

Research shows events that foster positive emotions is key to creating a collective identity

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In a new study published in *Organization Science*, researchers found organizations can unite members from different backgrounds behind a collective identity by organizing events that foster positive emotions and empathy. University of Colorado Denver Assistant Professor Cyrus Dioun conducted the research to investigate how shared emotions can help align diverse groups.

While attending Maker Faire, an event celebrating "Do-It-Yourself" (DIY) activities across a wide range of domains, researchers found that through hands-on workshops and demonstrations, attendees experienced positive emotions and passion that individuals feel toward their work. This event also features large spectacles such as fire-breathing dragon cars, which creates a collective feeling of excitement, similar to what you would experience at a live sporting event.

"Maker Faire attendees feel their shared connection to one another, even when intellectually they may feel far apart," said Dioun. "For example, mathematicians and computer hackers find their shared connection with aerial artists, gardeners, and hula-hoop aficionados."

The research focuses on how a growing sector or industry, whether it be [organic food](#) or DIY projects, can maintain a consistent identity even as it grows to include a wider range of participants. The identity of an industry may be easy to understand when it's smaller and there are companies with similar backgrounds and products. As the field grows, it attracts newcomers with different backgrounds and practices, leading to internal conflict about what defines the industry.

By leveraging fieldwork, natural language processing of text data, and

[statistical analysis](#), researchers examined how an industry's identity became harder to consistently define as it grew larger and more legitimate. They also examined how organizations can strategically arrange events that encouraged the sharing of [positive emotions](#) and empathy, helping members from different backgrounds feel their shared connection to one another and the industry's [identity](#).

"We show that as an organization, industry, or sector gets more popular, it attracts a wider variety of participants which makes it difficult to specify the overall message of the company," said Dioun. "We also show that collective events that involve these emotional interactions helped clarify the aspects of the organization, industry, or sector that unite these increasingly diverse actors."

More information: Andreea Gorbatai et al. Making Space for Emotions: Empathy, Contagion, and Legitimacy's Double-Edged Sword, *Organization Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1287/orsc.2020.1387](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2020.1387)

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