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Operating Systems

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Reading Assignment 1

In the article “System Administrators as Broker Technicians” by Nicole F. Velasquez and Suzanne P. Weisband, the work practices of system administrators are being investigated for research. The authors theorize that systems administrators act as technical brokers, so they use semi-structured interviews and an analysis of existing system administrator literature, to see how they bridge the two communities, the end user and the technical community. System Administrators rely on knowledge acquired through practice, thus system administrators act as broker technicians who must connect the end user and their technical community.

The authors of the article first elaborates the role of technical workers in order the make the comparison between system administrators. To further the comparison they, provide descriptions of their daily activities to illustrate the role of system administrators as broker technicians. For the semi-structured interviews, six field studies were conducted with at least two researchers observing, taking notes, and videotaping. They conducted hands on interviewing, watching, and surveying to better define the domain of system administration.

“System administrators are the information technology professionals who execute the system administration tasks for their organization...Most system administrators are men (91.6%), though trends show this percentage gradually declining. A single system administrator can support anywhere from a single end user to over 16,000 end users, though most support approximately 80 (pg. 2)”

Of those statistics most system administrators have no formal education or formal training directly related to system administration. When asked what skills are needed to be a system administrator most of the interviewees stated that “they did not know”. They receive their education and skills through hands on working at the job, when they work most of the things they do, they learn on the spot. This is very similar to Broker Technician who also “spend almost a quarter of the day in meetings, echoing reports from Dijker [45]. The rest of the workday was spent on planning (21%), system maintenance (19%), troubleshooting (11%) and installation (8%) (pg. 4)” From their similarities in meetings, system planning, system maintenance, troubleshooting, installation and tools, the authors came to the conclusion that system administrators indeed act as broker technicians.

Work Cited

Velasquez, Nicole F., and Suzanne P. Weisband. “System Administrators as Broker Technicians.”

*Proceedings of the Symposium on Computer Human Interaction for the Management of Information Technology - CHiMiT 09*, 2009, doi:10.1145/1641587.1641588.