



IMARK

Module
Investing in Information for Development

How to Invest in Information for Development

Lesson 1: An Introduction

Learner Notes



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Table of contents

Learning objectives	1
Introduction.....	1
Significant changes in the information environment.....	2
Changes in information management	3
Changes in information technology	3
Management and change.....	4
The challenge of making effective choices	4
Summary.....	8

This lesson is part of the IMARK Module on “Investing in Information for Development”. The Module contains six units. The unit on “How to Invest in Information for Development” comprises one lesson:

Lesson 1: An Introduction

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

(www.imarkgroup.org).

Learning objectives

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

- identify the main purposes of this module;
- identify some significant areas of change in your information environment*;
- understand how the module is organized.

* *information environment* includes the individuals, organizations and technologies that collect, process or use information; and the information itself.

Introduction

How do I invest in information for development? This question is the focus of our examination of the information environment.

In fact, this module is part of a series being produced to support the information activities of institutions working in development. It concentrates on the options and choices associated with investing in information for development. The other modules focus on specific technical areas (e.g. *Management of electronic documents, Digitalization and digital libraries, Building electronic communities*).

As a manager, you deal on a daily basis with information-related issues. Here are some examples:

Are we able to access the information we need?

How can we disseminate our information to our diverse audiences and be really heard and understood?

Do we have enough funds to cover our information-related costs?

How is it possible to coordinate all our different information activities?

Is the structure of our organization appropriate to respond to the changes in the information environment?

In recent years, more issues have emerged. Here is what some members of staff in an organization are saying:

1.... *"we need to explore new ways to promote two-way information flows using digital technologies..."*

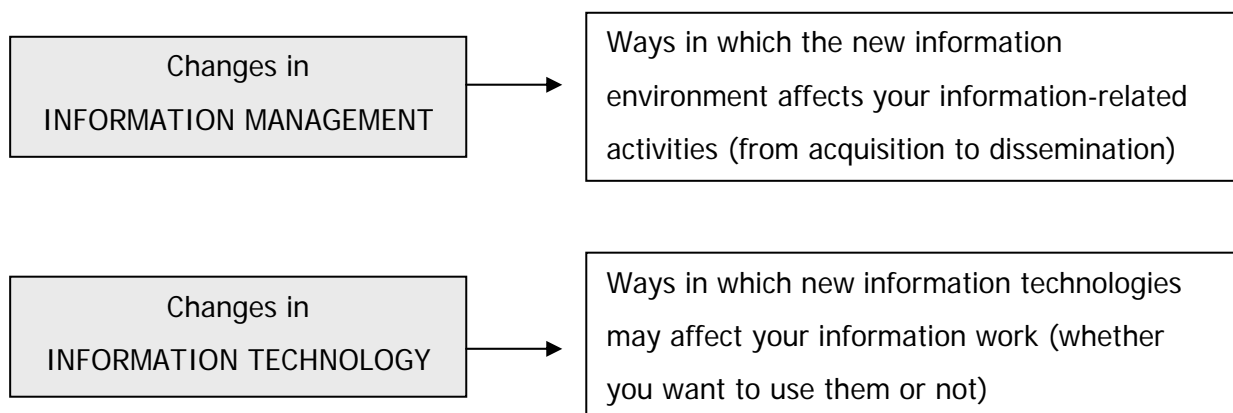
2.... *"the new policies on diversification of agricultural production and income will mean new investments for new types of information"...*

3.... *"we are operating in a much more crowded information environment than before...now we have to define our role more carefully"...*

The information environment is constantly changing, and investments in information must take into account these changes.

Significant changes in the information environment

We can think about these changes under **two main categories**:



Changes in information management

The principal change in information management over the last ten years has to do with the huge increase in the quantity of potentially relevant information on development.

The principal components of this increase are:

- academically oriented journals (printed and digital) and books; and
- information made available through electronic means, particularly the world-wide web.

This increasing quantity of information makes it important to improve the efficiency of information management.



This module will provide useful criteria for setting priorities when acquiring information. It will also explore several options for accessing information at low cost.

Changes in information technology

Changes in information technology have an enormous effect on the way you work, opening up a vast range of new opportunities as well as new issues to consider. Here are some of them:

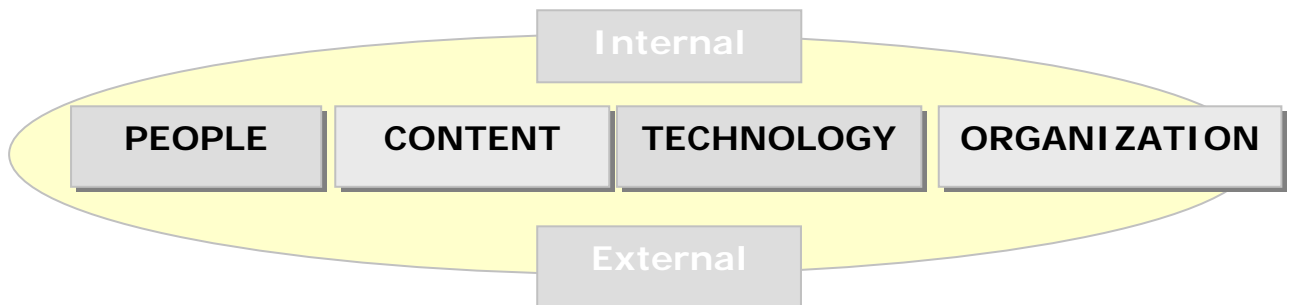
1. The ways technology helps you to acquire, process and disseminate information.
2. The technologies your audience(s) have access to.
3. How other organizations use information technology.
4. The durability of your investments in information technology.



