Workplace Information Practice (WIP): an Ongoing Research Program

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Contemporary multimodal workplaces are characterized by multiple ways of creating, circulating and linking various forms of knowledge. This is predicated on the development and execution of information practices. Employees develop a strategic advantage in the workplace when they build knowledge about: how and where information is located; the various forms of knowledge (embodied, nuanced, objective, social) available; how to operationalize activities that allow them to gain access to information; and, how to contribute new information to the work environment. The importance of workplace information practices can be found in the uptake of workplace research and embodied knowledges, which build capacity for employees to innovate, to work effectively and become resilient.

Information practices are defined as the information literacies, activities, skills and competencies required to inform participation, collaboration and performance in the work environment. Information practices support the creation and leveraging of knowledge (Ferguson & Lloyd, 2007; Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Lloyd, 2013) and are enacted through a broad range of social and technological activities that form the basis of information work and labor in the modern work environment. In the past, information work has not always been recognized as actual labor, however, when much of the labor in a contemporary society is undertaken totally – or at least with some reference to the information or digital world – to information and communication technologies, to information skills, or to communication skills and collaboration, then the notion of *labor needs to be readjusted* (Lloyd, 2013). Without the ability to operationalize information practices or skills relevant to their productivity, employees will find it difficult to solve workplace problems, to draw from research or evidence-based practice, and to innovate and be effective. As a consequence, employers may lose their competitive edge in dynamic and rapidly changing market places. The modern multimodal workplace requires information work that facilitates access to information as it is *created, manipulated, remediated, circulated, accessed and used*.   The labor of

information work connects workers to the context of work and to the structural, performative, social and embodied dimensions of work.

The challenges of socially and technologically complex work environments effect not only established employees, but also new employees who are transitioning into the work. Recent research (Head, 2012) suggests that while the ability to search online is an important skill, it also narrows the capacity of employees to solve work-related problems. Consequently, a wider and balanced suite of technical and non-technical information skills and competencies are required of employees to ensure work readiness in the transition from education to work. The issue for employers is how to train employees for information and technologically related information work. For educators and trainers the issue is how to prepare graduates and trainees with the information literacies and skills that ensure their workplace readiness.

This ongoing theoretical and empirical research program combines a practice theory approach with an information perspective (Lloyd, 2012). It explores how information practice emerges, is enacted, facilitated and augmented by employees through social and technological strategies to inform their work performance and their capacity to create, innovate, strategize and perform.

New questions of deep interest that this program addresses are:

- How is information practice shaped, experienced and understood in the performative discourse and the narratives of employers and employees?

- What is the nature of information work? What constitutes information labor in contemporary technologically rich work environments?

- In what way has the use of technology and remote ways of working altered / improved / contested the collaborative and communicative nature of information work?

- What information activities are central to work performance in a multimodal work environment?

In addition to new questions about the performance of work in multimodal environments, new techniques for investigating and describing employees experience are also being explored. These include the use of situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) to map the landscapes of information practices to identify the intersection between academic notions of contemporary information practices and literacies and evidence based practices.

References

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