Information Literacy at the Workplace: a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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BACKGROUND & MOTIVATION

Global economy - cross-cultural and cross-border research will help educators, such as librarians, understand the complexity of skills expected in the workplace.

Lack of in-depth study - much has been written on information literacy; yet very few can relate how information literacy is applied in the workplace.

PURPOSES OF THIS RESEARCH

Three main goals:

- To investigate how information literacy is perceived in the workplace
- To discover how employees obtain information to carry out their jobs in an effective and timely fashion.
- To learn how librarian can help bridge the gaps

KEYWORDS

- Information Literacy
- Workplace Expectations
- Academic Librarian
- Subject Librarian
- Economic Values
- Cross-cultural Study
- Globalization

WHY INFORMATION LITERACY?

Information Literacy in the Workplace Context

- The U.S. Department of Labor identified five competencies necessary to meet the challenges of today's (i.e., 1992) workforce; information literacy is one of them
- Endorsed by UNESCO in 2003, at its meeting in Prague: "Towards an Information Literate Society"
- Economic factors:
  - 2001 International Data Corporation (IDC) article revealed that this delay [be information literate] could cost a Fortune 500 company $5.3 million a year in the United States (Feldman & Sherman, 2001)
  - In 2007 Saulles' study showed that small- and medium-sized businesses in the United Kingdom wasted over £3.7 billion because of inefficient use of the Internet as a research tool

RESEARCH METHODS

- This project applies a mix of research methods - site visits, interviews, and a survey.
- Sample size: - more than 120 participants from 40 companies were involved in this study.
- Participants were from a wide spectrum of industries in Taiwan and Silicon Valley of Northern California - vice president of research &development, company controller, marketing director, president/owner of a software development start-up, web master, customer service representative, Internet evangelist, human resource director, talent recruiting specialist, visiting scholar from Switzerland, general manager of banking services, stock/financial/wealth manager, account executive of marketing research, general manager of high speed railroad consultation, director of government-funded information and business intelligent institute, importer/exporter, and engineer.

DATA ANALYSIS

- Participants (*n*=100)
  - Q1: Demographics, job functions/responsibilities
  - Q2: If company provides professional staff and training
  - Q3: Needs for on-job professional development
  - Q4: Concept of and/or Experience with Information Literacy

DEMOGRAPHICS

		Silicon Valley	Taiwan
What is the nature of your job function responsibility (top 3)	Marketing	16% (8)	
	Customer Support	12% (6)	14% (7)
	R&D	12% (6)	
	Engr		22% (11)
What is the number of employees in your company	Silicon Valley		
	Taiwan		
	1000+	56% (28)	20% (10)
Is your company public or privately held?	<100	26% (13)	22% (11)
	Silicon Valley		
	Taiwan		
	Pub	58% (29)	85% (4)
What is your highest education?	Private	16% (8)	22% (11)
	Silicon Valley		
	Taiwan		
	Gov't		8% (4)
	BA/BS	34% (17)	62% (31)
Where did you receive your education?	MA/MS	54% (27)	18% (9)
	Ph.D	8% (4)	4% (2)
	Silicon Valley		
	Taiwan		
	Hi School		4% (2)
Do you speak more than one language?	USA	52% (26)	
	more than one country	30% (15)	10% (5)
	one country	40% (20)	
	Asia	18% (9)	54% (27)
	Yes	70% (35)	70% (35)
What is your age group?	No	18% (9)	
	Silicon Valley		
	Taiwan		
	21-30	20% (10)	
	31-32	22% (11)	
	40-49	32% (16)	26% (13)
	16% (8)	38% (19)	8% (4)
	52-53	8% (4)	

