
Preface

This text is a guide to established and current thinking about how to get the best out of information technology and information systems investments. It relies on actual experience as well as research outputs from universities and business schools, but strives to be practical in the way the material is presented. It is intended for working professionals, in all disciplines that involve the management of information, as well as for students. It differs from other books because it deals with a complex domain in a reflective rather than a descriptive way, and it organises the approach to information management in six stages, from simple consideration of information *technology* right through to issues of organisational *strategy*. These six stages exactly parallel six areas of management competency required to reliably deliver value.

Information Management Is Everyone's Business

Many professional people (from all disciplines) have come to understand the importance of information in their work. Lawyers, teachers, journalists and logisticians are all heavily dependent on information for professional success, and yet these generally very capable people are still battling to get the best out of technology. Some choose to undertake part-time postgraduate studies in order to understand more about the impact of information technology; some choose to undertake short-term management education about management information systems; some choose to struggle on, regardless. The problem is that the breadth of issues associated with information management practice is potentially vast, extending from an understanding of the base technologies that are used, right through to questions of organisational strategy and how it can accommodate the potential benefits of information technology. Hence, the central problem today for many people is the wide scope of the issues that need to be understood and the fact that so many different kinds of people are involved.

Information Management Is Complex but it Can Be Dealt with

This text is based on an easily understood framework that deals with the complexity, relates organisational needs to new information technology opportunities in a simple way, and makes clear the competencies that an organisation needs if it is to make good with information management.

The framework presented here, the “Information Management Body of Knowledge” (or just “IMBOK”) allows us to locate problems and opportunities and to move our ideas more easily from one stage in information value-adding to another—from consideration of raw technologies through to issues of practice, performance management and strategy. It also provides us a means to organise the literature about the subject and it is hoped that the fruits of present and future research will accumulate within and around the IMBOK framework. Using it, students, professionals and managers now have easier access to the diagnostic tools and management techniques that they need; further, researchers will have the means to position their research ideas and to share them with others more effectively than would otherwise have been possible.

Benefits and Limitations of the Approach Taken

Of course, organising the issues in such a simplistic way might be misleading. Real life is not simple, and the tendency of “IT people” to try and deal with complexity in a hierarchical or reductionist way masks many of the unexpected connections that might exist outside the structured view that is presented here. For example, if in a successful business the chief executive decides that it is necessary to move to “cloud services”, for reasons that are not entirely clear, then it is probable that the workforce at all levels will set about achieving exactly that, whatever their misgivings about cloud services. The origins of strategic thinking are many and various, and not always based on rational strategic analysis.

It is also true that the scope of strategic thinking, especially about information technology, is also broadening. In recent years there has been a move to look much more seriously at the soft issues: the attitudes that people adopt, their emotional reactions to the introduction of new technologies, and the cultural factors that colour everything that goes on in a organisation, especially the relationships (between people) that so often override pure logic. It is now common to hear culture discussed in the context of information systems research and practice, and to acknowledge that if an organisation has no cultural bias to embrace and adopt change, then investments related to change are doomed to difficulty and even outright failure. An appropriate culture that allows change is axiomatic to success, despite what managers might think; it is just as important to understand what the workforce thinks as what the management thinks.

This work takes an international view of information management. The examples that are used to illustrate the narrative are not confined to Europe and North America. Working in South Africa for more than 16 years has caused me to take on an even more careful view of culture, and the differences that exist in organisations, and while much of what is written in this text is predicated on experience in Europe and North America, occasionally we will look elsewhere.

We Can Now See Issues that Are Timeless

Turning an investment in new information technology and information systems into improved organisational performance has proved to be a tortuously difficult thing. Despite occasional successes, initiatives of one kind or another seem to have failed to deliver the hoped-for results. Of course there are reasons for this, and because of the time that has passed we can now see and deal with problems in ways that are proving to be *timeless*. Despite the turmoil of endless technology-driven change, there are management tools and techniques that will be good for many decades to come, not just for next year or next week. I hope that the tools and techniques presented here will prove to be useful and timeless for you.

