

How is Information Literacy Related to Social Competences in the Workplace?

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Traditionally seen as a sub-concept of librarianship, information literacy has evolved far beyond issues of information access, management, or transmission (Moeller et al., 2011). The changing settings of mediated environments transform what it means to be information-savvy in the digital age. Hence, information literacy is becoming an issue to be tackled in the analysis of complex social and technical arrangements such as new work environments, where technologically-mediated teamwork and distance work have spread widely (Bruce, 1999). In particular, while the ability to consult, produce, search, or organize information are often implicitly considered as skills of the individual, it is also necessary to take the collective dimension of information literacy at work into account (Crawford & Irving, 2009).

Our presentation is based on work-in-progress research on digital and media literacy in distant teamwork environments. We introduce a theoretical framework that articulates the social and informational dimensions of competences in workplace environments. Using this framework, we interview office workers about how digital technology supports their distant teamwork practices and analyze these practices in terms of the technical, informational, and social competences they involve.

In this presentation, we use preliminary field data to highlight how our informants' informational work practices are not valuable in themselves, but only in relation to the social organization they elaborate. We see information literacy as inseparable from the ongoing social condition of the practice. For example, the observed employees' activities include the management of collective tasks, and of synchronous and asynchronous collective time. They involve the collective creation, maintenance, and sharing of information. Some activities are dedicated to the monitoring and visibility of the coordinated activity, or to the gathering of information for decision-making. Those examples illustrate how the information landscape in the workplace participates in the sociotechnical design of collective action and how information literacy may contribute to the social construction of an organization.

In other words, the information literate workers are able to produce, retrieve, and process information according to their workplace affordances and constraints. Their informational practices enable efficient collective activity and contribute to the constitution, maintenance, and evolution of the organization and the fulfillment of its mission. As it empowers the workers to fully participate to the existence of the organization, information literacy contributes to social inclusion.

References

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