

Community Problem-Solving Framed as a Distributed Information Use Environment: Bridging Research and Practice

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This article results from a qualitative study of 1) information behavior in community problem-solving framed as a distributed information use environment (IUE) and 2) approaches used by a best-practice library to anticipate information needs associated with community problem solving. Several approaches to data collection were used—focus groups, interviews, observation of community and library meetings, and analysis of supporting documents.

We focused first on the information behavior of community groups. Finding that the library sought to meet community needs, we examined its approach. Data were coded thematically around both information behavior concepts and themes germane to problem-solving activity. A grounded theory approach was taken to capture aspects of the library staff's practice.

Themes evolved from the data; supporting documentation—reports, articles and library communication was also coded. The study showed 1) how IUE components (people, setting, problems, problem resolution) combine in this distributed IUE to determine specific information needs and uses; and 2) how the library contributed to the viability of this distributed IUE. Community problem solving, here explicated as a distributed IUE, is likely to be seen in multiple communities. The library model presented demonstrates that by reshaping its information practice within the framework of an IUE, a library can anticipate community information needs as they are generated and where they are most relevant.