How do we manage information in our daily lives? How do we organise and evaluate the information we need for the various projects in which we’re involved? In particular, how do we place it in the proper context? How do we ensure that we find the information we need, without becoming overloaded with irrelevant and/or inaccurate documents?

Pre-class reading:


Carefully read the article, and bring a copy to the lab.

Lab component

Finding Information

Searching for information online is often a juggling act. Use search terms that are too broad, and you may receive a large number of documents, many of which are not relevant to your purposes. Use terms that are too narrow, and you may receive a small number of relevant documents, but miss out on other vital sources.

In information management, this problem is commonly termed the relationship between recall and precision.

One attempt to represent this relationship visually can be found at:


Working in pairs,

4. Enter the phrase “weapons of mass destruction” into the search engine nominated by your tutor. Remember to place the phrase within double quotation marks.
a. How many hits are returned?
b. What steps will you take to filter out hits that do not concern the ongoing war in Iraq?
c. What steps will you take to filter out hits that do not concern the debate in Australia about this topic?
d. Now enter a search which combines the following terms: weapons of mass destruction, Iraq, Howard, Australia.
e. How many hits are returned?
f. How many of these hits concern Australian Prime Minister Howard’s views and/or action concerning the ongoing war in Iraq? What other kinds of documents are returned by your search?

Evaluating Information

Having found some documents that seem relevant to us, how do we evaluate the information that they contain?

Working in pairs,

5. Review the check list provided by Grassian. If you have time, you might find it useful to look at the related article at http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/discipline.htm

a. Evaluate the ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East’ web site according to the criteria set out in Grassian’s article (http://cns.miis.edu/research/wmdme/)
b. Evaluate the ‘USAF Counterproliferation Center’ web site according to the criteria set out in Grassian’s article (http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/awc-cps.htm)
c. If time remains, evaluate another web site of your own choosing according to her criteria.


In groups of four or five, read and answer the questions below.

1. Imagine that you are visiting an organization, where you overhear the following statements. What could you assume about the meaning and implications of the word ‘murp’ in each individual case, given the context in which it is used? [Note: murp may well mean different things in each of the following cases]

a. ‘Bill has been murping the development committee meetings again. It’s so hard to reach consensus in a group that size, and his behaviour doesn’t help matters’.
b. ‘The **murp** in the computer room needs to be replaced again. It seems to be randomly deleting e-mail messages’.

c. ‘If we could just agree on how to evaluate the **murp**, we could move ahead with the study. Some of the staff think that there’s no way to measure it directly’.

2. Now imagine that you need to understand if these statements have any implications for information flows within the organization.

Other than the obvious question (‘Excuse me, but what is a murp?’),

a. *What would you ask* to understand the problem implied in each case?

b. *How else would you observe* (through watching, interviewing, or reading relevant documents) so that you could understand whether ‘murp’ has an important (or trivial) effect on information transfer within the organization?

Now report back to the tutorial class.

1. Explain your group’s decisions, as well as the issues that arose in the process.
2. Which methods of gathering information are best suited in each of the cases cited?
3. Can you think of other useful ways of gathering relevant information in an organisational context?

In groups of four or five, read and answer the questions below.

3. Read this excerpt from Case, op.cit., p.295: ‘how much information can actually be conveyed in a glimpse that lasts only a few seconds? And how likely is it to result in the viewer purchasing or using the advertised product or concept?’

For each of the handouts from your tutor, answer these questions:

‘a. How much information – in terms of distinct concepts – would you say is actually conveyed by the sign?’

b. How likely are people to take in the information – can it be easily (and perhaps, amusingly) absorbed and understood in a few seconds?

c. How likely are people to respond in the way the advertiser wants – how soon can they respond, and how costly will it be to do so?’

Now report your findings back to the tutorial class.