The objective of this paper is to suggest that the concept of Information Resource Management (IRM) should focus more on end-user concerns rather than information technology per se. IRM should develop and support IRM education for end-users emphasizing the cognitive skills required for effectively utilizing information resources. IRM should also consider adapting the concept of ‘information counseling’ as a guide to improving the interface between end-users and information resources.

Two IRM Perspectives

There are at least two traditions or perspectives underlying the current thinking in IRM. One perspective stems from data processing and management information systems traditions; another perspective is based on other information science traditions including library, communications, behavioral and social sciences.

Perspective #1

The first perspective views information as a manageable commodity or resource to be produced, distributed, and used for purposeful ends. An information system is viewed as an identifiable set of operations on data producing specific types of information products such as management reports. The methodology of this perspective focuses on the technologies, skills, and management necessary to design and implement a system that meets certain a priori defined technical standards. This system theoretic perspective is basically concerned with the supply of information and presupposes that an improved supply leads to an improved use of information. Guimaraes (1988) identified three specific IRM points of view in the literature: IRM as the management of the organization’s information resources, IRM as the management of individual information system application development and improvement, and IRM as the management of the
organization’s resources used to produce information. All three views of IRM seem to fall into this first perspective of emphasizing the technical aspects of information management.

**Perspective #2**

The second perspective underlying IRM focuses on the human use of information rather than on the supply of information. This perspective emphasizes information content, information transfer, and the interaction of users with information systems of all kinds. The focus is on the contextual factors, described in information terms, upon which human activity is contingent. The environment is not viewed as an information system per se but as a set of information arrangements. The methodology of this perspective focuses on the user’s ability to cope with information arrangements in ways appropriately defined by the user. The perspective is basically concerned with the demand for information and presupposes that an improved articulation for the need for information leads to an improved use of information. Lunin and Cooper's compilation of articles is an example of this perspective; they argue (1988, pg. 309) that ‘.. the convergence and integration of seemingly disparate fields and disciplines, and the raising of the collective consciousness of educators, practitioners, prospective student, and society in general to the importance of information and its transfer in all facets of professional and every day life require primary consideration.

**Necessity For Both Perspectives in IRM**

Both perspectives are legitimate and necessary for IRM. The interconnection between the two can be illustrated by an example. In the situation of strategic planning a corporate executive has potential access to a wide variety of information resources, e.g., DSS models, data bases, corporate and personal files, colleagues, etc. The system perspective in this example would be concerned with the technical quality of each of these resources; it would be assumed that the executive’s ability to utilize information in this situation is his/her ability to make use of these information resources. But the executive is also engaged in a variety of information intensive activities that as a whole comprise strategic management - assumption identification, consensus building, alternative generation, value clarification, and goal setting. The social theoretic perspective in this example would be concerned with the informational arrangements of the executive’s environment that either support or inhibit these activities. It would be assumed that the executive’s ability to utilize information is his/her ability to engage in the information intensive cognitive activities of strategic management under the constraints and opportunities of both the existing and perceived information environment.

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More generally, the history of the information field is replete with absence of data or data too late to enable decision makers to respond to crisis. How often is the case that actions are taken or not taken because of the gathering of useless, irrelevant data; or where symptoms are missed and the significance of events are assessed inappropriately. These dangers become increasingly more probable, ironically, as data availability and access increase. The growth of data and data processing technology, it would seem, requires a corresponding emphasis on the information capabilities that users bring to the task. Thus, IRM ought to emphasize both information technology variables (Perspective #1) and human factors variables (Perspective #2) in the equation of improved information utilization.
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