

Graduate Learning Community
Session 3—what habits are most
important for us to build our FSHN
scientific community?”

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Learning outcomes for today

- Reflect on the concept of community and scientific community.
- Develop and plan to implement action items that advance our sense of scientific community within FSHN

Scientific community—our learning community?

- Scientific Community
 - Universalism
 - “Communism”
 - Disinterestedness
 - Organized skepticism
- Community
 - Forming
 - Storming
 - Norming
 - Performing

Universalism

This is the idea that the important issue for scientists is the content of claims about the world (or about the phenomena being studied), not the particulars about the people making those claims. In other words, the tribe of science is committed to investigating knowledge claims made by graduate students as well as those made by Nobel Prize winners, those made by scientists at small colleges as well as those made at famous universities with huge endowments and buckets of grant money, those made by scientists in other countries as well as those made by scientists in one's own country. Since the shared goal is building a reliable body of knowledge about the world we share, *all* the scientists engaged in that project are to be treated as capable to contribute. Disregarding another scientist's report because of who he is, then, is a breach of the norm of universalism

As you discuss this in your team, be aware of ways in which you encourage each other to participate (or not)!

How is universalism relevant to FSHN Graduate LC? How can we encourage this value of scientific community?

Forming

- What actions help community participation?
- What actions detract from community participation?

“Communism”

Writing in 1942, Merton was careful to put this in scare-quotes. He’s not talking about Marxist-Leninist Communism, but about the view that scientific knowledge is a resource to be shared by the whole tribe of science, regardless of which individual scientists produced which particular bits of knowledge. In other words, ideally, if you establish a finding, you get recognition within the tribe for finding it, you may even get your name on an equation, but then that finding is public knowledge that anyone in the tribe of science can use to build additional knowledge (which itself is to be shared by the tribe of science). One of the things a scientist needs to do to live up to this norm is to communicate her findings to other scientists. If a result stays in your head, or even your lab notebook, it’s not ending up in the shared body of scientific knowledge. Knowledge that isn’t made public doesn’t help the tribe with its shared project.

As your team makes meaning of “communism” for our learning community, deliberately take an opposing view from a view expressed by another team member.

Storming

- What did you observe as your views were in conflict?
- How can communities honor/work with disagreements?

Disinterestedness

One way to think about the norm of disinterestedness is that scientists aren't doing science primarily to get the big bucks, or fame, or attractive dates. Merton's description of this community value is a bit more subtle. He notes that disinterestedness is different from altruism, and that scientists needn't be saints. The best way to understand disinterestedness might be to think of how a scientist working within her tribe is different from an expert out in the world dealing with laypeople. The expert, knowing more than the layperson, could exploit the layperson's ignorance or his tendency to trust the judgment of the expert. The expert, in other words, could put one over on the layperson for her own benefit. This is how snake oil gets sold. The scientist working within the tribe of science can expect no such advantage. Thus, trying to put one over on other scientists is a strategy that shouldn't get you far. By necessity, the knowledge claims you advance are going to be useful primarily in terms of what they add to the shared body of scientific knowledge, if only because your being accountable to the other scientists in the tribe means that there is no value added to the claims from using them to play your scientific peers for chumps.

As your team makes meaning of disinterestedness for our community, take deliberate steps to organize your work together?

Norming

- What community habits can help us function in a well organized manner?
- What detracts from a community's ability to be well organized?

Organized Skepticism

This is the value that balances universalism. Everyone in the tribe of science can advance knowledge claims, but every such claim that is advanced is scrutinized, tested, tortured to see if it really holds up. The claims that do survive the skeptical scrutiny of the tribe get to take their place in the shared body of scientific knowledge. This is also the norm that makes disinterestedness work — without organized skepticism, you might actually have a reasonable expectation of putting one over on your scientific peers for personal gain. Merton sees these four norms as the values that scientists themselves take to be definitive of the scientific enterprise. However, Merton himself identified tendencies pulling in the opposite directions from these norms. He thought instances of scientists criticizing other scientists for not resisting these pulls were good evidence that scientists as a group were serious about the norms.

As your team makes meaning of this concept for our community, think about participation, diversity of perspectives, and approaches that help your community maintain its organization in dealing with central issues/themes.

Performing

- What habits does our community need to cultivate to be at our best?
- What actions do I commit to in order for my FSHN community to be well-functioning and sustainable?