IF COMPANY PROVIDES PROFESSIONAL STAFF OR ON-JOB TRAINING

		Silicon Valley / Taiwan		
Does your company have a library/resource center?		yes	no	
	Silicon Valley	50%(25)	50% (25)	
	Taiwan	56%(28)	30% (15)	14% (7)
Is a librarian or professional staff in charge of the center?		yes	employee in biz./hur.com	don't know or didn't
	Silicon Valley	34%(17)	50% (25)	16% (8)
	Taiwan	38%(19)	46% (23)	16% (8)
Does your company provide training program?		no	yes	yes, online
	Silicon Valley	58%(29)	20% (10)	18% (9)
	Taiwan	38%(19)	26% (13)	30% (15)
What resources do you use the most?		free www	land phone	yes, inc pers pona 18% (9)
	Silicon Valley	80%(40)	38% (19)	
	Taiwan	76%(38)	28% (14)	24% (12)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CONTINUING EDUCATION

Top 3 commonly used communication tools			
	Silicon Valley	email 94% (47)	face-to-face 58% (29)	land phone 38% (19)
	Taiwan	email 94% (47)	face-to-face 30% (15)	cell 54% (27)
Most effective means of communication			
	Silicon Valley	email 90% (45)	face-to-face 50% (25)	online chat 24% (12)
	Taiwan	email 86% (43)	42% (21)	land phone 42% (21)	cell 24% (12)
How do you keep up with the profession?		attending conference	news/email alert	trade mag online	ask colleagues
	Silicon Valley	72% (36)	70% (35)	62% (31)	60% (30)
	Taiwan	44% (22)	44% (22)	42% (21)	44% (22)	trade mag hard c. 48% (24)

CONCEPT OF AND/OR EXPERIENCE WITH INFORMATION LITERACY

		Silicon Valley / Taiwan			
If you rely on www, do you think the information is reliable?		yes, most of the time	yes, all the time	not always, but this is all we have
	Silicon Valley	76% (38)	10% (5)	
	Taiwan	62% (31)	6% (3)	30% (15)
What criteria do you use to evaluate the accuracy of retrieved information?		all of above (content, date, author)	content	author	date
	Silicon Valley	60 % (30)	34% (17)	4% (2)	2% (1)
	Taiwan	50% (25)	26% (13)	6% (3)	18% (9)

IL (CONTINUED)

		Silicon Valley / Taiwan			
Which are trusted mostly by sites by domain name?		.gov	.org	.com	.edu
	Silicon Valley	64 % (32)	60% (30)	60% (30)	60% (30)
	Taiwan	60% (30)	58% (29)	46% (23)	56% (28)
Do you cite the source?		sometimes		not at all	
	Silicon Valley	52% (26)	32% (16)	12% (6)	
	Taiwan	48% (24)	36% (18)	16% (8)	
How important to give credit when citing a source?		extremely	very		not at all
	Silicon Valley	52% (26)	24% (12)	16% (8)	
	Taiwan	16% (8)	28% (14)	38% (19)	24% (12)
When you were in college, did you ask a librarian for assistance?		for school term papers	used job	learn on my own	evaluate info
	Silicon Valley	46% (23)	46% (20)	24% (12)	
	Taiwan	36 %(18)	24% (12)	40% (20)	
What did you learn from a librarian?		using databases	using search sources	all	author	other
	Silicon Valley	40% (20)	12% (6)	10% (5)	4% (2)	18% (9)
	Taiwan	56% (28)		20% (10)	6% (3)	

MAJOR OBSTACLES

- Cost: airfare, food, and lodging
  - Solution: grant or research fund
- Time demands to travel and moving between companies
  - Solution: release time, such as a sabbatical
- Scheduling meeting, interview, etc.
  - Solution: plan ahead with email, skype
- Adaptation to local culture
  - Solution: network with people who know the culture via listserv, interest group via ALA ethnic affiliate, etc.

LESSON LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

- It is involved a wide range of workers across many sectors of work functions and industries. Their views of information literacy are almost identical. The most alarming finding is the lack of knowledge about the legal and ethical aspects of using information.
- This primary study sheds some light to help academic librarians reposition themselves as researchers-educators integral to student success.
- Any follow-up study with new technology, such as mobile devices, free internet communication tools, such as Skype, talktime, facetime; social media, such as facebook, Twitter, etc.

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QUESTION & ANSWER

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