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Obituary

A tribute to Eugene Garfield: Information innovator and idealist

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

No other individual has had a greater influence on the fields of scientometrics, informetrics, and information science generally than Eugene Garfield. Most of his contributions over the decades are found to have had their origins very early in his career. Chemistry and chemical information launched his career and led to his involvement with medical information, computing technology, and the field of documentation. Content page products provided the foundation to his business, and the singular invention of a citation index for science, his most far reaching achievement, led to many spin offs including journal analyses, historical charting, evaluation, and science mapping. His idea for a science newspaper was derived from his early work in current awareness. The paper concludes with discussion of his management style, approach to business and philanthropy, and how they shed light on his complex personality and motivations.

1. Introduction

With the passing of Gene Garfield at the age of 91 years on February 26, 2017, we have lost one of the great pioneers and innovators of the information age. It was my good fortune to have been associated with Gene for 45 years. It was exciting to be involved in the applications of citation indexing, and it continues to be an intellectually rewarding journey. I think this is because the database he created is an incredible window onto the entire scientific landscape

For me Gene was a larger-than-life figure who was a commanding presence in my working life at the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), the company he founded. He was in turn an information pioneer, innovator, entrepreneur, a demanding boss, outspoken critic, a fighter for what he believed in, a nudge, a workaholic, a mentor, a father figure, good friend, and generous soul. Clearly, this is a complex picture and most people who have worked with him feel many conflicting emotions. But without his dogged and sometimes annoying persistence, it is unlikely that we would have seen the products, services, and ideas that have been for me and scholars the world over the essential nutrients of our intellectual life. Through his contributions many of us have built our careers

When I went to work at ISI in 1972, I did not realize that I would witness the birth of a new field of scholarship we call scientometrics and informetrics. The development of the new field was made possible in large part by Gene's citation index in combination with the rapidly expanding power of computing

We are fortunate to have many excellent accounts of his life in the form of audio and video interviews and historical accounts written by him or by colleagues ([Garfield, 1987](#); [Garfield, 1997, 2007](#); [Thackray & Brock, 2000](#); [Wouters, 1999](#)). What I will do here is highlight some his achievements and how they were an expression of his unique personality, ambition, and idealism

2. Chemical indexing products

We now think of Gene mainly in terms of his most successful and visible products, namely *Current Contents* and the *Science Citation Index*. But his early work was in chemistry and chemical indexing. He studied chemical engineering for one semester at the University of Colorado before joining the army, and after the army continued his schooling at Columbia University. In 1949 he graduated with a degree in chemistry but could not find a job as a chemist. With a recommendation from a cousin who was working on his PhD at Columbia, he got a job in the lab of the prominent chemist, Louis P. Hammett

His interest in chemical information stems from his work in Hammett's lab. Gene learned how to do literature searches in Chemical Abstracts and also created an index for the chemicals in Hammett's store room which had been synthesized in the lab. He had learned typing in a high school summer course and thought at one point that he might be a secretary. It turned out that this skill was very useful in his indexing work. However, due to some mishaps and explosions in Hammett's lab, he was fired. "I think it might be a good idea if you modify your career expectations" Hammett told him diplomatically (Garfield, 2007, 17)

Gene often said that one reason for his success was his ability to talk to anyone. Attending a meeting of the American Chemical Society in New York, he introduced himself to James W. Perry, a chemical engineer, who had given a presentation on chemical information sponsored by the ACS Division of Chemical Literature. Gene asked him "How do you get a job in this racket?", and invited Perry to dinner at his mother's home. Perry offered him a job at MIT, but before that could happen, the project lost funding. At Perry's suggestion, he went to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore but discovered that his job would be with Sanford Larkey at the Welch Medical Library working on chemical nomenclature. It turned out that Larkey was a friend of Perry. Later on, gaining access to his personnel file at the Welch Medical Library, Gene found out that Hammett, whom he had given as a reference, had written a letter to Larkey stating that "Garfield is an extremely hard worker but not a particularly original thinker." Looking back with a smile Gene would later say, "Was he surprised!" (Garfield, 2007, 18)

His work in chemical information continued in 1954, after he had completed a library degree at Columbia. At that time he relocated to Philadelphia and took a job as a consultant at the drug company SmithKline & French where one of his projects was indexing steroids. These were identified by scanning journal articles. Realizing that Chemical Abstracts was seriously out of date, he came up with the idea for a chemical information service that would quickly identify newly synthesized chemical compounds. This became his first chemical product in 1960 which he called Index Chemicus. Like his steroid work, this was based on a scanning of journal articles. Needing a way to identify and index new compounds, he developed a method for converting chemical names into molecular formulas which could be easily indexed. This conversion method became the basis of his PhD from the linguistics department of the University of Pennsylvania which at 10 pages became, somewhat notoriously, the shortest PhD dissertation ever granted by the department

3. Contents page services

In some ways, the foundation of Gene's career was the idea of providing the table of contents pages of journals in a timely manner which served the needs of readers to find out the latest publications in their field and of publishers to publicize their



Fig. 1. Gene Garfield in the 1950 with an early version of Current Contents.

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