Classics in Library and Information Science Series

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***Davenport, Thomas H. with Prusak, Laurence Information Ecology. Mastering the Information and Knowledge Environment.* Oxford University Press, 1997.**

It is obvious that we are in the midst of a new information age.Information has influenced almost every aspect of our life. It determines how we work, how business houses compete with each other and how we think. As a result, Information Technology (IT) has become a huge industry. Although IT is a business of more than a trillion dollars, it has not worked all that well as expected.Many companies are not getting the expected Return on Investment. Whydo workers, even CEOs, find it so hard to adjust to new IT systems? Here is an attempt by Thomas Davenport with Larry Prusak to explore this situation.

(Thomas H. Davenport is the president's distinguished professor of information technology and management at Babson College. Lawrence Prusack is a teacher of Master of Science in Information and Knowledge Strategy master's program at Columbia University's School of Professional Studies. He also is Director of Research of Knowledge Strategies, LLC, which is engaged in research and consulting services with a focus on knowledge and learning.)

Information Ecology :

Mastering the Information and Knowledge Environment by Davenportshows an entirely new outlook at information management. The title advocates that the information that comes from computer systems in any organization is substantially less valuable and less useful to managers



than information that flows from a variety of other sources in the system. What the author implies is an approach that covers the company's entire information environment. The author stresses that he prefers to call management of entire information environment as '**Information Ecology**'.Note that information environment deals with both living and nonliving entities while information ecology implies management of living components. In short, ecology is study of interactions and other properties of biological organisms and non-biological items in the environment. (I think that it boils down to the fifth law, 'Library is a living organism'.)

Here the author proposesa new way to look at information management taking into consideration the total information environment within an organization. All disciplines in a society have their counterparts in information society. Thus, there is information politics, information economics, information science, information technology etc. in each and every organization. The author has elaborately explained these concepts.

The author concludesthat useful information flow in the organization depends on people, and not from equipment or digital networking. In *Information Ecology* he paves the way for all managers to build a more competitive, creative, practical information environment for their companies.

The author advises information managers to combine and integrate diverse sources of information, so that they realize the full power of their information ecology. Thus, the author puts people at the center of the information world, and not technology. Information and knowledge are human creations, hence difficult to manage. It is said in this book that knowledge management is 5% technology and 95% psychology. Examples are cited from the research and consulting carried out at the firms such as A.T. & T., American Express,



Ford, General Electric, Hallmark, Hoffman La Roche, IBM, Polaroid, Pacific Bell,and Toshiba etc.

According to the author the infighting, jealousy over resources and political battles can frustrate information sharing; Davenport 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;the ideal information staff not only store and retrieve information, but also add value at every stage of information management. In *Information Ecology.* Davenport paves the way for all managers to build a more competitive, creative, practical information environment for their companies.



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