Outline of today’s lecture

• Why classify?
• Common uses of classification
• Some building blocks
• An example: Dewey Decimal Classification

Why classify?

• Because we can’t help ourselves
• Because it allows us to handle and store documents
• Because it allows us to retrieve documents when needed
Why classify?

Eric Hunter (2000: 1) defines classification as:

‘the grouping together of like things according to common qualities or characteristics’

Why classify?

Bowker and Starr (1999: 1-2) point out that

‘We all spend large parts of our days doing classification work, often tacitly, and we make up and use a range of ad hoc classifications to do so’.

Classifying helps us make sense of the world.

Why classify?

• We are immersed in systems of classification
• Some are quite visible and formalised
• Others are so much a part of our routine and surroundings as to seem invisible at times
Formal classification in tertiary education

- faculties
- disciplines
- qualifications
- years
- assessment
- spaces
- staff (tutors/lecturers/others')

Informal classification in tertiary education

- friends/acquaintances/people we don't know
- activities we enjoy/those we don't
- good places to hang out/bad places
- classes you can afford to cut/those you can't

Classification in organisations

Here is one definition of classification of information by-products in an organisational context:

'the process of devising and applying schemes based on the business activities which generate records, whereby they are categorised in systematic and consistent ways to facilitate their capture, retrieval, maintenance and disposal.'

Classification in organisations

Let’s look at this more closely:

- ‘devising and applying schemes’
- ‘based on the business activities which generate records’
- ‘categorised in systematic & consistent ways’
- ‘capture, retrieval, maintenance & disposal’

Sorting e-mail at work

Maureen Mackenzie (2000, 2002) has looked at the use of e-mail by American business executives:

- not only to communicate, but also
- to organise and store information ‘for future use’

Sorting e-mail at work

Mackenzie concluded that those she interviewed often organised their e-mail according to four broad categories:

> Immediate need
> Task management
> Environment scanning
> Perceived future need
Some common uses

Classification can provide both

• meaning and
• order

Dinosaurs

In the late 19th century, Harry Seeley argued that dinosaurs could be sorted into two major groups:

– Saurischians ('reptile-hipped')
– Ornithischians ('bird-hipped')

http://palaeo.gly.bris.ac.uk/communication/boulton/classification.html

Dinosaurs as classifiers

Like other animals, dinosaurs had to classify the world around them:

• Plants that are safe to eat/plants that are dangerous
• Prey that is easy to kill/prey that is difficult to kill
## Defining a classification system

A means of segmenting the world by space and/or time, through
- ‘consistent, unique classificatory principles’
- ‘mutually exclusive’ categories
- ‘total coverage of the world it describes’

(Bowker and Starr: 10-11)

## Classificatory principles

Two common ways to classify documents are according to
- their properties (‘facet analysis’)  
  OR  
- their organisational function (‘business analysis’)

## Facet analysis

Facets are the attributes by which documents can be grouped within a classification system.

Rooms might be identified by location:
- campus
- building
- floor
- room
Facet analysis for rooms

So this lecture theatre would be: CA B 2.13
- campus
- building
- floor
- room

And my office would be: CA S 7.14

Business analysis

• ‘starts with the broad core functions and activities of the organisation’, since

• ‘the primary criterion for categorisation is activity/task-based’

(Kennedy & Schauder 1997: 115)

Business analysis

• A school might classify its documents as follows:
  - Teaching (eg)
    – Curricula
    – Class timetables
    – Excursion details
  - Support services (eg)
    – Salaries
    – Payment of utility charges
    – Fundraising
Remember this?

