The Second Workshop of the European Network for Work Information (ENWI)

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Abstract

The second workshop of ENWI was held in Malmö, Sweden, June 12-13, 2013. ENWI is the European Network for Work Information which intends to establish a group of researchers who share a common interest in the study of workplace information practices. The better understanding of people and their tasks, and how information is part of their work is a primary goal of ENWI. Furthermore, the design and study of better technology tools supporting information practices and knowledge work is also in the focus of the network. The second workshop strengthened the network by identifying common terminology research issues and joint projects.

1 Introduction

The European Network for Work Information [ENWI] was established during the first workshop in 2011 in Borås in Sweden. The network gained momentum and focus at its second meeting which also took place in Sweden, this time in Malmö on the 12th and 13th of June 2013. In Malmö, eleven members of network met, of which most had participated in the meeting in Borås. So far the network works a closed group of members, but when the network has positioned itself, it is the ambition to open the network for new members.

The research focus of ENWI (http://www.enwi.org) is on information practices and activities in the work place setting. Information practices in the work place can be seen a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various

sources. These practices are often habitual and can be identified both in job-related and non-work contexts. Examples of the these practices are active seeking, active scanning, nondirected scanning [1].

The study of information practices in the work environments goes beyond search activities as well as beyond social studies. Information practices integrate the study of people, social structures, technology and their interaction. Search technology and its integration into work tasks and the construction of information ecologies around retrieval technology to facilitate knowledge work require a holistic approach. Information behavior is often seen as a term within the field of information studies describing the activities of humans when dealing with information [3]. The study of information practices in the work environments broadens the view to include technological and organizational challenges. In summary, ENWI focuses on work tasks for professional information users.

The study of information practices in the workplace is complex and requires a holistic perspective. It needs to rely on a variety of methods. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to investigate the relationship between people, technology and work tasks. The members of ENWI quickly noticed during the interdisciplinary discussion of methodological approaches that this is a key challenge for the success of ENWI.

The ENWI members who participated in the second workshop are: David Allen (Leeds University Business School, UK), Pia Borlund (University of Copenhagen, DK), Katriina Byström (Borås University, Sweden & Oslo and Akershus University College, Norway), Thomas Mandl (University of Hildesheim, Germany), Ian Ruthven (University of Strathclyde), Jela Steinerová (Comenius University, Slovakia), Henrik Strindberg (Findwise AB, Sweden), Elaine Toms (University of Sheffield, UK), Peter Voisey (Findwise AB, Sweden), Gunilla Widen (Åbo Akademi University, Finland), and Christa Womser-Hacker (University of Hildesheim, Germany).

2 Workshop Activities

Currently, studies on information practices in the work environment are carried out by all the members who participated in the workshop. Though, they use different approaches and pursue diverging goals. The format of the workshop was more creative, informal and work-oriented than that of a traditional presentation driven format. The participants went through a variety of activities with the goals to create a common ground of terminology, develop ideas for research projects to test the adequateness of the terminology, and to revise a concrete proposal for financial support.

2.1 Framework and Terminology

In a first step, the concepts and their meanings were collected from the definitions prepared by network members as homework prior to the workshop. The subsequent discussions were documented and revealed many issues concerning the terminology. The development of a full taxonomy proved to be difficult in the time schedule available. The ENWI website (http://www.enwi.org) is used for further development, and will contain a wiki for methods as well as key articles, citations and position papers.

Nevertheless, a fruitful discussion led to an order of the basic terms. Overall terms were found like information culture. It is the context where information is communicated and where information is regarded as an important resource for fulfilling corporate goals. Information culture is embedded in task performance and decision making and is affected by and affects information practices [2].

The taxonomy comprises four pillars:

- Components: e.g., actors, roles, systems, organizations.

- Context: e.g., political, social, economic, cultural.

- Information Use Process: e.g., information needs, sharing, dissemination, creation, transformation, literacy.

- Information Content: e.g., quality, type, format.

This taxonomy developed so far will form the basis of a paper in order for the the community to benefit from the workshop efforts.

2.2   Research Ideas

In the slightly competitive format of Dragon's Den, research proposals were developed by randomly assigned pairs of researchers. In the Dragon's Den on television, ideas need to be defended in front of highly critical investors who might provide millions for the wining ideas. Investors were represented by also very critical peers at the workshop.

The most favorably voted idea is on information sharing facing demographic change. What are best practices in organizations for transmitting and sharing information from older and experienced workers to a typically smaller group of workers of the younger generation? Which tools can be used under which organizational conditions, and how can they be optimized?

2.3   Workgroup Structure

A very concrete outcome of the meeting in Malmö was a proposal for funding. The ENWI members identified five main workgroup activities for the project plan of the proposal:

- Work: Review and renew existing techniques and approaches to model and understand work tasks and activities in information ecologies.

- Humans: Models of human characteristics that influence effectiveness/efficiency, including cultural differences, ABCs (affect, behavior, cognition). Such a model could help to explain e.g. how human practices could be influenced to overcome typical barriers to information sharing in work places.

- Technology: Framework of tools and tasks for effective systems to support knowledge work.

- Processes: Taxonomy of processes mapped to various domains/sectors which will lead to the identification of existing gaps in technologies and define a research and development programme.

- Influence: Social political and cultural influence which modify the context of work tasks. It is necessary to understand the inter- organization influences in a multi-cultural environment of the factors that influence work effectiveness and efficiency.

3   Outlook

The workshop proved very successful in creating foundations, collaboration, ideas and future plans. ENWI is positioning itself as a significant and authoritative group in the research area of Workplace Information Practices.

Many issues remain to be solved. Method selection and evaluation are still open topics. For example, the evaluation of results of information retrieval systems is an established research area. However, the span of behavior that it deals with is too short when considering work practices. The focus needs to be opened for a more holistic perspective. User information behavior needs to be analyzed using methods from HCI and other disciplines.

The network will organize further meetings and workshops, some in conjunction with international conferences in order to gain greater visibility. Concrete plans were made for the Information Interaction in Context Symposium (IIIX) 2014 in Regensburg, Germany and the Information Behaviour Conference (ISIC) 2014 in Leeds, UK. Another meeting of ENWI has been envisioned for the spring of 2014 in Visby.

4   Acknowledgement

References

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