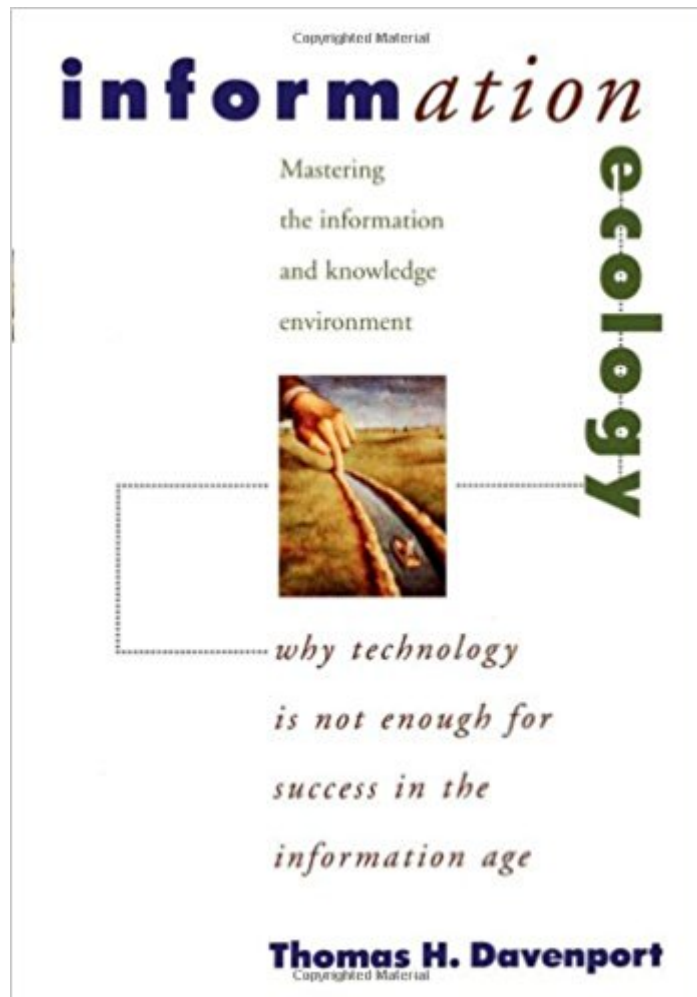


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Information Ecology: Mastering The Information And Knowledge Environment



Synopsis

According to virtually every business writer, we are in the midst of a new "information age," one that will revolutionize how workers work, how companies compete, perhaps even how thinkers think. And it is certainly true that Information Technology has become a giant industry. In America, more than 50% of all capital spending goes into IT, accounting for more than a third of the growth of the entire American economy in the last four years. Over the last decade, IT spending in the U.S. is estimated at 3 trillion dollars. And yet, by almost all accounts, IT hasn't worked all that well. Why is it that so many of the companies that have invested in these costly new technologies never saw the returns they had hoped for? And why do workers, even CEOs, find it so hard to adjust to new IT systems? In *Information Ecology*, Thomas Davenport proposes a revolutionary new way to look at information management, one that takes into account the total information environment within an organization. Arguing that the information that comes from computer systems may be considerably less valuable to managers than information that flows in from a variety of other sources, the author describes an approach that encompasses the company's entire information environment, the management of which he calls information ecology. Only when organizations are able to combine and integrate these diverse sources of information, and to take them to a higher level where information becomes knowledge, will they realize the full power of their information ecology. Thus, the author puts people, not technology, at the center of the information world. Information and knowledge are human creations, he points out, and we will never excel at managing them until we give people a primary role. Citing examples drawn from his own extensive research and consulting including such major firms as A.T. & T., American Express, Ford, General Electric, Hallmark, Hoffman La Roche, IBM, Polaroid, Pacific Bell, and Toshiba Davenport illuminates the critical components of information ecology, and at every step along the way, he provides a quick assessment survey for managers to see how their organization measures up. He discusses the importance of developing an overall strategy for information use; explores the infighting, jealousy over resources, and political battles that can frustrate information sharing; underscores the importance of looking at how people really use information (how they search for it, modify it, share it, hoard it, and even ignore it) and the kinds of information they want; describes the ideal information staff, who not only store and retrieve information, but also prune, provide context, enhance style, and choose the right presentation medium (in an age of work overload, vital information must be presented compellingly so the appropriate people recognize and use it); examines how information management should be done on a day to day basis; and presents several alternatives to the machine engineering approach to structuring and modeling information. Davenport makes explicit

what many managers already know in their gut: that useful information flow depends on people, not equipment. In Information Ecology he paves the way for all managers to build a more competitive, creative, practical information environment for their companies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was disappointed by this book. While its central thesis (that MIS should include human and political considerations, not just technical ones) is valid and needs championing, I found the text repetitive, lacking in clear advice, and full of buzzwords used to restate the obvious. Mr. Davenport is clearly an expert on how to run MIS at large companies. Unfortunately, I found it difficult to glean applicable lessons from his book

This book offers great insight into creating an information environment within the company. I think that the numerous examples for real life companies provide credibility to his claims. However this is for people who are building and IT structure from scratch or are looking for a paradigm shift in how they do IT? If your IT environment is not producing results this is a great place to start. It provides the theory to apply to real life situations. Understanding the necessity of Information Technology is essential for implementing results oriented systems.

I found this to be a useful and informative book with new insights, especially in the area of developing a wholistic view of an information enterprise. Most previous books seem to be limited to

just MIS departments and ignore the fact that managing information is not something that just happens in a vacuum. I also found the diagnosis section to be useful and grounded in real work versus the "blackboard" consulting suggestions that sometimes comes from academics whose ideas are not grounded in real world experiences.

In many ways this book, in my opinion, was far ahead of its time. It looks at Information Systems as an Ecology than an Engineered set of Components which are created out of some grandiose engineered blueprint. There are many refreshing ideas and insights in there. It talks about Human centered approach to Information systems development and deployment. A must read for people who "philosophise" about Information Systems.

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