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Information Diagnostics Interview

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My interview took place with Ms. K shortly after her previous job ended. She is a friend of a friend and upon hearing about her quest to find a new job I asked to interview her to find out more about her search process. I spent approximately an hour with Ms. K, talking about the pros and cons of job searching in the Topeka, Kansas market, her philosophy of how to find new information on a daily basis as it pertained to employment, and her feelings on what could have been easier about the entire process.

Upon meeting with Ms. K, it became apparent that she is not a shy person, but rather outgoing and energetic. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Ms. K is indicative of an extrovert personality because she verbally expressed her frustrations and talked through her search process easily, and at great length. Ms. K seemed to focus on the facts of the search process and with time lines, which is part of her sensing type, and is definitely a feeling type of personality since she just wanted to be treated as she was treating others involved in this process. Ms. K also showed signs of being a judging type because looking for a job was not part of her orderly life. All of these types are part of her cognitive style and defines how she thinks, perceives and remembers the information she has learned. As Webb (1990) states, “variations in behavior are not due to chance, whim, or personality flaw, but rather to a predictable pattern based on differences in the way people perceive information and make decisions” (p. 34).

Ms. K also stated she does best with learning involving interaction and visual cues. This is evident with Ms. K’s desire to be involved in all processes, from the end of her previous job to the start of her new job, and indicates how her hands-on learning style was prevalent in the entire process. She also learned by using visual representation of job announcements to aid her in the information search process. This would also rationalize why she was more comfortable with

face-to-face meetings with the temp agency professional, as explained below. Because she possessed these types of learning styles Ms. K felt competent to perform the job search and to be hired. As Chen (1990) theorizes, “individuals must not only feel that they are competent, but their ability should be observable and confirmed by their counterparts” (p. 245).

Brenda Dervin’s model of Information Seeking as Sense Making compares to Ms. K’s search process in that the interviewee found herself tied to the situation (needing to find a job) of which she wanted to find out more information. This break in information is what Dervin refers to as a gap, which involves some sort of a dilemma that the seeker needs to understand. Thomas (2004) explains these dilemmas as “when individuals encounter gaps in their knowledge sufficient to impede, prevent, or stop their progress through time and space” (p. 65). Since Ms. K had this gap of information, she used a professional in the temp agency as a bridge in order to supply information about current job listings and give her the knowledge, or sense, to proceed with her decision making about potential jobs. This model appears to assess how the interviewee uses the information resources that are available to her in the information seeking process and its framework is essentially user-centered.

An account of Ms. K’s information seeking process is that she was previously working at a local bank in Topeka, but after some time of service there, decided to seek employment elsewhere. She quit her job at the bank and used the following month to inquire about new jobs. She knew she was looking for something that would utilize her Associates degree, and provide stable working hours, and pay, in a comfortable environment. She also knew she would be well suited for office or clerical work as she had done in the past. Ms. K knew she had to find information that would enable her to gain employment in a timely manner since she had quit her previous job without a new profession lined up.

Ms. K has had some experience in information searching because of her previous college background, so she felt comfortable with her ability to find a new job using search methods she had employed in the past. Ms. K did not use any library or librarian to assist her, but rather did the searching herself. Her background of finding jobs previously also aided the interviewee in this search because it enabled her to know how to “jump through the hoops”, as stated by Ms. K. Finding previous employment had always been relatively easy for Ms. K, but she had still gone through the same search process before, resulting in particular knowledge on this subject.

Because Ms. K was unemployed for about a month, she had plenty of time to formulate her search process. What the interviewee relied on most were the temp agencies in Topeka. She found that there was virtually no information available from these agencies online and in order to communicate with them, calling was the best way to do so. This seemed almost archaic to her, in today’s world of technology, to not be able to see job postings online or to receive an email from her contact person. Ms. K also utilized the local print papers, bulletin boards in retail centers, word of mouth, actual websites of companies that she thought might be hiring, and various online papers, such as www.cjonline.com. She thought most employers would be advertising by using visual aids, either online or in print, so Ms. K attempted to search various areas of town to ensure her a job that would be local, since she needed to stay in the Topeka community. In the end, she found the temp agency professional she had been working with seemed to know the most about up-to-date job openings available, and they also provided her with the most information concerning job descriptions.

Ms. K moved through different emotions during this search process. Initially, she was eager because it felt like a new beginning to her. It was somewhat exciting to know she was

switching careers and going to meet new people. Also, without having a job in place, she definitely needed to start making money.

The interviewee's emotions quickly switched to impatient after about one month of turning in applications and never hearing back from any perspective employers for an interview. It seemed to Ms. K the time factors involved in the application process between the temp agency and the perspective employers stretched on for too long with no involvement of her in the process. The temp agency professional did finally come through on a lead for a temporary assignment at one of the local plants in Topeka and Ms. K took the job. This job was a way to make ends meet, but Ms. K soon discovered she was quite unhappy with the place of employment for several reasons.

Ms. K was, by then, very frustrated with her job search process. It had made her feel exhausted and was beginning to doubt her abilities. Because of the situation she was in, she decided to go back and start again, this time not dealing with the temp agency. She still retained the temporary position but looked for help to her mother. She helped her search for new jobs in places she had previously not thought of and some of the frustration began to wear off.

The interviewee then finally became satisfied at the end of the information search because with the help of her mother, she finally found a job two weeks after she started looking for the second time. This job is exactly what she was looking for and meets all of her criteria she had previously planned out. Ms. K feels she was successful in her information search for a job.

The level of intervention provided by a professional was limited because of the process Ms. K employed to help herself find a job. The professional help she did receive came from one woman working at the temp agency, which resulted in her being interviewed by this trained individual to talk about her interests, likes and dislikes, and other pertinent information relating

to job searching. After the interview was over, this professional then directed Ms. K to where she needed to go and who to contact. Ms. K did find the role of this professional to be lacking because she was often hard to reach to get additional information from, and hard to read on how the interviewee was doing in her search.

Other than this one woman at the temp agency, Ms. K relied mainly on non-professionals to guide her through the search process. She used herself to figure out the main points of this process, but did contact friends and previous co-workers to help her by word-of-mouth find job opportunities she might not have seen previously.

Several suggestions for improvement in service that Ms. K provided during this interview have already been discussed, but to reiterate them, she was disappointed with how the temp agency had virtually no online information and that the face-to-face relations were lacking. They also were very slow in processing the necessary paperwork between the agency and the prospective employer. Ms. K stated she would have liked to have more help from the professionals in the hiring field and felt they lacked the timely responses she expected from them in the beginning. Ms. K also said she gained valuable experience from this information search, which she attributes to the service not being done completely for her, resulting in her reaching out on her own to find the information.

After interviewing Ms. K, one can see her information search process correlates to Dervin's model in that she had a situation come up in her life. This situation involved her not having all of the answers to the questions, which formulated into gaps of knowledge so she employed a professional to bridge this gap for a useful end to her information search. She learned from this situation and she will rely on this information the next time she needs to find a job.

Appendix

Tell me how you came across this problem.

What are you trying to accomplish in this situation?

What would you like to know about job searching?

What steps or processes are you employing in this search?

What, if anything, seems to be missing from your current search that would better assist you?

What rationale was employed for these steps in the search process?

What are you having problems understanding?

What are your feelings about the search process in your current position?

How are you planning on using the information you gained during the search process?

What level of assistance was provided by any professionals in your search process?

Describe specific barriers to your information search.

If you could have exactly the help you wanted in this process, what would it be?

What were your emotional reactions during the information search process?

What were these emotions the result of?

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