Managed Forgetting

Body:

Information overload and congestion today are omnipresent and make it difficult to find relevant and important things. Increasingly, this also applies to personal information management in the professional and private context. This calls for a radically new approach, which questions the currently dominating information management paradigms and practices, where information is collected and stored in a more or less organized form, neglecting the differing and changing importance of the respective information items. In contrast to this, humans are very effective in distinguishing the important things fostered by the selective and adaptive mechanism of forgetting. This suggests to investigate what we can learn from human forgetting for more effective digital methods in support of knowledge workers.

As part of the DFG SPP “Intentional Forgetting”, the project will investigate methods inspired by models of human information processing from cognitive psychology for supporting the (remembering and forgetting) knowledge workers by a “forgetful” technology in their daily tasks as individuals and as part of teams. Our work considers a grass-roots approach of knowledge management, where acquisition, management and usage of knowledge are embedded in a knowledge worker’s daily activities and interaction with her team or group. The idea is to make such knowledge bases more effective and to reduce the burden for their maintenance by self-organizing forgetting mechanisms.

In close interdisciplinary collaboration between the involved competences in (a) cognitive science, (b) knowledge management and (c) information analysis and retrieval, a concept of managed forgetting will be investigated, an evidence-based routine of intentional forgetting that does not require conscious will. Managed forgetting aims to translate cognitive mechanisms of the human mind especially the focusing power of forgetting into the digital world, while at the same time complementing human remembering and forgetting. For investigating managed forgetting in the context of knowledge work, the following objectives have been identified:

1. Laying the foundations for the managed forgetting approach in close interdisciplinary work of all three involved teams.
2. Developing multifaceted methods for information value assessment, which help in understanding the current importance of information items and concepts.
3. Developing “forgetful” information access methods for a grass-roots organizational memory, which create conceptual alternatives to the keep-or-delete paradigm, e.g. information hiding, reduction, and aggregation.
4. Investigating the extension of managed forgetting to groups of knowledge workers and effects of group memory to individual forgetting.
5. Deepening the understanding of the cognitive processes that are relevant for managed forgetting, namely the processes underlying saving-enhanced memory and comparing them to directed forgetting.
6. Investigating the effects of managed forgetting on the user, which incorporates empirical testing and investigating the interactions between human forgetting and digital forgetting in a joint model.

Logo:

Project abstract:

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- Intelligent Access to Information

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