A means of segmenting the world by space and/or time, through

- ‘consistent, unique classificatory principles’
- ‘mutually exclusive’ categories
- ‘total coverage of the world it describes’

(Bowker and Starr: 10-11)

Mutually exclusive categories ...

are common in classification systems:

- No dinosaurs that are both ‘bird-hipped’ and ‘reptile-hipped’
- No buildings that are also rooms
- No invoices that are also receipts

Total coverage

- Callista aims to capture all students’ academic results
- Room classification aims to record all such spaces on university campuses
Dewey Decimal Classification

- Purpose
- Scope
- Principles
- Strengths
- Limitations

DDC Purpose

- To provide the means by which to organise a library
- First conceived in 1873, now in its 21st edition
- More widely used than another other library classification system
- Popular in public and university libraries in Australia

From Francis Bacon …

- Philosophy (Reason)
- Poesy (Imagination)
- History (Memory)
... to Dewey

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<td>- Biography</td>
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<td>- Geography &amp; travel</td>
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DDC Scope

An ambitious attempt to encompass 'the entire world of knowledge'

(DDC 20, Vol.1: xxvii)

DDC Principles

- Knowledge-based classification
- Organised by discipline (field of study)
- Hierarchical structure (from general to specific)
- Use of Relative Index to correlate subject with discipline
- Each item in the collection is assigned a Call Number
DDC Principles

• ‘The guiding principle of the DDC is that a work is classed in the discipline for which it is intended’ (DDC 20 Vol.1: xxx)

• Organising by discipline also means that ‘there is likely to be no single place for a given subject’ (DDC 20 Vol.1: xxvi)

DDC Principles

• ‘no single place for a given subject’:

  Marriage 306.81
  citizenship issues 323.636
  customs 392.5
  ethics 173

  (DDC 20 Vol.1: xxvii)

Dewey - the ten main classes

000  Computers, information, & general works
100  Philosophy & psychology
200  Religion
300  Social sciences
400  Language
500  Science
600  Technology
700  Arts & recreation
800  Literature
900  History & geography
Dewey - second summary

- 500 Science
- 510 Mathematics
- 520 Astronomy
- 530 Physics
- 540 Chemistry
- 550 Earth sciences & geology
- 560 Fossils & prehistoric life
- 570 Life sciences; biology
- 580 Plants (Botany)
- 590 Animals (Zoology)

Dewey - third summary

- 560 Paleontology; paleozoology
- 561 Paleobotany; fossil microorganisms
- 562 Fossil invertebrates
- 563 Fossil marine & seashore invertebrates
- 564 Fossil mollusks & molluscoids
- 565 Fossil arthropods
- 566 Fossil chordates
- 567 Fossil cold-blooded vertebrates; fossil fishes
- 568 Fossil birds
- 569 Fossil mammals

Dewey hierarchy

- 500 Science
  - 560 The study of fossils & prehistoric life
    - 567 Fossil cold-blooded vertebrates
DDC Call numbers

- **Title:** Dinosaurs and their living relatives.
- **Publisher:** London : British Museum (Natural History), 1979.
- **Description:** 72 p. :
- **Location:** Hargrave-Andrew Library
- **Call Number:** 567.91 B862D

DDC Strengths

- **Practicality (Chan 1994: 280)**
  - eg shelving is easy
  - Arabic numerals are ‘universally recognisable’
- **Use of recurring concepts in notation (mnemonics)**
- **Ubiquitousness**
- **Ongoing updating and revision**

DDC Limitations

- **Bias**
- **Cumbersome in the face of social innovation**
- **Separation of related disciplines**
- **Better suited to some documentary forms than others**
The emergence of IT within recent generations has posed problems for the Dewey system, since the original classification could not anticipate it. 000 Generalities now includes computers/Internet. But a lot of materials remain crammed into 004, 005 and 025.

Separation of related disciplines

400 Language | 800 Literature
690 Buildings | 720 Architecture

(Rowley 1992: 202)
## Further reading

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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>R. Harvey</td>
<td>Organising Knowledge Australia. Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Hunter</td>
<td>'Do we still need classification?'. In R. Marcella &amp; A. Maitby (eds.) The Future of Classification. Aldershot: Gower</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. Mackenzie</td>
<td>'The Personal Organization of Electronic mail Messages in a Business Environment: An Exploratory Study'. Library &amp; Information Science Research 22 (4)</td>
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