Alice in WISland

"Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle! »
(Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland)

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Acknowledgements for funding: Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche (FCAR), Social science and humanities research council (SSHRC), Fondation J.A. DeSève (Université de Montréal) and EBSI
Roles of information professionals currently redefined in part due to technological changes

- Web information systems (WIS): challenging technology

Organizations making massive investments in WIS

- E.g. governments in moving toward e-government model

No reference model for key players, organizational units, and competencies

- Lack of knowledge & consensus on roles of information professionals in WIS
Methodology

Descriptive & exploratory study, qualitative approach

Data collection: Fall 2001 to Winter 2003

- in depth interviews with information professionals involved in WIS
  - Information professional: master degree in information sciences or librarianship and information sciences (or equivalent)
  - head offices of seven departments of the Canadian government
- relevant documentation from their environment

Qualitative content analysis of interview transcripts
**Findings**

**Interviewees’ profile (1)**

- **32 IP involved in WIS** from 7 departments
- 2/3 are **women**
- Majority of interviews in **English**
- From **many disciplinary fields**: linguistic and literature, social sciences and sciences, etc., but **few with initial training related to technology**

**Interviewees’ experience (N=32)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Actual position</th>
<th>Work with WIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>11 (34%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>13 (41%)</td>
<td>13 (41%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>7 (22%)</td>
<td>18 (56%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Relatively new in their positions
- Experienced with WIS
Findings
Interviewees’ profile (2)

Units
- Information services
- Different divisions
- Information management group
- Technology group
- Government on-line office
- Communication group

Classification codes
- LS: Library Science
- CS: Computer Science
- IS: Information Services
- CO: Commerce Officer

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Background | Methodology | Findings | Discussion | Conclusions
Findings
WIS’ profile

Information professionals involvement in WIS

Micro level
Involved in specific WIS
e.g. the intranet of an information service

Macro level
Involved in the overall WIS
of an organizational level
e.g. developing policies for the WIS of a department
Findings

WIS’ profile - micro level (N=21)

- External Web site
- Intranet

Departments
- External Web site: 1
- Intranet: 2

Divisions
- External Web site: 3
- Intranet: 2

Information services
- External Web site: 6
- Intranet: 7
Findings
WIS-related tasks (1)

Categories of WIS-related tasks

- Content: 26
- Technologies: 19
- Users: 7
- Graphic interface: 3
Findings
WIS-related tasks (1)

Tasks from the “Content” category

- Development and updating: 26
- Management
- Organization
- Metadata development
- Navigation development
- Quality control
- Development of documentary tools

Categories:
- Content
- Technologies
- Users
- Graphic Interface
Findings
WIS-related tasks (1)

Tasks from the “Technologies” category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General technological</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>tasks related to Web pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphic interface</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Findings
WIS-related tasks (1)

Tasks from the “Users” and “Graphic interface” categories

- Interaction with users: 7
- Design development: 3
- Design management: 7
- Users
- Graphic interface
- Content
- Technologies
Findings

WIS-related tasks (2)

- Advice, suggestions, recommendations
- WIS management or WIS-related project management
- WIS planning or WIS-related project planning
- Intermediary role
- Participation in committees
- Update knowledge
- Development of electronic collections
- Development of policies
- Compliance with policies
- Evaluation of WIS performance
- Promotion, awareness
Findings
Information ecology model

Information environment (Davenport, 1997)
Findings
Information policy framework

Generic IM/IT policy instruments

Specific WIS policy instruments

Holistic WIS policy instruments

Background  Methodology  Findings  Discussion  Conclusions
Findings
Factors influencing WIS-related tasks

General types of WIS

WIS-related tasks of information professionals

Organizational levels represented

Types of positions filled

emphasis on task categories varied with WIS scope

tasks quite similar except for electronic collection development

managers, webmasters, system librarians

emphasis on task categories varied with WIS scope

Findings
# Findings

## Place in WIS as perceived by interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES OF TASKS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS (N=31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>25 (81%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Users</td>
<td>11 (35%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple categories tasks</td>
<td>9 (29%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technologies</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphic interface</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSTACLES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS (N=30)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the IP profession e.g. not a well known profession, feminization of the profession</td>
<td>23 (77%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other groups involved / competition</td>
<td>17 (57%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual characteristics: bad “sellers”, passiveness, lack of confidence in their capacities</td>
<td>16 (53%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIS characteristics: partial understanding of the WIS, technologies in perpetual evolution</td>
<td>11 (37%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete training and competencies</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
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<td>Lack of resources</td>
<td>5 (17%)</td>
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<td>Culture: Web and information considered as source of power</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Findings

### Other players

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WIS players (other than info. professionals)</th>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Technologies</th>
<th>Graphic Interface</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Multiple Categories</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information service</td>
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<td>Webmaster</td>
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<td>Division of department</td>
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<td>Content program manager</td>
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<td>Content provider (int. &amp; external)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translation group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translator (external)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
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<td>Content approbation group</td>
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<td>Communication group</td>
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<td>Chief information officer office</td>
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<td>Government on-line office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies group</td>
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<td>Cie offering Web training</td>
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<td>Info. management &amp; tech. group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technologist</td>
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<td>Cie in technology (external)</td>
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<td>Consultant in tech. (external)</td>
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<td>Security group</td>
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<td>Graphics group</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIS accessibility service</td>
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Discussion

Literature & Study: Differences and similarities

- **Same categories of tasks** *but emphasis* sometimes **different**

- **New tasks** found in the study

- **Greater variety** in tasks related to **information policies** found in the study
  - Scope of policies & Decisional power of information professionals

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Discussion

Information professionals “multidisciplinarity”

« it takes somebody whose job it is literally to coordinate, and I think someone who understands the big picture of information is the best person for that. »

« we are ideally situated to be the intermediaries between the people who write programs that run search engines and people who are producing content and wondering "How am I going to make this available in the modern computerized context". And our knowledge can bridge those two areas. »
Conclusions
Information professionals & WIS

Natural correspondence between informational dimension of WIS and competencies of information professionals

Information professionals involved in WIS but few in WIS representing broader organizational levels than information services

Information professionals have to take their place in multidisciplinary world of WIS before someone else does
Conclusions
Some general recommendations

Institutions and associations training information professionals in WIS-related context

- WIS training from other disciplines
- WIS in an ecological, global perspective
- In depth training on WIS dimensions more specific to information professionals

Organizations

- WIS in an ecological, global perspective
- WIS in its complexity
Conclusions
Future research

Other types of WIS such as extranets, and WIS in which no IP are involved

Different contexts: other types of governments, other types of organizations, etc.

Different perspectives e.g. impact of competencies of Web team on WIS usability
Thank you!