In this module, we will consider the impact of technology on the information environment and how it affects your organization's activities. However, we will not explain the various technologies in detail.

Management and change

The **changes** in the “new” information environment significantly affect the key areas that require your attention as a manager. These key areas are:



This module will consider not only the new **opportunities** for each of these areas, but also the **threats** that you might have to face.

The challenge of making effective choices

How do the changes affecting these areas affect you as a manager? How can you develop your organization's information-related activities to meet the new challenges?

There is not one single, simple answer. In fact, your organization will have to make its investment choices from a range of possibilities.



This module will present several options and criteria to help managers make effective choices in organization and planning.

We just mentioned the challenge for a manager of choosing from among the options and opportunities. In this module we will consider:

- the full range of strategic, organizational and technological options;
- the financial and organizational risks and potential benefits of each option;
- how various options can either complement each other or prove incompatible;
- the danger of making ad-hoc decisions with unforeseen long-term impacts.

Now, let's have a look at how a manager in an agricultural organization might use this module during his or her daily activities...

Mr. Kibaka is Director of the Information Division at the Ministry of Agriculture. He has been asked to lead a project to develop and coordinate the information activities of all the Ministry's local offices and its headquarters. Mr. Kibaka knows that the Ministry's main objectives in the area of information are:

- to provide more efficient access to information across the organization (using the newly-installed information technology network); and
- to improve the production and dissemination of publications and information materials for all stakeholders, including farmers.

Mr. Kibaka sits down to think about how to plan this project. First, he writes the **main categories of activities** that need to be considered:

- **Strategic planning:** plan and coordinate the various information-related activities;
- **Information access:** enhance efficiency of access to external sources of information;
- **Information dissemination:** improve the quality of Ministry's information products and services;
- **Organization and management:** improve effectiveness of the managers and staff working in information-related activities; and
- **Evaluation:** assess the impact of information-related activities.

Concerning strategic planning, here is what he says:

...we should find a way to plan and coordinate all the information-related activities...and to guide staff and other stakeholders in managing them...

He can find these issues addressed in:

Unit 2. "Information Strategy".

1. The features of an information strategy
2. Developing an information strategy
3. Implementing an information strategy

His staff also raise a number of important issues about the second type of activity (access):

...It has become difficult for anyone to keep track of all information relevant to a particular agricultural issue...

...There can be real problems in assessing the quality of much of this information...

...It can be hard to find what you actually want - there is too much information!

...There is more scientific literature in paper or electronic format, but prices have risen too high!!

Mr. Kibaka can find these issues addressed in:

Unit 3: "Information Access".

1. Introduction to information access
2. The external information providers
3. Internal information
4. Management interventions
5. Reducing costs

Another staff member identifies a further area of concern:

...we also need to look at the way we currently disseminate the information we produce...

...since the technologies used by some of our audiences have changed, the media we use now for dissemination might not be appropriate anymore...

Mr. Kibaka can find these issues addressed in:

Unit 4: "Information Dissemination".

1. Audiences and markets
2. Products and performance
3. New digital opportunities

Then Mr. Kibaka considers the way the organization is currently working:

...we need to identify the key activities and the necessary resources....we need to define some criteria for analysing those resources and for establishing alliances with other organizations....and we need to think about options for motivating and retaining skilled staff ...

Mr. Kibaka can find these issues addressed in:

Unit 5: "Organization and Management".

1. Information management in your organization
2. New structure and alliances
3. New approaches to motivating staff.

Finally, he considers one more issue:

...and we need to keep in mind evaluation... It will be important to find ways to assess if the outcome of our activities matches our intended objectives...

Mr. Kibaka can find these issues addressed in:

Unit 6: "Evaluating an Information Project".

1. Getting ready
2. Building consensus
3. Defining content
4. From questions to results.

In order for Mr. Kibaka's project to be successful, it will be necessary to carry out all these information-related activities in an efficient way.

The analysis of these activities in this module should help you realize the great potential of new information technologies, and to invest effectively in information for development.

Summary

The new information environment has brought changes that force us to continually reconsider what we are trying to achieve and how we can do it.

A manager should be able to interpret these changes and react to them.

The main changes to the broad information environment include:

- changes in **information management**
- changes in **information technology**

These changes will especially affect four key areas (internal and external) requiring your attention as a manager:

- **people**
- **content**
- **technology**
- **organization**

This module will provide you with some criteria to help you make effective decisions in the following activities:

- **Information Strategy**
- **Acquisition**
- **Dissemination**
- **Organization and Management**
- **Evaluation**