Proposal for a SIG on: "Collaborative Information Retrieval (CIR)"

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INTRODUCTION: It is becoming more and more critical for individuals and organization to manage the flood of information they receive. 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. Today's tools make it difficult for individuals to share search strategies, search queries, or the analysis of results with others except by looking over someone's shoulder. In contrast, sharing of information retrieval strategies and results takes place in a wide variety of workteam settings. 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 process such as: problem identification, analysis of information needs, query formulation, retrieval interactions, presentation and analysis of results, and using the results to resolve information problems.

In this SIG, we will explore how to better understand and support information access in these collaborative team settings. An understanding of the social and organizational contexts in which CIR occurs will lead to the design of more useful and usable systems. We believe this is a timely topic, and one that can benefit from the range of cultural and disciplinary perspective at CHI. Several researchers have addressed aspects of CIR. In previous CHI meetings, for example, Kidd (CHI'94) described how different people make different sense of the same information, Berlin et al (CHI'93) described similar issues in the use of group memories, Maltz and Ehrlich (CHI'95) outlined the key role that people who serve as information gate keeper play, and Harper and Sellen (CHI'95) identified the problems with interpretation, sharing and reuse of data during collaboration. Several groups have studied collaborative filtering and popularity filtering. Some commercial 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 and international 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. All the organizers have significant experience in leading highly interactive meetings like SIGs and workshops, and think this is an ideal setting for exchanging ideas about a research direction that is in its formative stages.

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 likely 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, information professionals.

SCHEDULING NOTE: Dumais and Grudin will be presenting papers at CHI (not on the topic of CIR), so scheduling conflicts will need to be addressed if this SIG is accepted.