

North Carolina Communities of Practice: Building the Foundation for an Open Organization

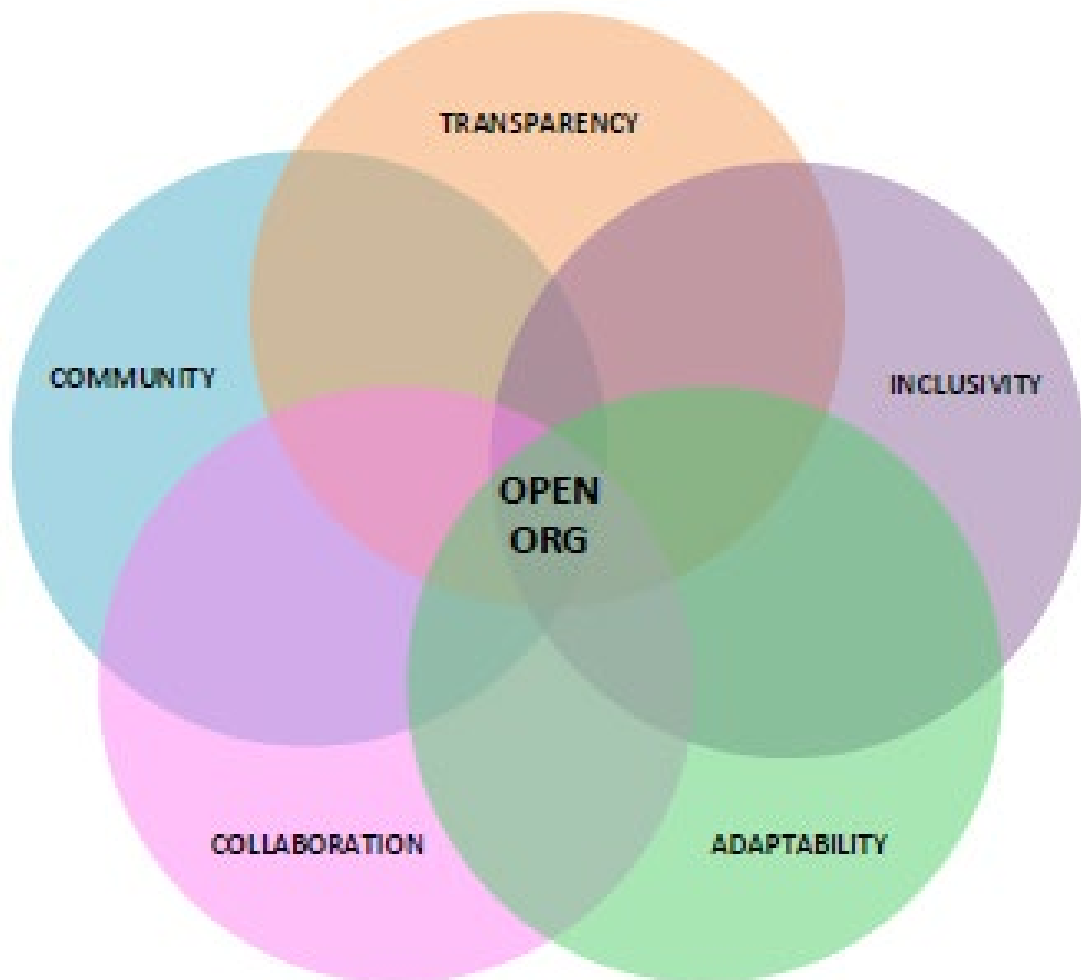
State CIO Office Special Recognition

North Carolina

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Moving more than 1,500 people from multiple agencies into one agency presents financial and logistical challenges. Making those individuals feel welcome, part of a team, and members of a successful community is even more challenging. Secretary J. Eric Boyette is making it happen.

In 2015 North Carolina passed S.L. 2015-241, which elevated the former Office of Information Technology Services to a cabinet agency, creating the Department of Information Technology (DIT). The creation of DIT required the centralization of the IT functions of 12 executive branch agencies. When the consolidation is complete, DIT will have a staff of about 2,200 employees and will oversee \$600 million in IT spend.

For DIT to be successful, we needed to become a more open organization that shares ideas, knowledge, resources, and skills. We are striving to embody five key characteristics of an open organization – transparency, inclusivity, adaptability, collaboration, and community. Truly open organizations exhibit all five.

This cultural shift won't happen overnight, but we have laid the foundation for this change by inviting state employees to participate in communities of practice (COPs) with a variety of focus areas. All of them have provided a way for individuals to share knowledge and a venue where they can be heard.

