

Designing a New Employee Orientation (NEO) System

Published as: Soltis, J., Patel, P. & Whitworth, B., 2005, Designing a New Employee Orientation (NEO) system, Special Interest Group on University and College Computer Services (SIGUCCS) Fall Conference in Monterey, California, Technical Program Track: Training and Documentation, p349-352

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ABSTRACT

Modern computing-intensive universities often provide a variety of computing resources to employees, ranging from simple email to complex database and development services. Each of these services demands employee knowledge and varies between institutes. Universities struggle not only to familiarize new employees with their information system services, but also to acquaint them with resources like helpdesk, web sites, and training classes that inform them about those services.

We conceived a web-based New Employee Orientation (NEO) system, designed to manage the introduction of new employees to online resources. This system does not itself provide resources, but tells new employees: 1. the purpose and value of each resource, 2. Contact information and web url(s) for accessing that resource, and 3. checkboxes to show whether tasks have been completed or not. It does not direct or sequence new employee orientation, as a formal teaching course might, but supports each individual's familiarization initiatives.

A pilot NEO system was developed at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), and new employees were asked to comment on its value. Over 80% of the participants found it very or extremely useful, and were definite that the system should be implemented. Having a single web-based point to manage their orientation led to a smoother and more pleasant transition to their new work environment.

Many colleges and universities may be encountering similar issues in inducting new employees to the increasing variety of computing resources on their campus. The NEO approach suggests a new way to facilitate new employee orientation.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 [Management of Computing and Information Systems]: People and Project Management – *management techniques*,

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SIGUCCS'05, November 6–9, 2005, Monterey, California, USA.
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staffing, training.

General Terms

Management, Documentation, Design.

Keywords

Employee, Orientation, Computing Resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Universities face a difficult challenge in educating employees on how to use the complex computing environment used for educational and administration purposes. The computing environment has changed dramatically over time, offering more powerful hardware and a variety of applications with rich contents. Computers have become an increasingly necessary tool for faculty and staff to perform their work. It has become clear that not all faculty and staff are equipped to work and communicate effectively using the tools at their disposal. One of the reasons for this problem is the constant changing technology and variety of tools available. New Jersey Institute of Technology is one of three universities located in Newark, NJ. Most of our students are computer, engineering or other technology related majors. NJIT employees have approximately four email accounts, and use at least four operating systems (Windows, UNIX, MAC and VAX/VMS). Additionally we have an intranet, WebCT, WebBoard, VPN connection and other services and each require a user ID and password. In order to make use of these services, employees must maintain several user ID's and passwords. This problem is known to the Computing Services Department and to most of the staff and faculty working at NJIT. Prior to this project there were no tools to help new employees learn about and become familiar with the various computing resources available at NJIT. We became aware of this issue and created a "New Employee Orientation" web page.

1.2 Purpose

Many new employees are not computer literate and it is difficult for them to understand which email they should use, and how to use some of the computer systems. They do not know the purpose of the systems and why they should use them. Presently there is limited documentation online that explains computing accounts and services. Some of the Universities send out e-mail memos,

paper handouts or booklets to the new employees with the purpose of informing them of all the computing resources. Some of them are in the form of a checklist, which is a good idea, but not very successful since the method of paper handouts, is not effective. This problem suggests the need for some type of web page or electronic tool that will hold and organize all information and resources. Furthermore, the statement also supports the hypothesis that NJIT new employees do not know where to find and how to use NJIT computing resources. The conducted research proved that NJIT employees liked this web page and found it useful. They had problems with locating information that is currently available from our computing web site as “Faculty and Staff Quick Start Guide” [1], where they find most of the information needed, but it is not well organized to help new employees and guide them with the steps. Additionally, there is no feedback and help provided to the employees while the individual is learning about new accounts or resources available to them.

This report shows that current methods that are used to introduce new employees to the computing system should be revised and changed accordingly. The proposed solution will benefit new employees, since it is simple to implement and is highly effective. An online check list is very visual and gives insight into many computing related topics without much researching from the employee’s side. It allows employees to go back and forth and learn about new computing environment.

1.3 Hypotheses

Currently, a new NJIT employee is introduced to the computing environment by reading a short handout, which is given to him or her by Human Resources. The drawback of this method is the limited information and the method in which the information is transmitted: paper handout. NJIT, living in the technology age and being rated as one of the nation’s most wired universities, should adopt a more technical and advanced method of information delivery. In order to facilitate the use of computer technology by employees, some type of electronic information is needed. Additionally, a change in the learning process is required. NJIT new employees do not know where to find and how to use NJIT computing resources in order to facilitate the use of all computing resources. How can we transfer knowledge from a “full” store (Internet) to a relatively “empty” store (employee) without creating boredom and repetition and without overwhelming the viewer?

We need to simplify what the viewer sees, so he or she is not overwhelmed. Additionally we need to guide him or her through the learning process and make it as interactive as possible. They may not need all the knowledge at once. We have to allow them to choose what they want at the time they need it and create an active process of changing their own processing. Learning requires that the learner is willing and able to change how they process.

This requires a need to change (or no effort is made), a process that can be changed, and ability to change the process.