The Audience for This Book

This book is intended to provide a reference for all those who are concerned to understand or even to bridge the “divide” (actual or perceived) that sits between information technology “specialists” and non-technological “generalists”. So, this text should be useful for...

- Secondary and tertiary teachers and lecturers, who are looking for a way to design courses in business management that deal effectively with information technology and information systems.
- Senior students and junior researchers who are looking for a simple contextual framework within which to organise their ideas, when what they are hearing and reading becomes too complex or too overwhelming.
- IS researchers who need to position their work in a management context.
- Managers who wish to identify and understand appropriate management tools that will help them in their work.

In the hope that the book will be read by senior students (and in case others are interested), at the end of each chapter there are pointers to selected research papers, with comments. There is also a full list of references and a bibliography.

Provenance of the Work

This book has been developed from a working text that has been available as the “Information Management Body of Knowledge”, that has circulated internationally for 10 years and has been adopted as a standard course text in South Africa, Europe and the Americas. For this new version, “properly” published at last, shortcomings in the original text have been dealt with, the examples have been extended, updated and improved, substantial additional material has been added, and accumulated experience with the IMBOK has made possible a more careful and more complete treatment of the issues.

Acknowledgments

The IMBOK originally emerged from a research project at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to whom we express our appreciation. I wish to acknowledge the interest and support of the many local South African organisations—too many to list here—that supported the early research workshops. I hope that this new text—now a “proper” book—continues to provide them with valuable assistance in terms of improving information management and improving their prospects of success with information systems investments.

Equally, it is important to acknowledge the contribution made by my many colleagues and students here in South Africa and elsewhere. In the beginning, working with John Ward, Rob Lambert and Chris Edwards at the Cranfield School of Management was inspirational; on arriving in South Africa so many years ago, Allen Lee articulated the need for the IMBOK in his keynote address at our inaugural conference in Cape Town, in 1999 (see Fig. 1.2)—that was the tipping point at which the story really began; the support and encouragement from Busi Ngidi, Cedrick Muleya, Yvette Greef and Munira Allie preserved my sanity when it was threatened by the mild but enduring chaos of the University of the Western Cape (at that time; the university has matured since then!); when we won the funding for the original research from the Carnegie Corporation of New York Derek Keats, Karolina O’Donoghue, Fahrnaaz Johadien, Melius Weideman, Corrie Uys, Bennett Alexander, Marcel Berteler, Peter Thomas, Lauren Wildschutz and Johan Mouton all contributed to a very challenging research agenda in many different ways; Geoff Erwin made it possible to contribute to the research developments at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology following its transformation into a real, research-based, technology university, and he encouraged the early dissemination of the IMBOK; as “students” (a descriptor hardly adequate to indicate the importance of their support and involvement) I must acknowledge all the happy times with Denise Biggs, Sipokazi Bukani, Bongazana Mahlangu, Constance Mtsweni, Sydwell Nikani, Rashied Scello, Thoko Speelman, Johannes Taswell and

Sibongiseni Tunzelana. Most recently Kobus Smit and Zoran Mitrovic have been particularly encouraging in the adoption and development of the IMBOK, and Darlington Onojaefe, Edward Naa Dakora, Laban Bagui, Moira Bladergroen, Wallace Chigona and Johannes Cronje have all been extraordinarily helpful, patient and supportive as the work of a lifetime finally settled down and became amenable to incorporation in a book like this.

Finally, I have to make special mention of two people. First, Grafton Whyte, whose doctoral project was the first one that I was ever substantially involved with and who followed me to southern Africa from the UK, to do what he could to promote Information Systems study and practice here: he has done more than anyone to encourage and critically appraise the ideas that have emerged. Second, my wife Ann, for endless proofreading and constructive criticism over nearly four decades of academic endeavour; it is just wonderful to have taken this journey together, with barely a single cross word exchanged. How did we do it?

Having said all that, any residual errors or omissions must of course be laid at my door, but the door is open—please visit the IMBOK web site and join the ongoing conversation.

<http://www.imbok.org>

Thanks, everyone!

Cape Town, August 2014

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