SI 643 - Professional Practice in Libraries and Information Centers, Winter 2009

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643 Week 5:
Libraries as Information Use Environments:

Robert Taylor’s
Concept of the Information Use Environment

Feb 5, 2009
Robert S Taylor

- Robert S. Taylor, 1918-2008
- WWII intelligence agent
- Sports editor
- Newspaper reporter
- Librarian
- Researcher, Educator
- Founding Dean Syracuse University School of Information Studies (1972-1981)
- Visionary “information” scholar

http://ischool.syr.edu/taylor_temp/taylor_bio.html
An Information Use Environment


• An IUE “consists of sets of people who share assumptions about the nature of their work and the role of information in it”;
50+ Years of Information Needs & Use Studies
(Chun Wei Choo)

**TABLE 2-2.** Information-use environments (Taylor 1991).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sets of people</th>
<th>Typical problems</th>
<th>Work settings</th>
<th>Problem resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. The professions | • Problems are **dynamic**  
|                    | • **Discrete classes of problems** are created by requirements of profession, occupation, social condition, etc.  
| 2. The entrepreneurs | | | • Assumptions about what constitutes the resolution of a problem  
| 3. Special interest groups | • **Problem dimensions** determine the criteria for judging the value of information  
| 4. Special socioeconomic groups | | • **Classes of information use**  
| | | • **Traits of information** anticipated to resolve problem  

The IUE Framework

• The IUE is contextual (people, problems, settings, problem resolution)

• Taylor (1991): The IUE is “a bridge between
  a) users and their environments and
  b) . . . librarians.”

• Choo (2006): “people’s perceptions . . . control the breadth and depth of their information search--including the time and effort to spend on searching, where to search, how information encountered is to be filtered, and how much and what kinds of information are required.”
Taylor’s Problem Dimensions

**Design**
- Well-structured
- Simple
- “Goals are specific”
- “Initial state understood”
- “Assumptions agreed upon”
- “Assumptions explicit”
- “Familiar pattern”
- “Magnitude of risk not great”
- “Susceptible to empirical analysis”
- “Internal imposition”

**Discovery**
- Ill-structured
- Complex
- “Goals are amorphous”
- “Initial state not understood”
- “Assumptions not agreed upon”
- “Assumptions not explicit”
- “New pattern”
- “Magnitude of risk great”
- “Not susceptible to empirical analysis”
- “External imposition”

OK. What is Information Use (IU)?

- IU happens when a person selects & processes info that **leads to a change** in the person’s capacity to **make sense of something** or to **take action**
- Taylor’s 8 categories of information use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enlightenment</th>
<th>Projective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem understanding</td>
<td>Motivational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental; factual</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The IUE: An Early Framework to Help Librarians Think Contextually by:

1) focusing on sets of people—often those who share work or organizational settings;
2) realizing that the problems these sets of people focus on profoundly effect the kinds of information they think will be useful;
3) recognizing that the constraints and opportunities provided by the setting influence information use; and
4) understanding that attitudes and approaches to problem resolution influence information seeking and use.
The IUE in the 21st Century

• Did your job analysis reveal that the information professionals in that area need to know any of the info environment concepts?

• Have you seen pieces of the IUE in use (even if it isn’t called an IUE)? How?

• What are the implications of the Information Use Environment Concept for Practice?