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**Workplace Information Literacy: It’s Different**

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There are plenty of articles and studies on information literacy in our professional literature. These almost always address the issue of information literacy in public, K-12 and academic libraries and focus on end users. We need more discussion and study of the unique needs and challenges of increasing information literacy skills in the workplace.

To that end, this summer, I am writing a chapter for a new book from Emerald that is expected to be published in 2013. The title is “**Developing people’s information capabilities: fostering information literacy in educational, workplace and community contexts” (editors: Dr Mark Hepworth & Dr Geoff Walton).**

This month I thought I’d share with you some of the ideas and concepts that I’ll be exploring.

I take the broader view of information literacy and subscribe to the emerging discussion about ‘transliteracy’. I believe that these skills will be essential in the 21st Century.

Here’s the definition of transliteracy from Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteracy]:

“**Transliteracy** is t*he ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks.* The modern meaning of the term combines *literacy* with the prefix *trans*-, which means "across; through", so a **transliterate** person is one who is literate across multiple media.”

Transliteracy can comprise any and all of the following skills and competencies in an enterprise environment:

* Reading literacy
* Numeracy
* Critical literacy
* Learning system and collaboration literacy
* Social literacy
* Search literacy
* Computer literacy
* Intranet literacy
* Web literacy
* Content literacy
* Written literacy
* News literacy
* Technology literacy
* Information literacy
* Media literacy
* Adaptive literacy
* Research literacy
* Academic literacy
* Confidentiality, privacy, corporate policy
* Legal and regulatory literacy
* Reputation management, Etc.
* Cultural literacy (i.e. corporate culture or global initiatives)

Each of these must be viewed in the context of the enterprise mission, as opposed to a community, learning or societal research goal. That difference is the key to understanding the key challenge of focusing on workplace literacy.

This definition nicely frames the challenge of workplace literacy where search, retrieve, and usage rarely sufficient to be a competent and successful employee. Success in the workplace requires the integration of specific software, network environments, and collaboration tools, learning tools, multiple content formats and more. And it’s incumbent on both the employer and the employee to keep up to date with the changes in the technical and content environment as well as their profession, sector and industry. The need for continuous learning is more than just a personal value; it’s a matter of competitive advantage and survival. Sometimes lives depend on progress being made and adaptations spreading throughout the enterprise.

In my chapter my intent is to frame the key issues in workplace information literacy. I’m am basing it on my personal experience and observations of over 30 years with multiple workplaces, intranets, corporate libraries, content development, training and development strategy, and product development. The workplace is not a single or uniform population, as can be argued that general consumers, K-12 students, and undergraduate scholars can be. These traditional literacy markets differ in one key aspect, they are under the rigor of an institutional strategy and agenda in the case of education or make compromises, as in the consumer space, to acquire information at no charge like Google or public library services or at the behest and rules of, for example, a retailer. Workplaces are defined as the workers in both not for profit and for profit sectors who are tasked with running the organization, delivering value to others, and delivering services to end users like learners, customers, clients, patients, etc. I want to explore these issues and frameworks through key target audiences in commercial and institutional workplace environments such as:

* Teachers (as opposed to students)
* Professors (as opposed to young scholars)
* Corporate administrators and business decision-makers, professionals, consultants
* Medical Professionals such as Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists)
* Lawyers (in both private practice and internal corporate and government work)
* Engineers, Architects
* Financial Pros (accountants, auditors, MBA’s, etc.)
* Creative Professions (advertising, marketers, artists, etc.)

With workplace audiences there are key differentiations from the more common focus of librarians on the broad information literacy needs of end user populations in public library, school, college and university sectors. These can broadly be thought of in several key buckets:

* Adult learning and education have very different aspects in that there are more solidified learning styles and expectations, competing priorities for time, compensation and performance considerations as well as demographic issues related to age and adoption strategies;
* There are a wider range of and need for partnerships with other stakeholder groups in the host organization such as human resources professionals , training departments, executive champions, quality leaders, financial leaders;
* There are stronger and more clearly defined strategic goals that are managed, targeted and measured such as improvements in productivity, efficiency and effectiveness, revenue growth, cost control, process and technological change, etc. that are built into position performance contracts and compensation. There may also be cultural and environmental issues related to unionization, enterprise culture and values, etc.;
* There are key measurements that predominate decision-making in this sector that include return on investment, return on effort, revenue growth/cost savings, and strategic alignment with long term and operational goals;
* There may be tough legal requirements and deadlines such as, for example Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) training, medical regulations, audit recommendations, etc.
* There are strong institutional and cultural considerations around how ‘things are done here” and alignment with the cultural and learning values of the dominant profession or industry and commercial norms;
* There are often cultural differences between public sector and private sector value systems and the articulation of benefits. Communication of these in the *language of the workplace* *audience* is key;
* Lastly, the training and development opportunities provided by an employer may not be by choice or voluntary and not all target audiences will choose to attend, engage, learn or adopt. In order to be successful there is an aspect of building engagement and balancing influence and control in order to ‘move the needle’.

And now a request to access the SLA hive mind: I will conclude the chapter with recommendations for successful framing of information literacy interventions in a workplace context. If anyone has any insights or examples of best practices and lessons learned about workplace information literacy initiatives, please feel free to share them with me at stephen.abram@gmail.com.