Foreword

The book is timely, authoritative and comprehensive through a detailed view of recent Information Technology (IT) ‘trends and tools’ which may be exploited for the benefit of developing countries. Few agendas are more important within our globally engaged world where experience, expertise and examples may be translated and adopted from mature economies to less advantaged areas of our planet. These critical gains can be realised to support all citizens and provide universal opportunities for improved health, education and well-being facilitated by new IT. This is particularly evident through the development and diffusion of the internet which has evidently transformed societies through the application of sophisticated web-enabled systems. Many governments have recognised these trends and are seriously implementing relevant applications in this respect for economic development. This is also apparent through the emergence of eGovernment where online services are provided to improve service delivery agendas. In addition, private providers and commercial enterprises are also increasingly engaging with eBusiness systems as they recognise the opportunities for competitive advantages. In this respect a combined awareness of IT, in whatever guise, represents a valuable resource for developing countries in their efforts to maintain and sustain the quality of life for citizens.

The book usefully demonstrates the extent of the ‘digital divide’ between developed and developing nations and represents an important example of how imaginative IT initiatives may be leveraged to overcome physical obstacles and potentially generate significant market access and competitive stimulus. The content includes the interesting notion of ‘knowledge reconciliation’ which may be applied to developing countries in an attempt to capture the cultural dimensions generated from imprecise information in these contexts. A few chapters also conceptualise the concept of knowledge management within developing countries which offer insights and opportunities for commercial organisations.

In keeping with the theme of the book there is an example of the exploitation of ‘web service composition’ to support the enactment of high quality service applications. Most usefully the notion of cloud computing is discussed and how these innovations may again be adapted to developing country contexts. Any serious adoption of IT systems is wholly dependent upon how the systems are diffused and implemented and these issues are instigated through an assessment and role of IT training in a developing public sector context. The examples are chosen from the Nigerian Immigration Service but are again applicable and translatable to other areas of similar concern. A broader more generic perspective is also provided where national policies, social economic factors, national culture and network readiness are examined in Africa. The extent, capabilities and level of preparation are assessed to determine network opportunities. The book exposes a number of relevant areas to achieve readiness in this respect most importantly, educational systems, transparency (corruption) levels, regulatory frameworks, and cross-cultural dimensions.
Another excellent feature of the book is its demonstration of career orientations and turnover of IT personnel in Africa which is critically important where skill shortages may be exacerbated through labour transfers which are clearly instigated through lack of attention to career ‘anchors’. A valuable insight is gained from a need to ensure organisational stability (job security) and sense of service initiatives. Further reports consider the adoption of eCommerce systems and present an analysis of the emergence of these systems which may enable and support revenue generation from non-traditional resources. The research models proposed are particularly helpful based upon the Diffusion of Innovation and Technology-Organisation-Environment frameworks. Culturally sensitive issues are also addressed through reference and empirical evaluation of gender differences and self-efficacy through the adoption of eBanking. The book identifies that females are disadvantaged compared with their male counter parts with respect to IT usage and acceptance. This is a complex area which clearly deserves more research attention given the value and equitability necessary for gender equality.

A further common concern relative to eCommerce systems is the apparent lack of trust in their adoption. A series of initiative to enhance the extent of trust within developing environments are suggested which will certainly engage more users in electronic exchanges. The report of the Chinese economy is a welcome addition to the experiences of larger developing countries. Evidence and evaluations clearly present important lessons for IT adoption for obtaining personal credit as an engine of economic activity and sustainability. In addition, issues and advise on the translation of Western methodologies through the application of robust credit procedures enabled from IT are discussed. eLearning applications are addressed and the opportunities to enhance literacy and library use facilities are reported. This is again a critically unique and important area of concern in developing countries to ensure the right skills are achieved in the use of IT and the available resources provided through libraries. The final chapters consider these systems and experiences of higher education. They provide a useful explanation of how and why eLearning are important particularly in relation to the educational transmission of information, knowledge, values and attitudes. The opportunity is also taken to outline the challenges associated of carrying out IT measurements in developing countries as they are different from those in developed countries. This also relates to the methods for selecting appropriate IT content. The results reveal significant differences between the academic use of IT by students and faculty members which has implications for researchers, education practitioners, planners, policy makers and government – a main objective of the book.

The richness and diversity of coverage in the book is highly commendable and it should become a critically useful resource for anyone involved with or is dependent upon the exploitation of IT systems within developing countries.

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