Information Literacy:
Transferring the Concept from School to Work

Linnea Knapp, CRM

Information Literacy in the Workplace: New Perspectives brings together several contributors to focus on different aspects of information literacy (IL) in academic settings and in the workplace, with many of the chapters focusing on the shift that happens when someone moves from the first into the latter.

As Sayyad Abdi states in chapter five, "The major reason why workplace IL began to attract research interest was the apparent lack of transferability of concepts from one context (i.e. education) to another (i.e. workplace or everyday life)."

The Focus

The book is focused on reviewing the research that has been done, explaining instances where IL in the workplace and education settings has been successful and taking a few tentative steps towards connecting the two with practical applications.

The contributors address a variety of topics and areas of IL research conducted over the last few decades. Some of them explain the research and others build on what's been done, proposing new definitions, new models, or new analysis methods focused on the experience of IL in the workplace context.

Some methods, main author Marc Forster recognizes, such as those used in the nursing study explained in chapters two and three, can be a model for translating IL to workplaces and industries other than the one described. Others, like the analysis method described in chapter 11, Forster argues, are slightly impractical.

With such a wide variety of research presented and interpreted, Stephen Roberts rightly argues in chapter nine that there needs to be
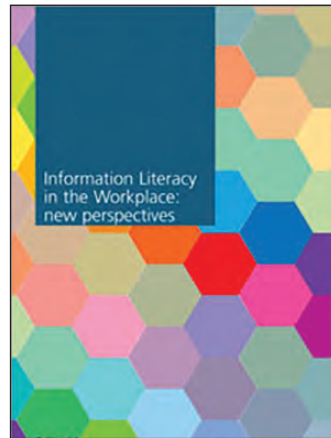
Information Literacy in the Workplace: New Perspectives
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"some consensus of the principles and theory upon which investigation is grounded."

Writing Style

Because this book is mainly written by and for those in the academic environment, the writing style can feel overly academic at times. It may be slightly difficult for the average information professional (such as me) with little to no experience in this area to quickly comprehend what is being addressed in each chapter, let alone understand how to easily apply the information. This is often exacerbated by the book's variety of authors who each brings a unique writing style.

That said, the portions of the chapters that focus on the research

being done in the realm of IL shouldn't be discounted by those in information fields just because of what might be unfamiliar language or writing style. Several of the book's authors include practical examples of how a certain model or approach worked in a particular workplace setting that can make it worth the effort of working through the academic language.

Practical Applications

The workplace settings of the practical examples vary and include the nursing profession, the technical services department of a university library, a large public organization, a small private company, and a non-profit group. Within each chapter that includes practical examples, the author presents the findings, relating them back to the aspect of IL in the workplace they were focusing on. Often, readers can see how the presented examples could be extrapolated and adjusted to be used in a different environment.

There is still a communication barrier that needs to be addressed before the academic version of IL can truly be accepted and effective in the workplace. As Bonnie Cheuk explains in chapter 10, the value of IL is hidden from the greater workplace because "IL experts speak only to ourselves, and mostly in an academic context." In addition, "the phrase 'Information Literacy' does not mean anything in the business context."

Because of this language problem, it may take extra effort on the part of information professionals to translate the practical examples presented in the book so they can be understood and accepted within their own organizations.

This book is a great first step towards bridging the gap between IL in educational settings and IL in the workplace, where – as Cheuk mentions – few people even know the term. Even though its topic is very relevant to information professionals, the book doesn't expand outside of the research realm enough to make it a "must read" for them. With its definitions, models, and practical examples, though, I would say it could be a potentially useful "resource." **E**

About the Author: Linnea Knapp, CRM, is the records information specialist at Lansing Community College in Michigan. Previously, she was one of the initial members of the records and information management services department at the University of Illinois at Chicago and was the first archives librarian at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Ill. She earned a master's degree in library and information science with an archival administration certificate from Wayne State University. Knapp can be contacted at *knappl1@lcc.edu*.

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