Information Culture of Students in the Academic Environment – Finding One's Way through Studies

Krista Lepik, Katrin Kannukene

University of Tartu, Estonia

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Where it all started?

- Courses
  - „Academic Self-Management"
    - Planning one's studies at the university, mnemotechnical techniques, proper citing, different forms of writing tasks, but also:
    - Communication to faculty members
    - „Student's best friend is another student!"
  - „Reseach Methodology"
    - Students need to practice interviewing in a *safe* environment

Theoretical framework – information culture

- Information culture - manifested in the organization's values, norms, and practices that have an impact on how information is perceived, created and used (Choo, Bergeron, Detlor, Heaton 2008: 793)

  thus, the research question is

- Through which values, norms, and practices can we conceptualize information culture of students based on the example of information work students at the University of Tartu?

- Focus on the 'organizational' context of studies

The context of our study

- University of Tartu

- Information work students, N = 100

- Composition of the sample:

Year (Semester)	Form of study	Year of study	Number of students in our sample
2015 (Spring)	Regular study (RS)	2nd	12
2015 (Spring)	Open university (OU)	2nd	26
2015 (Spring)	Open university	3rd	14
2015 (Fall)	Open university	3rd	14
2016 (Spring)	Regular study	2nd	7
2016 (Spring)	Open university	2nd	27

Methodology of our study

- Semi-structured interviews conducted by students (has it's own pros and cons!)

- Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014)

  - Open coding

  - Axial coding

  - Memos

  - Subjectivity and researcher involvement recognized

  - Context-dependency of the results

Results. Values 1

- Interactions with faculty members:
  - Expectations about faculty members' interpersonal skills (positive attitude, open-mindedness, friendliness, treating students as equals):
    - In the classroom and beyond
    - Tonality of their messages (the role of e-mail and Moodle!)
  - Need to feel welcome at the university and find courage to ask questions
  - Teachers as somewhat superior to students (You/you differences)
  - Formulating messages so that it would be as easy as possible to reply these
  - How students 'measure' ASAP (when a faculty member has to respond to an e-mail?)

Results. Values 2

- Interactions with fellow students:
  - Collectivity
  - Careful choice of the addressee:
    - Faculty member first – personal or embarrassing question,
    - Fellow-students first – don't want to leave 'silly' impressioon
    - A mix: discussing with fellow-students, then together asking from faculty member

Results. Norms

- Students as equals – rules apply to everyone, also in case of 'You'

- Uncontested norm of writing a polite e-mail:
  - Respect to faculty-member,
  - Feeling oneself professional in the company of other professionals

- Facebook – still for real friends, not 'friends'
  - Faculty member as a 'friend' – exceptional (for supervisors, familiaar before enrollment, professional contact after graduation)
  - Keeping different environments for different activities

Results. Practices

- Practices being informed by values and norms:
  - Always a polite e-mail
  - Contrast between perceptions of university (formal) and social media (informal)
  - 'Crisis situations' – urgent and unpleasant situations
    - Clear 'rules of game' (home assignment or its deadline changing)
    - Respectable position of faculty member means responsiblity of showing the initiative to solve the crisis
    - 'Crisis situations' emerging from misunderstandings and clashes of values and norms

For discussion

- 'Unwritten rules' about communication to faculty members and fellow-students:
  - Each year, new students struggling with these issues
  - Classes of 'academic self-management' or 'learning to learn'
- Information culture as rather independent and self-organizing, formed through mutual collaboration and negotiation:
  - How far can it drift away from the previously existing information culture in the university?
  - Do students need another set of rules?
  - Yet, the importance to recognize the information culture of students remains.

What next?

- From initial results about 'organizational issues' towards:
  - Forms of collaboration between students
  - Course-work related information culture (including writing homework, information seeking, avoiding plagiarism, etc)
  - Students' information culture regarding online environments
- From a fragmented view towards a multifaceted model that considers the academic context more in-depth
- Context-specificity of students' infrmation culture – international comparison

References

- Charmaz, K.: *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. SAGE, Los Angeles etc (2014)

- Choo, C. W., Bergeron, P., Detlor, B., Heaton, L.: Information Culture and Information Use: An Exploratory Study of Three Organizations. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(5), 792–804 (2008)

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Questions and comments are welcome:

- E-mail: krista.lepik@ut.ee

- Skype: v2ikekass