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Book Review: Information Literacy in the Workplace

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Review of *Information Literacy in the Workplace* Edited by Marc Forster

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Review of *Information Literacy in the Workplace* Edited by Marc Forster

Although librarians put great effort into developing means of teaching and assessing students' information literacy, much work remains in examining the role of information literacy in the workplace. What are the information literacy needs of workers and employers? How can people use information literacy skills to succeed in their jobs? How can employers provide support for workers' information literacy, and how might workers' information literacy benefit businesses? How do we develop a base of evidence on the role, development, and uses of information literacy in the workplace? How can information professionals understand the uses of information in the workplace in order to focus our efforts effectively? These are among the many questions examined in *Information Literacy in the Workplace*, edited by Marc Forster.

This edited volume of research attempts to reach beyond the library field to Library and Information Science (LIS) educators, professional workers, and their employers to help them understand the value of information literacy as a significant workplace skill. The authors position workplace information literacy, or workplace IL, within the social context of workplace practice, taking into account the interpersonal interactions and communication systems that provide structure to the working world. In doing so, they provide a richer and more practical view of information literacy than commonly seen, carrying concepts beyond the classroom.

Although the editor and authors state throughout this volume that the intended audience, in addition to the expected librarians and LIS educators, includes business professionals, human resource specialists, and workers, the question of how non-library professionals would encounter this publication is underexplored. The authors acknowledge the limitations of the term "information literacy" but also point out that workplace professionals value the concepts underlying it: critical thinking, research skill, effective evaluation, and presentation of information. A key challenge addressed in this book is how librarians and educators can expand their understanding of the complexity of workplace IL as knowledge development and learning necessary for effective performance at the individual and organizational level.

Indeed, *Information Literacy in the Workplace* would be particularly useful to those librarians and LIS educators who work with adult learners, whether in colleges, universities, or

vocational training programs. Instead of offering a step-by-step plan for demonstrating the direct impact of workplace IL on an employee's professional success, this research offers a theoretical underpinning to inform information professionals' work. It offers suggestions for how librarians and LIS educators may communicate the relevance of our instruction to our students, helping individuals to see more clearly how information literacy can improve their lives in practical ways. More than being learning for learning's sake, workplace IL helps individuals be effective and productive information users in a professional setting.

However, this reviewer wished for more practical advice from the authors, such as suggestions for how to build professional relationships with employers that would be necessary in order to bring information literacy programming into the workplace. While that research remains to be written, *Information Literacy in the Workplace* does raise and examine a range of important issues and prompts reflection as to how we can move these conversations forward.

The book begins with a review of prior research on the role of workplace IL. The authors discuss the interpersonal characteristics of workplace IL and how individuals within an organization may operate at different levels of complexity in their use and consideration of information. This examination of information literacy within a team, beyond the level of the individual, is an intriguing and valuable contribution to the field. The authors also consider how individuals' information literacy skills and needs might develop over the course of a career. Some workers' responsibilities require more or less complex analysis of information than others'.

Several chapters address the social dimension of workplace IL. Workplace leaders and managers will find this perspective valuable; workplace IL requires consideration of individual workers not just as informed consumers of information but also as sources of information for colleagues and teams. In the workplace, information drawn from expert sources or external communities of practice is synthesized with that developed by experience, creating a particularly rich and intriguing information environment, as described in several chapters of this volume.

As befits an examination of information literacy within the practical sphere of the workplace, readers are offered a discussion of how businesses can benefit from recruiting, training, and supporting information-literate individuals. The inclusion of workplace IL in staff development, as well as in the creation of policies and procedures, is examined in light of its economic value to businesses.

A discussion of workplace IL as a moral responsibility in the professional world could prompt meaningful discussion with those who may not have previously considered the wider importance of information literacy to society. To function well as a professional requires individuals to recognize their information needs and to locate and utilize quality information in their field. The potential damage done by a doctor who failed to seek out quality research on a case, or a lawyer who did not research the ramifications of the plea entered on the part of a client, is clear. The authors present a convincing argument that professionals have an ethical responsibility to develop their own and their organization's workplace IL for the good of their clients, customers, and broader society.

This collection offers many avenues for future research, moving beyond the theoretical and into the analysis of information literacy's role within various workplaces and fields. Future research might consider how professional collaboration informs and is informed by workplace IL, how individual and organizational IL interact, and how workplace IL serves the goals of individuals and professions. Those interested in the development of lifelong information literacy within college and university teaching may want to look into the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) (<https://www.aacu.org/leap>). This collaboration between higher education, industry, and philanthropic organizations offers guidance for planning and implementing high-impact, real-world information literacy learning in a college or university setting.

Marc Forster, in his editing of and contributions to *Information Literacy in the Workplace*, asks us to recognize the real-life impacts of information-illiterate workers and workplaces and charges us to carry his research forward, within our own daily work and as educators, to communicate the value of information literacy to non-librarians: students, workers, managers, human resources professionals, business owners, and leaders. We must also recognize that information literacy is a means to an end within the workplace, not an end unto itself. According to Marc Forster, information literacy is "a personal attribute" to accomplish goals, to move an organization forward, to produce profit, to improve services, and to develop workers as individuals and as groups (p. 29). *Information Literacy in the Workplace* plays a valuable role in bridging the gap among librarians, LIS educators, and the professional world, offering suggestions for enriching the workplace as an environment for knowledge construction and learning.