

What did you call it, again?

Language Use in Group Information Management Systems

Emilee Rader
School of Information
University of Michigan
ejrader@umich.edu

The purpose of this research is to improve users’ ability to **find information** in situations where **multiple users** access shared information resources via a **user-contributed content** system, by investigating how **language use** affects the **organizational structure and seeking** of information.

1 Group Members Contribute and Use Shared Content

People who work together often need to share files; one way to do this is to make files available to each other via storage space on a server.

Organizations are adopting user-contributed content systems, such as enterprise content management systems, software code repositories, and wikis and blogs used to support knowledge management.

These systems are relied upon by group members for keeping their information safe and making it available when it is needed. It can cost a significant amount of time to search for or re-create a single missing document.

2 Obstacles to Finding

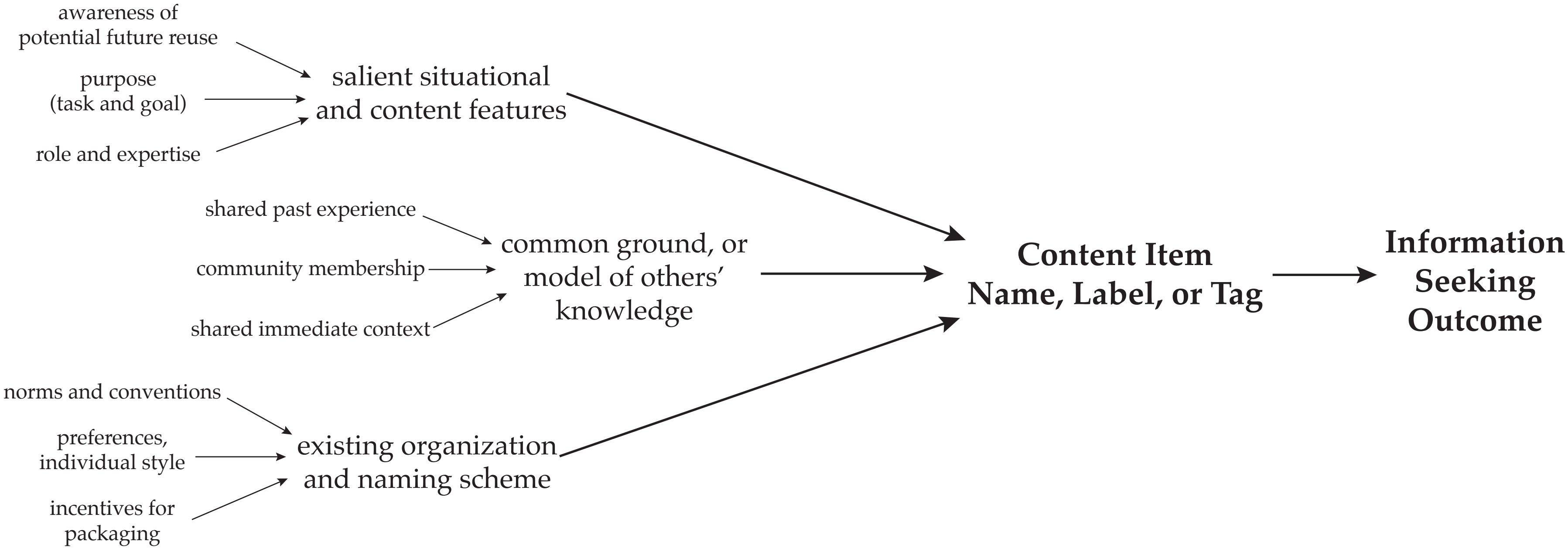
Different people fill information *producer* and *consumer* roles at different times. This means there are multiple potential recipients, all with unique knowledge, context, and needs.

Packaging information for reuse by others is more difficult when there can be multiple potential information consumers. Also, each producer is free to package however they feel like it, and tends to do so according to their own style and preferences.

There is a great deal of variability in language use; people do not often agree on names for the same things, and the interpretation of names and labels is influenced by context.

“...Because there is a group of us using the site I find it difficult to keep up with what is located where, and so ask people to email me direct copies of materials I need...”
- *Ctools project site user*

3 Influences on Naming and Organizing



4 Language Connects Users with Information

Words and phrases supply a handle or identifier for a chunk of information. They are the means by which people are able to access content items, and they serve a communication function by connecting the information producer and consumer.

Labels and names represent salient aspects of content items’ intent, purpose, and context. They manifest relationships among content items, and support inferences about the meaning and importance of the information.

5 Research Questions and Plan

How does language use affect information sharing in user-contributed content repositories?

Study 1 (field): How do groups organize and share information via an online repository of user-contributed content? What problems do individual members encounter during information seeking within the repository?

Study 2 (lab): How do the type of common ground (from community membership or shared past experience) and the intended audience affect file and folder name choices?

Study 3 (lab): How does the influence of common ground and intended audience on file and folder names affect information seeking outcomes in a shared online repository?

6 Expected Contribution

This work will add to our understanding of language use in situations not traditionally thought of as communication.

It combines a psychology and LIS perspective to investigate unstructured information organization schemes, exploring factors that affect the usage and usefulness of a growing category of CSCW tools: *group information management* systems.