Developing a Model of Factors Influencing Professional Workers’ Information Behaviors

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Background

Existing empirical and theoretical research (e.g., Byström and Järvelin (1995); Foster (2004); Ingwersen and Järvelin (2005); Leckie et al (1996); and Wilson (1997)) suggests that an individual’s information behaviors can be affected by cognitive and environmental factors. Anecdotal and research evidence suggests that individuals and organizations do not value their information assets, and therefore do not exhibit behaviors that appropriately reflect the value of workplace information. There are also apparent gaps in the literature, particularly around a lack of appropriate models of information behavior associated with professionals in the workplace and information being seen as valuable (useful, important, of worth and of benefit) by the organization. The increasing legal and regulatory environment, the expansion of information management standards and the increasing pervasiveness of computer technology add to the mix of how workplace information behaviors might be supported, encouraged or hindered.

Aim

This research sets out to develop a socio-technical model of factors influencing professional workers’ information behaviors within the context of seeing information as a valuable organizational asset.

Method

An extensive literature review (Silburn, 2013) identified a number of key conceptual models from information behavior, information systems, library and information science, and value of information literature. These models provided a set of core information behaviors (such as information seeking, retrieval, use and sharing) and potential influencing factors (for example
computer technology, the information behaviors of others, personal values and beliefs, and job design). The review found that there was no apparent literature that combined these information behaviors and the influences upon them, into a single workplace-related model. The output from the literature review was a conceptual model supported by a set of propositions.

Primary research was carried out in two parts within the context of a pragmatist philosophical position. An initial phase, using semi-structured in-depth interviews, looked at professionals’ interpretations of the value of information and some of the information behaviors that might be associated with valuing information. From this, a slightly revised version of the conceptual model was produced. The second phase of research was carried out using the revised model and combined semi-structured in-depth interviews with repertory grid work. Textual, graphical and numerical data were analyzed using repertory grid cluster analysis (Jankowicz, 2004; Shaw, 1980), and thematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

The research, documented in Silburn (2013), found a consistent approach to defining the value of information – valuable information was seen as being useful, important, of some worth, and of benefit. Seven behaviors, including information seeking, information sharing, and managing information, were identified as being relevant to showing that information is valuable. Some twenty influencing factors were identified. Evidence from the interviews supported factors identified in the research literature, and identified new factors, such as the degree of information literacy and the quality of technology. A life-cycle relationship was identified between some of the behaviors, whilst others were identified as information governance behaviors that supported the life-cycle behaviors. Some factors were found to have relationships with other factors, as well as with the behaviors.

An academic model was developed from the findings, based on inductive model building principles (Carlile & Christensen, 2005; Dubin, 1969), for further research. A simplified version of the academic model is shown in the figure below:
Figure 1: Simplified Model of Factors Affecting Information Behaviors within the Context of Valuing Workplace Information. Adapted from Silburn (2013).

Conclusions

Several conclusions were drawn from this research. Firstly, the information behaviors of professional workers are influenced, in various ways, by a variety of people, organizational, technology and environmental factors. Secondly, the degree to which behaviors are influenced, and whether the influence is positive or negative in nature, is determined by several inductively derived quality- and literacy-related factors. Thirdly, the biggest influences on information behavior centered on personal values and beliefs, the technology in the organization, and the needs of information stakeholders.

References


