's goals is varied. Gallagher (2018), a member of the community, suggests that the New Jersey Google Education Group “...is more of an organic, intrinsic usage group. You bring to it what you want to hopefully get out of it.” Many of the members introduce themselves as someone actively working on obtaining Google Certified Educator Level 1. The last filter in the community is labeled resources.

The resources filter enables community members to view posts with tips, tricks, and announcements for upcoming events as posted by anyone who has been accepted as part of the group. Moderators and members alike express a shared passion towards Google for Education, and this is ever present in the multitudes of resources available to members. Members who find themselves challenged with one of Google for Educations G-Suite applications need only post their question to find many members who will offer suggestions to resolve their stumbling block.

No matter the technology need of the members, the New Jersey’s Google Education Group is focused on advancing the growth of educators through leveraging passion and collaboration. Sharing information and opportunities for growth are omnipresent and no matter the skill level of the member, the chance to learn something new every day is a major force behind the continued growth of the community and their passion for G-Suite for Education.

**Actions Taken to Support Community Goals**

Dan Gallagher, Kim Mattina and Chris Aviles identified five strategies and actions they use to support their community goals. They discussed the effectiveness of seeded questions, online workshops, social media, hashtags, and face-to-face events as means to pursuing their community objectives. Face-to-face events and online presentations seem to be the most laborious and time-consuming, yet the most effective strategy for expanding membership and encouraging active involvement. The underlying theory and motivations behind these approaches to growing the community are consistent with that found in Millington (2011), MackWebSolutions (2013), Peepso (2015), and Kraut & Resnick (2011).

Seeded questions have been used throughout the growth stages of the community to catalyze discussions and maximize participation. Dan and Chris applied this approach more frequently during the launch phase; however, Chris admits to adding seed questions whenever community activity seems low. Both agree that seed questions encourage engagement and expand discussions to new areas while attracting new contributors. They include open and closed seed questions to support community members' contribution.

The community routinely offers open online presentations on topics related to members' interests, with a focus on Google Education. An example of a recently posted event is the video presentation overview of the OrangeSlice Teacher Rubric. The postings are identified with hashtags of keywords and promoted through Twitter.

The strategies for growing this community align with best practices described in multiple publications on developing successful communities. For example, their member-centered approach to developing Google Education-related events and presentations is an effective strategy for encouraging continuous engagement and attracting new members in this field (Millington, 2011; MackWebSolutions, 2013; Peepso, 2015; Kraut & Resnick, 2011). The use of social media and hashtags to promote their community and events is also an effective strategy for expanding their membership by reaching people with shared interests (Millington, 2011; MackWebSolutions, 2013; Peepso, 2015; Kraut & Resnick, 2011).

**Measuring Progress of the Community**

Three areas are commonly used to measure metrics in online communities: audience, growth, and activity (Zucal, 2016). In 2014 this GEG started with six leaders from around the State of NJ. Now the group experiences an average growth of 100 new members every month. GEG New Jersey currently has 3,256 members. One metric that can be analyzed via GEG's control panel is engagement. Whenever someone posts a message in this group, it's accessible for each community member to see. They then have the opportunity to +1 the post, share the post, and/or comment on the post to share their thoughts.

The owners of these communities can track these metrics via Google's activity log. This applies to anyone in a Google Community (Collins, J. 2017) or anyone who has a Google Plus account. Via the activity log, you can track all the engagement metrics mentioned above.

Some key takeaways from our conversations with Chris Aviles, the site owner and chief administrator from GEG include:

· Averaging around 100 new members a month.

· Averaging around 15/20 posts a month.

· With no real way to analyze active monthly users, the owner of the group scrolls through the community to see who posted over the last month and takes down names to have a running list.

These metrics provide opportunities to glimpse the overall satisfaction from members as part of this community. It also helps the owners to see who is actively engaged and may be worth expansion as part of the community (i.e., a moderator and/or owner position). It also shows that this community is continuing to expand to bring in more educators to be part of the conversation.

While the metrics are important, the main theme is focused on helping educators by actively encouraging members to comment on posts and reach out to other members. Word of mouth for that reason is a central consideration for the owners.

**Conclusions**

The discussions that we were able to have with the Google Educator Group of New Jersey has led our group to understand how a small group of people motivated by a common desire can create and grow a positive organization for learning. The organization has demonstrated its ability to be a successful online organization by gathering its constituents together and provide each other with useful technological information which encourages both personal and organizational growth.

