PIM 2022: Successfully Aging with Our Information and Our Information Tools

Workshop Participant Position Statement for in Person Attendance
by
Vanessa Reyes, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Instruction,
University of South Florida, iSchool

Topic of Interest: PIM, Libraries, and Successful Aging: Conquering Our Declining Memory for the Sake of Our Personal Digital Collections

Introduction

Aging populations present challenges to the management and preservation of personal digital information. When it comes to information and communication technologies, older adults are experiencing cognitive decline and as a result are losing the function of these technologies that aid in the daily management of personal digital information. The workshop that will be held at this year's ASIS&T (Association for Information Science & Technology) entitled *PIM 2022: Successfully Aging with Our Information and Our Information Tools,* inspires me to focus on aging adults, as they are quickly among the users that we are forgetting to consider in personal information management studies.

In my book, *Saving Your Digital Past, Present, and Future*, *A Step-By Step Guide*, I make the case for improving the organization of personal digital collections. I introduce PIM tools and their importance to our daily lives as we create methods that allow PIM activities. This is possible thanks to several advances in the technologies of information management, particularly those that include tools for managing information, for example, application software that functions as a personal organizer, email, calendars, and personal wikis, all of which can be accessed from most personal computing devices. With the advent of new PIM tools, people are increasingly creating new personal digital information without worrying about the lack of storage.

Public Libraries, PIM, and Successful Aging

There is much concern to be had as PIM tools are changing to adapt with the vast need to record, track, and manage all types of personal information in different information spaces, but how are user communities adapting to these rapid changing technologies? What are aging users doing? Who helps these user communities learn, adapt, and remember how to use recent technologies that help manage personal information? Andrea Copeland (2015) and Amber Cushing (2016) document how public libraries are a place for the digital community archive. Public libraries are educational, essential, and vital when it comes to teaching others a variety of skillsets. The programs are carefully crafted to meet their target users' needs. When it comes to personal digital technologies, public libraries play a crucial role in the education of aging adults. Programming themes span educating users through various information skills and programs.

My first experience in the information profession was working in the public libraries sector. One of the first programs I helped coordinate was an introduction to computer usage. Most of the patrons attending the program were aging adults. The program was fruitful but required much effort in repetition of concepts and terms. As I hosted the program; one of the ongoing challenges was that aging patrons could not remember what they had just learned. Given this challenge, I thought about shortcuts that would be easier to remember. It was often the best way to keep patrons engaged because they had a challenging time remembering.

PIM, Memory, and Cognition

Personal information management, memory, and cognition are all connected, as memory is the basis necessary to carry out the primary PIM functions of receiving, generating, keeping, using, organizing, re-finding (especially), and sharing. Studies have shown that computer use improves older adult cognitive functions. Before PIM was researched as a technical topic, there were studies conducted in the field of psychology and philosophy by Bartlett (1932), for example, that demonstrated how difficult it is to understand memory by which he meant that "it is impossible to understand any high-level mental process if it is simply studied by and for itself." (p. 186). He described the principle as one that was involved with the psychology of an individual's memory and how and why people remember. Bartlett's principle is now known as the basis for his theory of remembering.

According to Gauld and Stephenson (2011), Bartlett's theory of remembering is a "reconstructive" process based on the ways subjects change and distort textual passages when reproducing them from memory. Changes and distortions are components of a theory of remembering, it is necessary to be quite certain that the person is consciously trying to remember, rather than deliberately inventing material to fill gaps in their memories (Gauld and Stephenson, 2011). Memory is one of the factors of PIM that allows users to remember what they need for later use, and it is the reason users can easily retrieve their recollections. The theory of remembering has since been used as the basis for theoretical frameworks in various PIM studies. Lansdale (1988) suggests that while memory for arbitrarily detailed information can be poor, from it we can understand that information can be organized within a wider scheme using memory as a process that improves recollection for future retrieval of information.

 In examining the importance that memory and cognition contribute to the process of PIM, I have found that when it comes to aging adults, memory is the key component of managing personal information that hinders the process of PIM. As we age, we struggle to remember where we put things, and how to access our own materials. Sometimes, I find myself spending over an hour trying to find my phone, keys, and just recently, the file for this statement, which was sitting on my computer's desktop all along. As we all face this eventual decline, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, as research by Zhang et al. (2021) suggests sustained engagement in cognitively challenging and stimulating activities is believed to benefit general cognition by promoting the formation of supportive neural circuitry. This provides additional neural resources to compensate for age-related changes in the brain (Park & Reuter-Lorenz, 2009; Reuter-Lorenz & Park, 2014). The future looks bright, as we should start working on memory-based techniques that will keep our minds engaged and ready to manage our daily digital lives. I look forward to discussing these themes as I take part in this esteemed workshop effort.

Author Bio

Dr. Vanessa Reyes is an Assistant Professor of Instruction for the School of Information at the University of South Florida. She is Editor-in-Chief for the Florida Libraries, the official journal of the Florida Library Association and is a recently elected Director-At-Large for Beta Phi Mu, the International Library, and Information Studies Honor Society. Dr. Reyes holds a Ph.D. in Library and Information Science from Simmons College, and an M.S. in Library and Information Studies from Florida State University. Having worked in archives, legislative, university, and public libraries, she became interested in exploring the PIM (Personal Information Management) field when she noticed that researchers' interest were sparked when they used appropriately organized and preserved personal collections for scholarly work. Her current research contributes to the emerging field of personal information management (PIM), quantifying how individual users are organizing, managing, and preserving digital information. She is the author of *Saving Your Digital Past, Present, and Future A Step-by-Step Guide*, to managing your digital life.

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