PAPER

**Information organization practices from Portuguese students in digital context: some understandings from a survey**

**Keywords: Personal Information Management, information organization, information behavior**

**Introduction**

Technology simplified information creation and retrieval leading individuals to store an increasing amount of information resources in their electronic devices or/and in an analogical context. They create personal information collections with huge quantity and variety of information items. These information resources need to be organized so that individuals can search, retrieve and use them. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary “organization” is the act or process of [organizing](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/organizing) or of being [organized](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/organized) and “organizing” means to form into a coherent unity or functioning whole. So, information organization implies to create a coherent unity of information resources within a specific context or space. Organization seems to be a basic human insight and even information working spaces that appears to be chaotic have some kind of organization for the individuals that use them (Glushko, 2013). In broad terms, we organize to understand, to save time and to retrieve. Reasons to information organization are similar and if information is not organized, it is difficult or even impossible to find (Taylor & Joudrey, 2009).

In digital context, with information items recorded in several formats and locations, the inability of individuals to accurately recall the huge number of information previously seen, used or stored is certainly higher than in print context. So, news challenges are emerging to personal knowledge organization due to sociotechnical changes. In their electronic devices, information users need to develop adequate skills to create personal information spaces simpler and logic for themselves, allowing an easier use of their information resources.

**Theoretical background**

Our approach fits within the scope of Personal Information Management (PIM) and information organization.

According to (Bergman, 2013), personal information management involves activities through which individuals store personal items of information in order to be able to retrieve them in the future. Jones (2012) states that PIM is the art of getting things done in our lives through information. It is not just about retrieving previously experienced information (refinding) or just having a good organization, as personal information management activities should foster the creation of meaning and use of personal information, in order to implement the ideal of having appropriate information (in a convenient format and with good quality) at the right time to meet a need.

Personal information management strategies reflect individual needs and interests but there are patterns and specific skills that can help to improve information organization. As Jones (2007) explains, most part of the people maintain several, separate, roughly comparable but inevitably inconsistent, organizational schemes for electronic documents, papers documents or email messages. Additionally, the number of information organization schemes may increase if a person has several digital devices or emails accounts. One of the main problems in personal information organization is related to the cognitive difficulty of categorizing (Malone, 1983). Categorizing problems will difficult finding and reminding functions of information organization.

In personal information organization, categorization makes no sense without understanding and reflecting the specific needs and interests of the individual who is categorizing/organizing personal information items (Oh, 2012, 2013). On the other hand, the representation of well-established categories, which are easily remembered, is essential for the performance use of the category itself (Barsalou, 1983). From this point of view, in personal information organization, the creation and use of poorly established categories in one's own mind undermines one's performance. Thus, two of the main problems of information categorization lie in the fact that it is difficult to assign the appropriate category to an information item and in the fact that it is difficult to remember precisely the assigned category designation (Lansdale, 1988).

**Research questions**

Personal information usability and findability depend on information organization and will determine the effective use of information resources that each individual stores in their digital devices. Some of the problems of searching and using information could be solved with information organization skills. Attending to this, real information organization practices need to be known and understand.

This proposal intends to make some reflections upon user’s personal information organization in digital context. Intellectual organization through categorizing and labelling documents, name/renaming files and folders or moving documents from different folders will be considered. The need to consider and stress information organization skills will be discussed.

Attending to this starting point, research questions of this paper are as follows:

1. What kind of behaviors, attitudes and concerns have Portuguese university students about their personal information management?
2. What strategies do university students adopt in order to manage their personal digital information?
3. What kind of structures do Portuguese university students create and use to organize their personal digital information?
4. What kind of problems do Portuguese university students feel when they organize their personal digital information?

**Methodology**

The aim of this paper is to research the personal information organizing practices of Portuguese students. A pilot study will be conducted with a sample of university students, in bachelor and master courses. A survey was designed to collect data about self-related opinions, attitudes and practices related to personal digital information management, in a broad sense, and them on specific features about creating and naming files and folders, digital documents versioning, deleting and backup options and demographics.

The survey was adapted from previous work of Henderson (2009), Krtalić, Marčetić, & Mičunović (2016) and Oh (2017).

**Expected results and conclusion**

The author expects the research results will answer the research questions stated above. The author expects to identify the main behaviors, attitudes and concerns of Portuguese university students in their personal information management, with a focus on the strategies regarding the process of interrelated actions that include identifying, naming, categorizing (creating categories) and classifying (assigning categories to items). The understanding of the problems that Portuguese university students faces are also an important expected insight of this research.

With this awareness plan courses could be designed and implemented in order to improve the whole information organization behavior of individuals, with positive consequences on professional and everyday life information behavior.

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