Judgements during Information Seeking: Policy and Research Workers' Assessments of Enough Information

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A thesis submitted to the University of Technology, Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

2008

Certificate of authorship and originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in this thesis.

Signed

Date

To

John and Tessa

Marjorie and Bob

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to all who have helped me in this journey of discovery.

I was blessed throughout my candidature with two wonderful supervisors whose sustained guidance and generosity made my path easier. Dr Theresa Anderson was my principal supervisor and I greatly appreciated her intellectual guidance and strong support throughout my journey. Theresa challenged my thinking and expanded my intellectual horizons, always pushing me to take just one more step. One of her most valued contributions was the enthusiasm and excitement she brought to my research project. Professor Joyce Kirk was my alternate supervisor and brought to my endeavours a highly valued mentorship, a watchful eye on progress and a never-ending stream of thought-provoking questions.

Much gratitude must go to the participants in the empirical study which informed the thesis. These people willingly shared with me their experiences of seeking and using information in the workplace, both good and bad. Without their contribution, there would have been no thesis.

I am deeply appreciative of the encouragement I received from the community of information behaviour researchers. The work of this community provided the starting points for my own research contribution. These researchers generously engaged me in scholarly debate, extended my ideas and challenged my thinking, and so helped me produce better research.

My 'Doktor Schwesters' Dr Nicola Parker and Dr Suzana Sukovic were highly valued travelling companions. I worked in their slipstreams, learning from the experiences they shared with me and finding my own journey a little easier because of their generosity.

My thanks go to my colleagues at the State Library of New South Wales – Kerrie Burgess, Anne Doherty and Maggie McElhill – who were generous with their time, their ideas and their comments, whenever I needed to take a compass bearing. In particular, Bronwyn Coop's role in helping me manage my time to combine part time

work and thesis research was greatly appreciated. Thanks are also due to the University of Technology, Sydney, for financial assistance with conference participation and for the many opportunities to present my evolving work in a highly supportive environment.

At the end, I do not have the words to thank John and Tessa as they deserve. My husband and my daughter tolerated my preoccupation and panics, understood my anxieties and absentmindedness and shared wholeheartedly in the joy of my achievements. They were unstinting in their support and never failed to encourage me and to remind me always of the most important things in life.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how people determine they have enough information, a fundamental but perplexing question for human information behaviour researchers. Informed by theories of human judgement and decision making, the thesis investigates the ways in which judgements of enough information are made and the subtleties that shape this critical judgement.

The empirical work that underpinned the thesis was an exploratory study conducted from an interpretive orientation and using the case study approach. The study examined multiple cases of judgements of enough information made while seeking and using information in the workplace. Semi-structured interviews (33) were conducted with public sector policy and research workers in Australia. Two interviews were carried out, the first with individual participants to explore the nature of the contexts in which they worked and the second, a paired interview with two participants to focus on how they assessed they had enough information. Interviews were taped and transcribed and inductive data analysis carried out.

Principal findings included the importance of task in shaping judgements of enough information through an iterative and fluid process. Throughout the process the nature of what constituted enough information changed. Factors in the information use environment of the policy and research workers that shaped their judgements of enough information included the views of colleagues, supervisors and stakeholders, organisational decision making processes and organisational attitudes towards uncertainty. The collaborative information seeking and use of the policy and research workers resulted in collaborative judgements of enough information.

The research makes three contributions to the field of human information behaviour research. Firstly findings provide new insights into judgements of enough information made by the policy and research workers, illuminating the judgement of enough information as a process and refining concepts critical to understanding judgements made while seeking and using information. Secondly the study provides a rich description of policy and research workers, a professional group not previously studied in relation to enough information, and their role in the public policy process. Thirdly

concern about the limitations of behavioural decision theory to fully explain judgements of enough information led to consideration of naturalistic decision making, a recent development in decision theory. Naturalistic decision making affords a different perspective on human judgement and decision making. As a conceptual framework within which to develop more nuanced understandings of judgements and decision making during information seeking, naturalistic decision making has much to offer human information behaviour researchers.