The Google Educator Group of New Jersey uses its three-filter approach to introduce its members to each other, to facilitate discussion, and provide resources which the community members are looking to understand to improve their educational practice. By combining a member-centered approach with the five central strategies, the leadership of the GEGNJ can encourage the desired growth of the community and further the group's interests. The five fundamental strategies discussed in the actions section above are valuable tools which the leaders of the community use to ensure that the group does not stagnate. While some of the strategies are more difficult to use and build, such as face-to-face workshops, through their mixed usage the GEGNJ has produced steady growth over its existence.

The use of metrics for this community is the area where GEGNJ could use to create some improvement. Although they keep logs of participation and face to face meetings the control panel they use for the online community is created by Google and does not allow for a much in the way of creating meaningful statistics, many of which must be curated by hand. Therefore, the recommendation we would suggest to GEGNJ is to find a more robust control system and learn to use it to create a better understanding of your users, their practices and how to better develop members and encourage their growth within the organization.

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**Appendices**

**Invitations to Participate in the Interview sent to community members and moderators**:

First, thank you so much for responding! I'll post the questions here and I'm going to copy my cohort members, Kerry, Laszlo, and Chris who all are working on this project.

Thank you so much for expressing your willingness to answer some questions regarding the Google Community GEG New Jersey. We are doctoral students in the Educational Technology Department at New Jersey City University. We will present a report about your online community to our professors and fellow doctoral colleagues. I understand you must have a busy schedule, so in lieu of an interview, I would like to present the option for you to supply answers to the following three questions in a written or oral format as soon as possible. I figure this would be least intrusive on your schedule. A few sentences response for each question would be truly appreciated.

Question #1

What is your organization seeking to accomplish through your online community?

Question #2

What actions have you taken towards accomplishing your goals? (e.g. seeded discussion with personnel, the creation of internal/external incentives for the desired activity, leading by example...)

Question #3

What metrics do you employ to understand your progress towards your goals? (e.g. issue turnaround time, customer satisfaction, external participant numbers and activity, lurker-to-leader conversion, speed/quality of question answering)

I sincerely appreciate your time and input.

**Interview with Kim Mattina**

A1: Google Education Groups (GEGs) are independently run communities of educators who inspire and empower each other to meet the needs of students through technology both in the classroom and beyond. Via face to face meetups and online activities, GEGs provide a way for educators who are passionate about education and technology to meet like minded people and share, learn, and collaborate together.

A2: I would like to think I lead by example by using G Suite for Education and other tech tools in my teaching and professional development sessions. I provide professional development to staff in my district training, as well as other school districts, on G Suite for Education. This includes all core apps of GSFE and innovative ways to use it in a future ready school or classroom. Without my target goals, (which are my Google certifications), I would not be able to train other professionals on this subject.

A3: In addition to being a GEG NJ Leader, I am a Google Certified Trainer, a Top Contributor in the G Suite for Education forum, a Google Cloud Certified G Suite, and a Google Certified Educator. (You can visit my website for more information, [bit.ly/kmattina](http://bit.ly/kmattina)) All of these certifications require me to maintain my status on a yearly basis. For example, in order for me to maintain my Google Certified Trainer status, I must complete 12 training sessions a year, share one resource in the trainer directory, and pass a re-certification exam. I am extremely proud of my accomplishments and certifications because it takes a lot of motivation and determination, to stay on course and excel in this area of technology integration.

**Interview with Dan Gallagher**

A 1. The New Jersey GEG isn't a formal organization. We are a group of Google User Educators who all share a willingness to share successes & failures, tips & tricks, ideas, suggestions, and resources with an end goal of meaningful technology integration which improves student learning experiences and outcomes.

A 2. As a part of the group, I receive notification of any postings. Typically, a member of the community reaches out asking for help (much like this questionnaire was posted) or looking for suggestions. If I can assist, I'll respond to the posting. Other times, I may post a successful technology integration technique so others can grow from it.

A 3. Again, going back to my first response, since we aren't a formal organization, I don't believe there are any metrics used to check for growth or progress. This is more of an organic, intrinsic usage group. You bring to it what you want to hopefully get out of it. Since I want to have questions of mine answered in the future (perhaps) then I will try and answer others. It's like a digital version of the golden rule.

