

Taylor R S. Question-negotiation and information seeking in libraries.  
*Coll. Res Libr.* 29 178-94, 1968.  
[Center for the Information Sciences, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA]

People go through four levels of awareness in seeking information from libraries visceral, conscious, formal, and compromised. It is the latter—the compromised question—that is presented to the information store. A reference librarian negotiating the question needs to determine (a) subject matter, (b) motivation, (c) personal characteristics, (d) relationship of inquiry to file organization, and (e) what the client anticipates in the form of an answer. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 50 publications since 1968, making this the most-cited paper in this journal.]

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This paper was the result of a long-standing interest—which continues to the present—in why people want information, how they seek it, what they do with it when they have it, and how the “answers” to these questions affect the design of information systems, including libraries. These are difficult problems to consider, let alone to answer. I have come to realize that my role in the information field is that of synthesizer, organizing what we seem to “know” about a particular process into useful chunks, and identifying the potential effect of that knowledge on system design. This paper was preceded by an earlier one in which many of the ideas were introduced and explored.<sup>1</sup> In the mid-1960s, I received a grant from Harold Wooster's Office of Information Science in the Air Force Office of Aerospace Research to test these ideas about information seeking and question negotiation in the library context.

Special libraries were chosen for the study for reasons discussed in the paper. No at-

tempt was made to sample randomly. The principal concern was to interview librarians and information specialists who were perceptive of the seeking and negotiation processes. There was good subject representation (chemistry, electronics, agriculture, law, and research, in both private industry and governmental agencies) and geographic dispersion (Mid-Atlantic, upper Midwest, and southern California). The interviews followed a rough format and were open-ended. They were taped—not as easy then as now. It was the pre-cassette era, a time of reel-to-reel recorders. They weighed about 25 pounds, and carrying a recorder from a distant parking lot to the library had a peculiar effect on the bursa in one's shoulders.

The paper has been reprinted several times, and requests are even received today for permission to copy for classroom use. I think the reason for the continued interest is that the paper presents a simple and understandable structure for examining the human/system interface in libraries and other information systems.

Following the publication of this paper, despite a period of a dozen years of being a librarian, dean, and teacher, I have maintained a strong interest in the human/system interface that I began to describe here. There are, to me, several concerns of importance: (a) the development of a user-driven model to complement present content- and technology-driven models of systems; (b) the need for system concern with clarification of clients' problems rather than merely answering their (compromised) questions; and (c) the development of a structure for describing information-use environments useful to the design of information systems.

Recently, through the help of a grant from the National Science Foundation, I have been able to explore some of these questions and to develop a value-added model of information systems that begins to address some of these concerns. Two recent publications are of particular interest as direct extensions of the question-negotiation paper.<sup>2,3</sup>

1 Taylor R S. The process of asking questions. *Amer Doc* 13 391-6, 1962

2 MacMullin S E & Taylor R S. Problem dimensions and information traits. *Inform Soc* 3 91-111, 1984

3 Taylor R S. *Value-added processes in information systems*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing. To be published, 1986