By December 2018, we had seven COPs with over 600 participants. These participants represent a cross-section of state government, serving agencies across the executive and judicial branches, and represent both the IT and business sides of their organizations.

The COPs have opened the lines of communication between agencies, between silos within agencies, and most importantly between DIT and the agency business units it serves. Members feel like they are part of a bigger team, all working toward a larger common purpose, directly involved with and providing input for DIT decision-making.

As these COPs continue to grow, they will provide a solid foundation for the transition to DIT, allowing us to thrive with a new, more open organization.

CONCEPT

In 2015 North Carolina passed S.L. 2015-241 which created the Department of Information Technology (DIT), which called for the centralization of the IT functions of 12 executive branch agencies. When the work is complete, DIT will oversee \$600 million in IT spend and will have a staff of about 2,200 employees.

Centralization was underway when Secretary Boyette was appointed in 2017. Following his appointment, Secretary Boyette and his senior leadership recognized that a new approach was necessary to make this transition to a new department successful. Many agency leaders were apprehensive about IT being centralized, and IT staff from the agencies were anxious. DIT was grappling with questions such as:

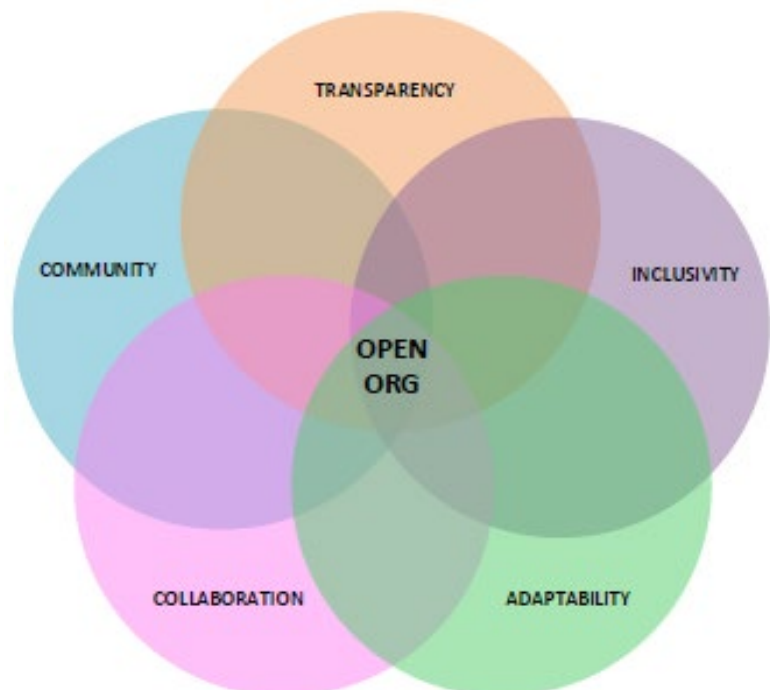
- How do we make the new staff feel as part of the DIT team?
- How do we create a sense of community?
- How do we encourage collaboration and break down the silos between agencies?
- How do we also include and leverage those agencies who are not part of DIT?

As DIT continues to grow, we must adapt and become more open to encourage the best ideas, and attract and retain skilled talent. Open organizations lend themselves to greater agility, faster innovation, and, most importantly, increased engagement. All of which will ultimately make DIT successful going forward.

Open organizations share ideas, knowledge, resources, and skills across organizations, generational, and cultural boundaries to achieve their goals. Ultimately the open organization shows members connections between their activities and the organizations' goals and values. To get closer to an open organization, we are embracing the five key characteristics as outlined in [The Open Organization Definition](#) – transparency, inclusivity, adaptability, collaboration, and community. Truly open organizations exhibit all five.

We are striving to be an open organization, but government lends itself to silos. Agencies have different funding sources, different missions, different oversight bodies, and very specific mandates. For this reason, it is unlikely that the state will ever fully adopt the idea of open organizations. That said, we realize that openness is key to gaining momentum at DIT.

Cultural shifts like this require incremental change to be successful. North Carolina chose to start with



implementing Communities of Practice (COP) in multiple areas.

Communities of Practice

Gartner defines a “community of practice” as, “people associated and interlinked in a communication or knowledge network because of their shared interest or share responsibility for a subject area.”

Communities of practice (COPs) are a key component of open organizations. The shared expertise in COPs allows organizations to capitalize on resources and skills that would not otherwise have been known or available. The informality of these groups allows for organizational adaptability, and this flexibility allows for knowledge to be shared at any time.