I hope these responses help with your presentation

**Interview with Chris Aviles** -

Question #1  
A 1. We are looking to bring educators together, especially around Google for Education, to share best practices.  
Question #2  
A 2.,Seeded discussions, online "shows" and face-to-face events.  
Question #3  
A,3 The number we focus on the most is monthly active users and monthly adds to the community.   
**Follow up on metrics as Administrator of Group**

Question 3 on Metrics

Hey Chris

I'm a member of NJCU Cohort 4. Thanks for your help so far. My team are looking to answer the question below about metrics when it comes to your GEG community. Any data would be appreciated.

What metrics do they employ to understand their progress towards these goals? (e.g., issue turnaround time, customer satisfaction, external participant numbers and activity, lurker-to leader conversion, speed/quality of question answering).

Best, Kerry

**Chris Aviles -** Hi Unfortunately, I don't have anything meaningful. I just write down the numbers..

**Kerry Magro -** No, this works. Thanks so much Chris! --

**Kerry Magro -** This is helpful Just one final Question when did I start the site! Sent from …

**Chris Aviles -** Pretty sure we started in the winter of 2014

**Kerry Magro** How many members to start?

**Chris Aviles** -Started with the six leaders.

**Kerry Magro** - What growth have you experienced

**Chris Aviles** -We’ve had steady growth over time. Around a 100 a month.

**Kerry Magro** Has your focused changed

**Chris Aviles** -We’ve had the same focus since the beginning.

**From:** Chris Aviles <chrisaviles@techedupteacher.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, February 14, 2018 10:33 AM

**To:** Laszlo Pokorny

**Subject:** Re: Attn: Chris Aviles - GEG New Jersey - Google Community

We use open and closed seeded questions to encourage engagement and participation in community discussions and keep the community active. I did this more often when the group started, but I still do it now.

The online presentations are related to Google Education and they also keep the community active while attracting potential new members from outside the community.

We use Twitter to promote the community, our meetings, and the online presentations. You can see examples of the above on the community pages.<https://plus.google.com/communities/114835332053218435059>

Hope this helps.

On Tue, Feb 13, 2018 at 11:31 AM, Laszlo Pokorny <lpokorny@trenton.k12.nj.us> wrote:

Dear Mr. Aviles,

I would truly appreciate if you expand on your response to Question #2. For example, how do you use seeded questions, online “shows”, and face-to-face events to accomplish your community’s goals?

Thank you so much.

-Laszlo

Laszlo Pokorny

Doctoral Candidate

Educational Technology Department

New Jersey City University

M: (732)-207-7452

**From:** Chris Aviles <chrisaviles@techedupteacher.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, February 13, 2018 10:17 AM

**To:** Laszlo Pokorny

**Subject:** Re: Attn: Chris Aviles - GEG New Jersey - Google Community

Question #1

We are looking to bring educators together, especially around Google for Education, to share best practices.

Question #2

Seeded discussions, online "shows" and face-to-face events.

Question #3

The number we focus on the most is monthly active users and monthly adds to the community.

On Mon, Feb 12, 2018 at 11:11 AM, Laszlo Pokorny <lpokorny@trenton.k12.nj.us> wrote:

Dear Mr. Aviles,

Thank you so much for expressing your willingness to answer some questions regarding the Google Community GEG New Jersey. We are doctoral students in the Educational Technology Department at New Jersey City University. We will present a report about your online community to our professors and fellow doctoral colleagues. I understand you have a busy schedule, so in lieu of an interview I would like to present the option for you to supply answers to the following three questions in written or oral format by Wednesday February 14. A few sentences response for each question would be truly appreciated.

Question #1

What is your organization seeking to accomplish through your online community?

Question #2

What actions have you taken towards accomplishing your goals? (e.g. seeded discussion with personnel, creation of internal/external incentives for desired activity, leading by example...)

Question #3

What metrics do you employ to understand your progress towards your goals? (e.g. issue turnaround time, customer satisfaction, external participant numbers and activity, lurker-to-leader conversion, speed/quality of question answering)

I sincerely appreciate your time and input.

Thank you,

Laszlo

Laszlo Pokorny

Doctoral Candidate

Educational Technology Department

New Jersey City University

M: (732)-207-7452