Digital Workplaces and Information Access: Some Research Perspectives from the French Context

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Digital workplaces present new challenges for organizations, and also for researchers (Borlund, Mandl, Womser-Hacker, 2013; Widén, Steinerová, Voisey, 2014). Companies change their everyday working environments with digital innovations (Germain & Malaison, 2004; Choo, 2016), especially when they require employees to use new tools that modify information access, including employees’ seeking and use behavior. Thus, research should better take into account information seeking behavior in the professional digital workspace and take into account the succession of professionals tasks (Byström, 2007 & 2005). Together with S. Boulesnane, Associate Professor in Information Science, and L. Bouzidi, Professor in Information Science, we have been conducting multiple different research projects investigating information behavior in digital workspaces. We also work with researchers from other disciplines, including computer science, mathematical science, management and economical science who are based in the Magellan Research Center. As illustrated in Table 1, we use different approaches in our research, including sense-making, psycho-social, sociological, and socio-cognitive approaches. Our research focuses on: the information behavior of business managers in the finance sector; the information mobility in the hotel industry; and, the information space of small to medium enterprises (SMEs), including the question of the use of new information systems in international enterprises.

Table 1. Research approaches used

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Publications</th>
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<td>Sociological</td>
<td>Callon, 2005; Latour, 2006</td>
<td>Thivant &amp; Bouzidi 2010</td>
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<td>Socio-cognitive</td>
<td>Wilson, 2006</td>
<td>Thivant &amp; Bouzidi, 2006</td>
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Our first main research domain focuses on information seeking and use behavior of professionals mainly in the financial sector, but also in other economic sectors. I developed an original qualitative method, called situation, complexity and information activity (SICIA), which underlines the relationship between situations, professional contexts and strategies. In this method, we first analyze the discourse of professionals in relation with a questionnaire, looking for matches between a main professional context and a specific strategy for each situation mentioned by professionals. We found similarity in information seeking and use strategies used by different sectors of finance in most situations. But some differences were also found, and these differences were explained by the relevant activity goals in each sector. We applied this method in different sectors of Finance and demonstrated that the activity and also the professional context can directly influence information, seeking and use (ISU) behavior (Thivant & Bouzidi, 2004 & 2006). Continuing our focus on the finance sector, we also conducted research on the concept of information sources for financial professionals using a psycho-social approach (Thivant & Bouzidi, 2008). We have continued using the SICIA method and psycho-social approaches to investigate educational sectors, e.g., focusing on the ISU behavior of PhD students in Management Science (Thivant & Bouzidi, 2010), and focusing on the competitive intelligence sector (Frion & Thivant, 2014). Our colleagues also use these approaches to investigate ISU behavior the field of collective intelligence (Boulesnane & Bouzidi, 2013a, 2013b; Comtet, 2013).

Our second research domain concerns the concept of information space, mobility and ISU behavior. This second series of studies focuses on the hotel industry. This work was launched in 2004-2006 a Portuguese-French collaborative research project. Using the socio-cognitive approach (i.e., activity theory), we conducted qualitative interviews with hotel representatives and sent a questionnaire to hotel managers in order to know if they use and how they use information and communication technology (ICT) in their hotels, and how they represent themselves in the information space of their hotels. The definition of information space used in this study is: “the part of the information system that the searcher has navigated, as well as the information space anticipated by the searcher.” (Pharo, 2004) This research helps us to demonstrate that hotel managers have extended their information space with new ICT technologies and develop new ISU behavior in their everyday activities. (Boulesnane et al., 2009) After this initial study, we developed a new series of studies in this sector, concentrating more on information access problem. In these studies we focus on hotel websites with Web 2.0 in the Rhône-Alps region (Boulesnane et al., 2015).

Our third research domain concerns information access in small to medium business enterprises (SMEs) in different sectors (production, services). We have participated in several
different research projects, including the Discotec ANR Project (Moriset, 2010). We would like to better know the managers’ information environment and identify information access barriers. Specifically we would like to understand the use of heterogeneous information systems by these managers in the decision-making context (Boulesnane & Bouzidi, 2013c). We compared the ICT uses in SMES and more precisely the differences in practice between national and international enterprises (Collin, Moriset & Thivant, 2011, 2012). We conducted a case study (Lelorieux & Thivant, 2013) in order to understand how SMEs use their territorial environment in order to better seek and use information. We have also used different qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to know the information barriers of SMEs (Thivant, Moriset & Collin, 2013). With this research area, we hope to have a better view of digital workplaces in enterprises.

References


