

To use this manual adequately would need quite a lot of prior knowledge of the topics discussed. Also its order does not allow of a learning process and it seems to lack a structure. It declares "the user is the focal point of all information retrieval systems because the sole objective is to transfer information from the source to the user" - true of course. But why is this Chapter 10 Not Chapter 1 ? and why is it not followed by the chapters 21 and 22 on Natural [i.e. of the users] language?. And it is here that the thinness of the index shows itself. I suspect that Boolean logic occurs in the text far more often than the 4 entries in the index to its major occurrences suggest; it would be difficult to pursue this concept and others in an alternative order to that of the author. Within these terms and for its lifetime - this is a much rewritten 2nd edition of a publication only 4 years old. - it is a very useful manual , but like an article in an encyclopaedia or an elaborate recipe in a cook book the reader may have to work at understanding the topic surveyed.

The book does not attempt to look at the whole spectrum of information storage and retrieval for that goes back some two thousand years. It does not even look at the recent outburst of information, print and literacy from 1450, even though one of the fascinating things about the growth of the Electronic Environment is the way the process is mirroring that of print - on a much faster time scale [which is part of the problem]. The Internet and the Web are not the first widespread general access to information. That started in the 1870's with universal education, the growth of literacy and the popular press, followed by the radio and the cheap paperbacks of the 20th century and the growth of the library system as the machinery for open access to all this.

Information is transmitted knowledge; if it to be retained it must be in a document - the electronic file is only the latest container for these - and then disseminated; this is publishing. None of these processes are the business of the information practitioner though the more we understand them the better. The organisation of information in these documents for it to be retrieved is. To do this information must be stored in a collection; libraries are collections for a defined audience which can be as wide as the Nation of Great Britain. These then need organising to meet the users' demands. Part of this process is an intellectual technology - Indexing in its widest meaning. Finally these solutions will require a physical technology - shelves, filing cabinets, card catalogues, computers.

Of these elements it is the physical technology that is the most ephemeral - where now is the 5" X 3" card or the IBM main frame, the 45 r.p.m or shortly, the photograph on film ? Within the EE the emphasis is still upon physical technology and as

this is evolving so quickly the EE is finding a use for it after it appears rather than tailoring it to the needs as they evolve.

This book does mirror this: it is about "the latest developments and ... trends in research" [in IR] (p445) and it is aimed primarily at library and information scientists not library practitioners. Research does produces new knowledge - what we did not know or were wrong about. But much research actually only tells us what we already knew more precisely and in measuring and defining this it does a useful task.

So the conclusion of the Human information behaviour research is only what any experienced reference librarian could have told. This book does discuss cataloguing and subject indexing but only insofar as they are reflected in the electronic environment. It does not look at them as solutions to the problems the IR research is defining which are not particularly new. Why did we need to invent metadata when, as the book acknowledges, librarians have been providing this to agreed standards for decades.

Librarians have been information engineers for a very long time. It was librarians that in the 1950's seized upon the value of the computer as a general purpose tool which led to the King report "Automation and the Library of Congress" -1963. Perhaps we should look harder at their existing solutions and enable them to evolve in this new electronic environment.

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Brophy, Fisher & Craven Libraries without walls 5: the distributed delivery of library and information systems 2nd ed.