Annotated Bibliography


In this article the authors review existent research on the information seeking habits of engineers, health care professionals, and lawyers. From the review of this literature the authors propose a model of information seeking behavior that would apply to any group of professionals.

The first group of professionals considered in the article is engineers and how their use of information differs from scientists mainly because of the nature of their work. The result of a engineer's work is generally "a product, a process, or a service." (p. 164) They usually consume more information than they produce, as opposed to scientists whose product is generally more information in the form of a research paper. According to existing studies, engineers rely heavily on peers' knowledge and written sources consulted, which "consist of textbooks, technical reports, catalogs, and trade journals." (p. 165)

The second group of professionals addressed in this article is health care professionals, more specifically nurses, physicians, and dentists. For nurses, there are two main types of information needs, that is, "information to help them make decision about the care of individual patients and information about broader topics within nursing." (p. 168) Research in the information seeking habits of nurses indicates that for routine questions nurses rely on single source of information be it a colleague or in print. For other types of information, nurses will seek multiple sources of information.

Physicians' use of information varies according to the type, years, and geographical location of practice. For example, a study shows that surgeons sought more information on
patient care while pediatricians and family doctors were more interested on the psychological aspect of disease. (p. 169) Those physicians with less years of practice make greater use of the library and older physicians consult with colleagues less. Also, studies show that physicians need immediate access to information and that colleagues are important in obtaining information.

The focus of dentists' information seeking is also for patient care. Studies show that dentists "seldom appear to use libraries for gathering information" but rather seek information through recommendation from colleagues and dental reference books. Factors of importance for dentists are currency and timeliness of the information available.

Lawyers make up the last group of information users addressed in this article. The author recognize that there is few studies about the information seeking behavior of lawyers, but that lawyers' need of information will vary depending on the type of practice with some ramifications of the field requiring more research than others. Another fact is the place where the lawyer works with lawyers in larger firms delegating the resource to assistants while in smaller offices lawyers will perform their own research.

After reviewing these users groups and considering that information seeking models focus on a specific group, the authors suggest a model that can be used for any group of professionals. The proposed model consists of six components: works roles and associated tasks, characteristics of information needs, factors affecting information seeking, awareness of information, and outcomes.

This article shows that each group of professionals has specific information needs and searches for information in specific ways. The studies also show that information-seeking habits of professionals are directly related to their work and the outcomes of that work. Even so, the
authors were able to create a model to be commonly applied to any group of professionals, which shows that some generalization can be made across different groups of professionals.