As of December 2018, DIT created seven COPs and engaged more than 600 participants. These individuals serve agencies across the executive and judicial branches, and represent both the IT and business sides of their organizations. Many of our participants are involved in more than one COP. The COPs range in size from 40 to 439 members. Some started out trying to grow their base membership quickly, focusing on sharing and promoting what they do. Other COPs have started with a smaller core membership, focusing on their specific areas of expertise. All of them have provided a way for individuals to share knowledge and a venue where they can be heard.

Community of Practice Membership	
Community	Total Membership
Architecture	40
Business Analysis	106
Dynamics O365	63
Power BI	102
Process Improvement	40
Project Management	223
SharePoint	439

While the COPs were originally established by DIT staff, they have become true communities where members feel ownership and feel empowered to participate. These communities provide a place where ideas can be shared, and members can interact and gain valuable knowledge and skills from people in their area of interest.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT

Though we have more to do to become a truly open organization, our communities of practice have been a successful first step. They have provided a great foundation as we work to embody the key characteristics of an open organization.

Transparency: The COPs have allowed members to better understand what their counterparts in other agencies are doing. Members have also had the opportunity to provide input and be directly involved in DIT decision-making.

- Members of the Process Improvement COP are taking turns presenting about their respective agencies and how they use process improvement on their initiatives. These meetings rotate between agencies.
- Members of the Architecture COP were given the opportunity to provide input and recommend changes prior to the rollout of new templates for updating architectural artifacts.
- Each of the COPs have created an online presence making it easier to disseminate and share information.

Inclusivity: The COPs have allowed members to feel like they are part of a bigger team, all working toward a larger common purpose. Many members of these COPs work in small agencies and do not have many (if any) teammates with whom to discuss ideas. As we become DIT, this aspect of COPs is critical.

- The SharePoint COP has done an outstanding job of encouraging people who are not necessarily SharePoint Admins to take part in their COP. As a result, we have a higher level of SharePoint adoption than we otherwise would have. Members are empowered to build their own sites knowing that there is a group of people willing and able to assist them with questions as they arise.
- There are many project managers in the state, but they rarely have the opportunity to share ideas with one another. The Project Management COP has done an outstanding job of creating a culture where everyone who chooses to join, not only has the opportunity, but is encouraged to participate and provide input into what they would like to see out of the community. The COP has conducted online surveys to get better information and feedback from its members.
- The Business Analysis COP has opened its doors to everyone, trying to promote and encourage stronger business analysis and requirements gathering practices in the agencies. They are also promoting the adoption of business architecture, process improvement (Lean Six Sigma) and strong project management practices allowing for cross pollination between groups.

Adaptability: Government agencies are not always highly adaptable organizations. The size and complexity of state government make it difficult to change course once a direction has been set. That said, technology is changing so fast that we have no choice but to find ways to change with it.

- Both the Dynamics CRM COP and the SharePoint COP have focused on harnessing the collective knowledge of the groups to solve problems. When a SharePoint developer or a CRM developer has an issue, they have a community of people to whom they can turn when trying to solve the problem.
- The Process Improvement, Business Analysis, and SharePoint COPs have created ways to share lessons learned from the agencies so that when issues do arise, agencies have learned from each other and are better prepared to handle them.
- The technology-specific COPs have established a great way to disseminate information about changes to their respective platforms to a much wider audience. These groups are now able to

much more proactively handle changes in the technology and take advantage of new functionality.

Collaboration: The COPs have opened the lines of communication between agencies, between silos within agencies, and, most importantly, between DIT and the agency business units it serves. This is particularly true in the COPs with focuses more directly related to the business like Business Analysis, Process Improvement, and Project Management.

- The Business Analysis COP has more than 100 members, representing both business and IT and this COP has trained more than 400 individuals.
- The project management COP has covered topics such as vision, mission, goals and objectives, promoting value of a PM, legislative process, and utilizing SharePoint for collaboration to expand knowledge to all project managers.
- The Architecture COP has used its platform to collaborate on how to solve technical issues that have come up on certain enterprise software packages. They are also looking at ways to better document and share architectural artifacts.

Community: Each of the COPs we have created to date have established their own unique culture and personality. Some of the COPs, like Dynamic CRM, are focused on the technology with which they work. Other COPs, like Business Analysis, are focused on sharing (training on the role of a business analyst, as well as sharing information on other aspects of IT with which business analysts should be familiar). The Project Management COP is the newest COP, established late in 2018, and it already has 223 members. This group is creating subgroups that are focusing on overarching topics like PM COP Group Site Design, Survey Design and Results Analysis, User Group Q&A, and PM Mentoring to make sure that PM are well versed in these and other subjects and can subsequently perform at higher levels for the agencies.

While our COPs are just the first step in a long journey of creating an open organization, we have made great strides in a short period. We are excited to build on what we have accomplished to make DIT a model organization for IT and for management.