

Chapter 3

Information Organising Behaviours in Everyday Life: An Exploration Using Diaries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses people's everyday encounters with information and the difficulties they face in finding information within both personal and professional contexts, with a specific focus on information-organisation-related behaviours in everyday-life, and based on a diary study where participants maintained an information journal. The discussion is based on the literature along with selected findings from a larger empirical study of human information behaviours, which found that information-organisation-related behaviours (including the lack of it) in everyday life is a problematic area due to various factors. The factors include problems with knowledge representation and inter-subjectivity, along with spatiotemporal dimensions that give rise to intra-subjectivity in our minds. These factors have implications on the findability of information and also on personal information management.

You may remember the story of how the devil and a friend of his were walking down the street, when they saw ahead of them a man stoop down and pick up something from the ground, look at it, and put it away in his pocket. The friend said to the devil, "What did that man pick up?" "He picked up a piece of Truth," said the devil. "That is a very bad business for you, then," said his friend. "Oh, not at all," the devil replied, "I am going to let him organize it."

— J. Krishnamurti (1929)

INTRODUCTION

Humans have a propensity to gather and use information to adapt to everyday problems in the world, leading George Miller (1983) to theorise that mankind might be conceptualised as a kind of *informavore* (Miller, 1983). This propensity for information, or *information need*, inasmuch as it is a need, arises within the context of an individual's physiological, cognitive, or affective state, while the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the information need depend on several internal and external variables. Together, these variables

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interact with each other to determine a person's information behaviour within any given context.

Human information behaviour, according to Wilson (2000, p.49), is the "totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking, and information use" and Pettigrew, Fidel, and Bruce (2001) described information behaviour as "how people need, seek, manage, give and use information in different contexts, including the workplace and everyday living" (p. 45).

A recent doctoral research in Human Information Behaviour conducted by the present author defined information behaviour as "the totality of human behaviour in relation to information, both active and passive, along with the explicit, implicit, and tacit mental states related to information" (Lakshminarayanan, 2010, p. 11). This is the definition used in this study, as it includes all human interactions with information in the information life cycle; this includes information creation, for the very act of organising information creates new information.

Information organising behaviour is a subset of human information behaviours, and is the process of analysing and classifying materials into defined categories and includes an individual's or group's own organisation methods and schemas; more importantly, it also includes the lack of organisation. The chapter builds a discussion around a study of people's everyday-life information behaviours where information-organising behaviours were examined as an integral component of everyday life information behaviours.

This study used a snowball sampling method (a sequential sampling method with the initial four participants in Australia) and maximum variation sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) and was conducted from Australia wherein forty participants from across five countries (with sampling beginning with four participants in Australia) maintained a private daily electronic information journal for two weeks. The findings indicated that

the information behaviours related to information organisation and the resulting findability of information was fraught with problems leading to frustration and an inability to find information. This chapter discusses this phenomenon based on the findings from this and other studies in the literature to better understand the possible cognitive and other phenomena underlying the relationships or dynamics discovered empirically.

One of the major issues found in information organisation is the *inter-subjectivity* in communicating a concept or *aboutness*—the subject or topic association of a document that may or may not be a term within the document itself—of an information artefact between the person who may have organised the information and the person looking for that same information. Increasingly though, we are not just looking for information within collections that have been designed by someone else, but within our own personal collections of information, which frequently include books, electronic files, photos, records, documents, desktops, Web bookmarks, and portable devices. The passage of time between when we categorised or classified the information, and the time when we look for the same information, poses several problems of *intra-subjectivity*, or the difference between our own past and present perceptions of the same information. Information searching, and hence the retrieval of information from one's own collection of information in everyday life involved a spatial and temporal coordination with one's own past selves in a sort of cognitive and affective time travel, just as organising information is a form of anticipatory coordination with one's future information needs. This involves a lot of cognitive coordination and, consequently a lot of confusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the information organisation studies in the literature focus on cataloguing and classifi-

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