



IMARK

Module

Investing in Information for Development

Organization and Management

**Lesson 1: Information Management  
in Your Organization**

Learner Notes



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This lesson is part of the IMARK Module on “Investing in Information for development”. The Module contains six units. The unit on “Organization and Management” comprises three lessons:

Lesson 1: Information Management in your Organization

Lesson 2: New Structures and Alliances

Lesson 3: New Approaches to Motivating Staff

This course is available in self-paced e-learning format on CD-ROM and the Internet

([www.imarkgroup.org](http://www.imarkgroup.org)).

## Learning objectives

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At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify key information management activities and the resources necessary to perform them;
- define some basic criteria for analysing key information management resources in your organization.

## Introduction

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The environment for information management is changing fast.

In the 21st century, information has become:

- more plentiful than ever before;
- more easily accessible;
- packaged and delivered in more attractive text/audio/image formats;
- often more expensive.

A successful organization must continually modify its products and services to adapt to changing circumstances. This will have an impact on information management.

## Main activities and resources in information management

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Information management includes **four activities**:

- the **ACQUISITION** of content (from both external and internal sources);
- the **PRODUCTION** of new content;
- the **STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL** of content that has been acquired and/or produced;
- the **DISSEMINATION** of appropriate content to users.

To accomplish these activities, your organization requires **five main resources**:

- **POLICY**  
(enabling policies)
- **PEOPLE**  
(motivated and skilled people)
- **TECHNOLOGY**  
(appropriate technology)
- **ORGANIZATION**  
(efficient structures and procedures)
- **ALLIANCES**  
(constructive and supportive alliances)

Efficient management depends on effective application of the five types of resources in the four core information management activities.

**Analysis of the requirements** for these resources will provide the basis for developing an organization-specific framework for making decisions about investments.

But how is the situation in your Organization?

The following questions refer to the activities and resources we just talked about. You might think that sometimes the answer is not simply a “yes” or “no”; nevertheless, this test can be useful for a quick check-up.

QUESTION	YES	NO
Have you responded to recent changes in the external information environment by making internal organizational changes?		
Do you have procedures in place for continuous assessment of your information needs?		
Are your Information Technologies appropriate to meet those needs?		
Do you have regular processes for identifying new information suppliers, users, partners and technologies?		
Do you do market research on the types of information products and services that your users (and potential users) want?		
Have you established partnerships for implementing significant parts of your information operations?		
Do your information staff have the values and skills required for their jobs?		
Do they have clear job descriptions?		
Does your organization have an Information Strategy?		

**\* Scores:**

- If you answered “yes” between 0 and 3 times: Your organization should reconsider its approach to information management. This unit will give you useful suggestions on possible investment options.
- If you answered “yes” between 4 and 6 times: Your organization is clearly addressing the issues related to information management. But there is still room for improvement.
- If you answered “yes” between 7 and 9 times: Your organization is above average in its approach to information management.

## Some information management issues

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We mentioned that information management activities and resources are affected by the new information environment. The following short summaries are common examples.

For each one, a list of questions will highlight some of the ways in which the five main resources may be involved.

SCIENCE: Scientists are increasingly looking to electronic sources for the literature they need to prepare new projects and interpret their results. This demand raises management as well as technical issues.

- Does your organization have an acquisitions policy for electronic content resources?
- Are there procedures in place for such acquisitions and is/are the unit(s) properly organized?
- Are the necessary partnerships and contractual arrangements in place to deliver the content?
- Do the information specialist staff and intermediaries have the necessary skills to fulfil their roles?
- Is the right technology and connectivity available to allow acquisition?

EDUCATION: Many education organizations are looking to use electronic formats for preparing and delivering teaching materials. This demand can have major new resource implications.

- Does your organization have an overall strategy for the role of electronic media in supporting education?
- Are there procedures in place for development and dissemination of the resources?
- Are the necessary partnerships in place to develop and disseminate the teaching materials?
- Are the academic staff given the right encouragement to explore new electronic methods of education for on-campus and off-campus learners?
- Are the right hardware and software available in the departments for the development of materials?

**STATISTICS:** New information technology offers many new possibilities for managing and disseminating statistics. More traditional outputs include printed “yearbooks”, but new methods are available for setting up relational statistical databases and publishing the data in electronic format.

- Does your organization have a policy on electronic management and dissemination of statistics?
- Are there correct procedures in place and is the statistics unit properly organized?
- Are the necessary partnerships and contractual arrangements in place to manage and disseminate the data?
- Do the statisticians and the InformationTechnology staff have the necessary skills to establish and use the databases effectively?
- Is the right technology and connectivity available?

**EXTENSION:** Extension services are exploiting electronic media to improve access to current information for agronomists in the field, and to improve efficiency of feedback from field staff to national/provincial offices.

- Does your organization have a policy to the use of electronic media in extension?
- Are there correct procedures in place and are the headquarters and field units properly organized to use such a system?
- Are the necessary partnerships in place to gather and exchange the information content?
- Do the field staff have the necessary skills to use the system well?
- Are the appropriate technology and connectivity available to allow headquarters and field units to exchange information?

## Analysing investment options

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In order to adapt to the changing environment, a manager can intervene and invest in any or all of the information management resources: policy, people, organization, technology and alliances.

But how does a manager choose which one(s), and how can (s)he set priorities?

To answer this, we will consider three of the five main resources in more detail:

- **People**
- **Organization**
- **Alliances**

Here are some basic questions that will help you get started with your analysis. (In the next lessons in this Unit we will consider People, Organization and Alliances in more detail.)

Let's begin with **people**:

### 1. Skills of information management staff

- Do our people have the skills required to do their jobs well in a new information environment?
- Does our organization give them sufficient opportunity to keep their information skills up to date?
- Do they have enough facilities to use their information skills and to perform their jobs efficiently?

### 2. Jobs of information management staff

- Are the jobs of our information staff clearly defined?
- Are we continually reassessing these jobs in the context of new information requirements?



Next, some basic questions concerning **organization**:

**1. Structure**

- Is our existing organizational structure appropriate for information management operations in the new digital environment?
- What significant organizational changes have we made in the last three years in response to new information constraints and opportunities?

**2. Procedures**

- Are people in our different information units working in a coordinated way towards the same objectives?
- Do we have an organizational process for coordinating decisions on information management with decisions on the acquisition and use of new Information Technologies?

The last questions are related to **alliances**

**1. Organizational capacity**

- Can we cope with managing the acquisition, development and dissemination of all of the information products and services that the organization needs or produces?

**2. Collaborators**

- Do we already cooperate actively on information management with other organizations?
- Should we be thinking about developing new alliances with new partners?

These issues are the building blocks for starting an analysis of the key information management resources in your organization.

## Summary

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Information management includes **four main activities**:

- acquisition of content;
- production of new content;
- storage and retrieval of content that has been acquired and/or produced;
- dissemination of appropriate content to users.

To accomplish these activities, an organization needs **five main resources**:

- an enabling policy environment;
- efficient structures and procedures;
- motivated and skilled people;
- appropriate technology;
- helpful alliances.

Efficient management of information depends on **effective application** of the five types of resources in the four core information management activities.

In order to decide where investments are necessary, we considered three of the main resources in more detail: **people, organization, alliances**.