About Topic Gateways

Topic Gateways are intended as a refresher or introduction to topics of interest to CIMA members. They include a basic definition, a brief overview and a fuller explanation of practical application. Finally they signpost some further resources for detailed understanding and research.

Topic Gateways are available electronically to CIMA Members only in the CPD Centre on the CIMA website, along with a number of electronic resources.

About the Technical Information Service

CIMA supports its members and students with its Technical Information Service (TIS) for their work and CPD needs.

Our information specialists and accounting specialists work closely together to identify or create authoritative resources to help members resolve their work related information needs. Additionally, our accounting specialists can help CIMA members and students with the interpretation of guidance on financial reporting, financial management and performance management, as defined in the CIMA Official Terminology 2005 edition.

CIMA members and students should sign into My CIMA to access these services and resources.

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Information strategy

Definition

An information strategy is:

‘...a management tool linking the delivery of the organisation’s mission to the overall information resource.’

*JISC, 1998*

‘... a strategic planning framework for the delivery, use and management of information.’

*CIPFA, 2001*

In the current syllabus, information strategy is briefly mentioned in Paper 4 ‘Organisational management and information systems’. Information strategies are covered in Paper 6 ‘Management accounting business strategy’. Study systems for these papers are available from CIMA Publishing.

[www.books.elsevier.com](http://www.books.elsevier.com)  
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

Related concepts

Information strategy is linked to knowledge management and information technology strategy.

Overview

An information strategy is a high level strategic plan for managing an organisation’s information and knowledge resources. It is underpinned by an information policy. Elizabeth Orna, a leading writer on information strategy, stresses that the information policy stems from a clear understanding of the organisation’s strategic objectives, and the information resources required to achieve those objectives.

The information strategy puts the information policy into practice by setting out aims/objectives, actions to achieve them, and targets/deadlines. It is developed and implemented in stages, and must be periodically reviewed.
Information strategy is related to, but should not be confused with other lower level strategies, such as:

- information systems strategy - an identification of the information systems required to meet the information requirements of the organisation [CIPFA, 2001]
- information technology strategy - an identification of the technology needed to support the information and information systems strategy [CIPFA, 2001].

**Application**

**Information strategy in practice**

Organisations rely on information that is relevant, timely and accurate. Their information needs are numerous and diverse. Orna (2004) argues that an organisation’s information resources should therefore be managed using a strategy based on:

- its strategic objectives
- a clear idea of its information needs and how staff should use that information.

Orna lists benefits of having an information strategy. The following is an adaptation:

- decision making on investment in systems and IT is based on organisational strategy and user needs (rather than technology push or the latest trends)
- a strategy avoids wasting time on unnecessary activities, particularly users having to interpret information received in unsuitable formats
- a strategy also ensures an organisation meets its legal requirements, so avoiding unnecessary costs and risk to reputation
- properly managed information supports innovation, productivity and competitiveness
- information activities are unified, so fully contributing to organisational objectives
- a strategy encourages co-operation and openness between managers of information resources. This results in more effective use of the organisation’s information and in more innovation.
Pre-requisites

A successful information strategy requires the commitment and understanding of senior managers from all departments, such as finance, marketing and operations. The rest of the organisation requires a clear understanding of the strategy. Other requirements include time, money and staff to manage and implement the strategy.

Reported users

Information strategies have been developed and implemented by a range of different organisations including local authorities, universities, police forces, charities, museums and financial services companies. The motives for developing the strategy and the aims and content of the strategy vary for each organisation. However the strategy is always based on organisational objectives.

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) points out that the information strategies of higher education institutions tend to be more complex than for other types of organisation. Higher education institutions need to conduct their affairs in a business-like way, but will also tend to act:

like loosely connected, anarchic groups of dedicated individuals. (JISC, 1998)

Therefore, for a higher education institution’s information strategy to succeed, its development must include a bottom-up analysis in conjunction with a strategically driven top-down approach.

Steps in the development of an information strategy

(Base on the work of Orna, 2004 and CIPFA, 2001).

1. Strategists need to understand the organisation’s strategic objectives, its culture and its business processes/methods of working.

2. They need to establish what activities and information resources are required to meet the organisation’s objectives.

3. Current processes and information resources are examined through an information audit (see below for further details of information audits).

4. The results of the information audit are analysed to identify shortcomings or gaps between (a) what is required (Step 2) and (b) existing processes and resources (Step 3).

5. An information policy is produced based on the organisation’s objectives. It comprises a series of statements covering: (a) the organisation’s attitude to information; (b) principles governing the management of information, the
use of staff and I.T. for the management of information, and cost effectiveness.

6. The information strategy is developed and implemented, possibly in stages. It puts policy into practice through specific actions and projects. (See below for details of possible components that an information strategy is likely to include).

7. The information strategy is periodically reviewed to ensure its aims are still appropriate and are being met.

Information audits

An information audit is:

‘A systematic examination of information use, resources and flows, with a verification by reference to both people and existing documents, in order to establish the extent to which they are contributing to an organisation’s objectives.’

ASMIB Information Resources Management Network

Information audits employ a number of methods including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and examination of existing databases and documents - both electronic and paper records. Information audits are not one-off exercises. They should be repeated periodically. They may identify opportunities for quick wins - improvements that can be made immediately.

Step 2 (see above) is essential before carrying out an information audit. Otherwise you will not know how to use the results of the audit.

Information strategy - possible components

There is no formal model or template for an information strategy. The types of document that are included, their style and content, will vary between organisations according to organisational culture and the aims of the information strategy. However, the strategy is likely to contain the following components:

- what you are trying to achieve and why
- what you have done and discovered so far
- information policies and procedures (or reference to them)
- the plan for the specified projects
- the framework for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

JISC 1998
Case studies/examples

Glasgow University’s Information Strategy
Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdwy
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

A number of informative documents can be viewed in ‘Major Outputs’.
Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdwt
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

The paper ‘Producing an Information Strategy’ offers further details of Orna’s work.
Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdws
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

Queen Mary, University of London
A link to the college’s information strategy can be found on the college information page under the title Strategies.
Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdwr
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

University of East Anglia’s Information Strategy
Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdty
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

JISC InfoNet website includes further case studies on developing information strategies in universities.
Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdwa
[Accessed 4 July 2008]

References

Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdwb
[Accessed 12 November 2008]
Further information

Articles
Full text available from Business Source Corporate through My CIMA
www.cimaglobal.com/mycima
[Accessed 12 November 2008]
Donlon, B. Barriers to leveraging information assets for strategy. DM Review, May 2007, Volume 17, Issue 5, p. 18
Rogalski, S. CIOs value a full information management strategy. DM Review, September 2007, Volume 17, Issue 9, pp 29-31
Thomas, K. Companies drown in information. Information World Review, November 2006, Issue 229

Books

Related CIMA resources
benefits of an efficient and effective information system, and indicates the processes by which good information systems may be created or enhanced.
Available from: www.cimaglobal.com/technicalguides
[Accessed 20 November 2007]

CIMA Information Management Key Target Task Force. April 2000. Information Management: the fundamentals. CIMA Technical Guide. Explores the importance of an information management policy. Stresses that everyone, in any type of size of organisation, needs to understand the importance of safeguarding the very valuable knowledge that permeates all daily operations.
Available from: www.cimaglobal.com/technicalguides
[Accessed 12 November 2008]

**Websites**

[Accessed 12 November 2008]

Available from: http://digbig.com/4xdwd
[Accessed 12 November 2008]