I remember when NJIT Human Resources sent all employees a web page with information about sexual harassment. Most of my colleagues just pressed the “next” button as many times as it was needed to complete it and get full credit. Even if someone was interested in finding out some information about sexual

harassment, the method they used to encourage the user to read through the information was not successful. The tutorial was too long (about 40 min) and an employee did not see the subtopics of the presentation. They did not have an option to choose what they wanted to learn. The learning process was passive, not interactive and did not create any interest in the viewer.

1.4 Materials and Methods

To perform this experiment a “New Employee Orientation” webpage was designed. The following document will precisely explain in details all the steps and tools needed to create this webpage and what to expect when using this online system. This web page was created to decrease time in getting to know and understand computing services at NJIT. It is a guiding system to assist in gaining information about the computing systems, various accounts, and the online training service. It is very critical that a new employee be familiar with all the steps needed to understand how to utilize this online service.

The implementation of the project started with creating a web page. This web page was created in Cold Fusion. The employee opens the “New Employee Orientation Web Page” and logs in using their user ID and password, which will allow multiple logins and save all changes to the database.

The web page is connected to the database, which is located on the server. Microsoft Access is used as the database software. All users are listed there and can authenticate to access New Employee Orientation webpage. After they authenticate they can start using this web page. All the links and documents that are listed in the Employee Orientation webpage are listed in the database and automatically update if needed. The web page has all their NJIT accounts listed. An employee can examine and learn about selected accounts, visit the NJIT Computing helpdesk web site, learn about training availability and discover tools to help them make their work easier and more enjoyable. The first table allows the new employee to click on the link and find more information about the account selected or create that account. The second table allows the employee to examine resources available to them and all related topics. If any one has a problem they can check the check box on the right side of the web page and specify what problem they have. All the problems are saved to the database and can be accessed and examined by an administrator. Every time an employee completes one step he or she checks the checkbox and the information is saved with a completion date. The employee can log off and log on again as many times as needed to access this information (See Figure 1).

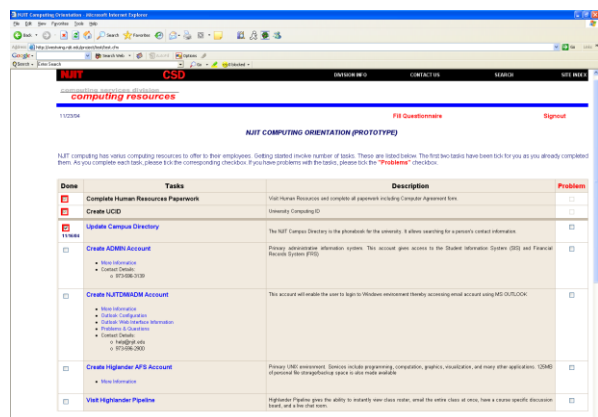


Figure 1. New Employee Orientation web page.

The pilot program that was introduced to some employees required them to fill out a questionnaire to find out the usefulness of the system. The questions were designed to determine how much the employee knows about Computing Services and how user friendly this web page is. Participants in the testing of the new web page were asked to answer a short questionnaire that gave us some ideas on how useful and user friendly the web page was to the new employee. This survey was conducted on behalf of New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT).

2. DISCUSSION

Based on the positive feedback from the participants, we proposed to the Computing Services Division to work on enhancing the web site and implementing it in production. Employees who participated in the study had many concerns about the amount of information that is required for them to know. One of them stated that he is “just now learning most of what was involved in this project. I certainly would have saved myself from 2 years worth of learning on my own.” Another participant said: “I personally think this computing orientation prototype is an excellent tool for a new hired employee, because it introduces different computing resources to a new employee. One of the good things about this tool is that it explains each task very precisely.” Below are some of the statements from other participants expressing the usefulness of this web page:

“I think it will be useful prior to the first day of work for all new employees, so that on their first day of work, they are already up and running. The HR aspects of it I think should be accessible to HR or the department should be knowledgeable of the parts at which both departments interface and intercept.”

” I wish that this system had already been in place when I began working at NJIT. I started at NJIT in August 2004 and it took a number of weeks to get situated in the system. Unfortunately, that puts a new administrator at a disadvantage in terms of learning FRS (Financial Resource System) and SIS (Student Information System) as quickly as possible. Those two systems are such an intricate part of our operation that I wish I had the opportunity to devote the appropriate time to learn them rather than a couple of months after my date of hire. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this project.”

NJIT employees liked the idea of centralizing all information in an electronic form. The check boxes made clear what steps they should take and helped them to follow the right order. The “problem” check box let them know that their problems are important to the school technical administrators and will be reviewed and resolved.

3. CONCLUSION

My hypothesis, that NJIT employees are not familiar with a variety of computing resources was verified. In general, the participants of the project learned a lot in a short period of time and they learned the most important information necessary for them to perform their work here at NJIT. Many of the participants did not know about all the resources that are available to them even though the NJIT Computing web site has all the information needed. The problem is not how much information is available but how we present it to the user.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] NJIT Computing Services Division – CSD. Retrieved November 30, 2004, from World Wide Web: <http://csd.njit.edu>