

Collaborative Information Retrieval (CIR)

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INTRODUCTION

Most information retrieval and management tools have been developed for use by individuals. For example, Web search interfaces, and online catalogs support individual searchers working on their own. In workplace and library settings, however, teamwork is becoming more and more prevalent. We use the term *Collaborative Information Retrieval (CIR)* to describe any activity that collectively resolves an information problem. Information retrieval is construed in the broadest sense and includes processes such as: problem identification, analysis of information needs, query formulation, retrieval interactions, and the presentation and analysis of results. In this SIG, we will explore how to better understand and support information access in collaborative team settings. An understanding of the social and organizational contexts in which CIR occurs will lead to the design of more useful systems.

Several researchers have addressed aspects of CIR. In previous CHI meetings, Kidd (CHI'94) described how different people make different sense of the same information, Maltz and Ehrlich (CHI'95) outlined the key role that information gate keepers play, and several groups studied collaborative filtering. Some products support workgroup scheduling, document workflow, etc. But, none has brought together the variety of perspectives we believe are critical in fully understanding the CIR design space.

SIG GOALS

Studying CIR requires addressing several basic questions.

- How does CIR manifest itself in the workplace?

- Does current information technology support CIR?
- Do existing team structures support CIR?
- What field methods and conceptual frameworks can guide the study of CIR?

A cross-disciplinary team is beginning to address some of these questions in a large-scale field study (see <http://www.ischool.washington.edu/cir>). The team will share their experiences to date, and solicit input from others working on similar problems. The discussion will:

- Enable participants from different backgrounds to interact on the common theme of CIR.
- Encourage sharing of related findings, experiences and approaches.
- Provide a forum to explore new partnerships.

In addition, we plan to establish a listserv and Web site for interested participants to further share ideas and resources.

SIG ORGANIZATION

We will coordinate the discussion, but encourage lively interaction among participants. Three main topics and others suggested by participants will be addressed.

- 1) Manifestations of CIR. We will begin with some examples and encourage participants to share others.
- 2) Methods for studying CIR. This will focus on field methods but could also include survey instruments or more formal experimental approaches.
- 3) Design implications for new CIR tools and interfaces.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for the SIG is any professional who is interested in better understanding collaborative information seeking and management activities. We hope to attract people representing a breadth of perspectives in HCI, IR, CSCW, and DL -- e.g., researchers, designers, managers, and information professionals.