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LTER DataBits

Information Management Newsletter of The Long Term Ecological Research Network

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Good Read: Data at Work: Supporting Sharing in Science and Engineering

- Karen Baker (PAL)

Birnholtz, J. And M. Biertz, 2003. Data at Work: Supporting Sharing in Science and Engineering. Proceedings of the 2003 International ACM SIGGROUP Conference on Supporting Group Work (GROUP'03; 2003 November 9-12). E.M.Tremaine (ed). ACM Press 34: 339-348.

Collaboratories are organizational structures that support distributed work, bringing together scientists with tools and information. Often the collaboratory concept is associated with remote use of telescopes or microscopes. This article focuses not on the collaboratory itself nor its tools but rather highlights data sharing as nontrivial ("data sharing is not easy") and as needed ("Funding agencies appear to be convinced that their underlying 'need' for groundbreaking scientific research will be more effectively satisfied if there is more data sharing among scientists.) Many thanks to James Brunt for sharing this paper over dinner one evening at the recent Information Manager meeting as it presents one aspect of the multifaceted work being done by a team of researchers studying collaboratories at the University of Michigan School of Information.

Categorization of data routinely opens up dialogue within an information management community; this paper adds to such discussions presenting 'data as events' to contrast with 'data as streams' and considering 'data as science enabler' while recognizing research areas that have 'low task uncertainty and high mutual dependence' in contrast with others with 'high task uncertainty'. The notion of needing to understand data practices as one critical element of collaboratories comes as no surprise to an information manager, but the vocabulary and language used to frame the discussion brings valuable definition to some frequently unarticulated thoughts regarding data at work.