Over the past few decades, taxonomies have grown in importance in the worlds of information technology and knowledge management. As technologies, platforms and uses have developed, information specialists have discovered what works and what doesn’t and have developed effective approaches for creating taxonomies that do. The articles in this issue focus on taxonomy development and implementation.

Perhaps you already have a taxonomy or classification scheme. So how do you evaluate it and decide if it does what you want it to do and what still needs to be done to it? This is the subject of “Evaluating Classification Schema and Classification Decisions,” by Denise Bedford, a well-known taxonomy expert and currently the Goodyear Professor of Knowledge Management at Kent State University. She offers practical methods for evaluating not only the scheme itself, but also how well it supports classification decisions.

Taxonomies, including thesauri, have become important resources in online science publication platforms. For their full potential to be realized, they need to be carefully designed and developed. In “Case Study: Developing the PLOS Thesaurus,” Jonas Dupui ch of the Public Library of Science and Gabe Carr of Access Innovations, Inc., describe the rebuilding of the PLOS thesaurus to increase its usability and better reflect the content of its publications in a wide variety of subjects in medicine, biology and other scientific areas.

“Building User Experiences: Synchronizing User Experience Design and the Supporting Metadata and Taxonomy Infrastructure” is by Carol Hert and Gary Carlson of Gary Carlson Consulting and Bram Wessel, an experience strategist at Factor. They observe that there is often a disconnect between
user experience design work and the development of taxonomy and metadata. The article examines some possibilities for integrating the “dual development processes,” drawing on examples from the authors’ recent projects.

One of the most promising areas for applying digital taxonomy-based platforms is health information. In “Indexing Electronic Medical Records Using a Taxonomy,” John Kuranz, CEO of Access Integrity, and Barbara Gilles of Access Innovations explore some of the challenges involved in achieving indexing accuracy. As the article puts it, “Part of the grand mission of rendering order out of chaos is to bring clarity and precision to the language of our deliberations.” Some automated and semi-automated methodologies for accomplishing this goal are discussed.

In the not-too-distant past of online taxonomies, they were used largely to provide a basis for online navigation of websites. Wendy Pohs of InfoClear Consulting points out that while taxonomies still fulfill this role, the emphasis has been shifting toward their use in auto-classification. This change calls for a change in the taxonomy building process. In “Building a Taxonomy for Auto-classification,” Pohs explains how “we still work to create high-level categories, but we also work to accurately associate the lower-level entities with the higher-level categories we’ve created.”

“Building Controlled Vocabularies for Metadata Harmonization,” by Marcia Zaharee, lead information systems engineer at MITRE Corporation, is a use case for metadata harmonization. The article describes MITRE’s Tactical ISR Integration Metadata Harmonization project for the U.S. Department of Defense. A practical, step-by-step controlled vocabulary or taxonomy development approach is provided, along with the caveat, “Taxonomists will tell you there is no right way to create a CV and taxonomies are always evolving. This is true!”

My thanks to all the authors for sharing their insight and experience.