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## The Enterprise of Diplomacy in the Information Age

**Dennis M. Jauch**

Dealing with information technology and the reinvention of businesses and government are central issues throughout the public and private sector today. Changes resulting from information technology range from upgrading telecommunications and computer systems to rethinking completely the nature of enterprises and entire industries. Roy Harmon in Reinventing the Business writes, "Not a single enterprise's executives should fail to view its future as anything less than one filled with revolutionary change." (Harmon: xv). The personal and organizational adaptations to upgrades in information technology are only the bow wave of even greater changes to come as enterprises reorganize in response to these technological changes and adjust to societal changes caused by information technology. These changes range from immediate requirements to train staff on new information technology to the longer term challenges of shaping the enterprise, profession and professionals to be successful in the continuing evolution of the information age, which is only now in its infancy. At the individual, organizational, and societal levels, information technology will change the nature of enterprises, even enterprises like the U.S. Department of State, as well as the profession and the professionals who carry out the functions of the enterprise.

The terminology of the information age can itself be confusing. An information tremor, perhaps traceable to the European Renaissance, became an explosion within the last few decades as individuals, enterprises and societies dealt with extraordinarily greater quantities of information. A technological rumble resonating from the Industrial Revolution itself exploded within the past few decades in a variety of aspects of our lives, particularly in dealing with information. This overlap of

information and technology advances became first symbiotic as technological advances further fueled the information avalanche and the availability and thirst for information required technological advances, then synergistic as the information age, where generating, transmitting, collecting, analyzing, and reacting to information is the essence of interpersonal relations. The information age is more than just the technology that delivers the avalanche of information and in turn feeds the individual and organizational thirst for more information. The information age brings social, cultural, psychological, and legal changes to the way we live, interact, and work. It is within this information age environment that enterprises, professions and professionals must redefine themselves.

The 1996 Information Technology Management Reform Act, called Clinger-Cohen, puts business-like requirements on government enterprises. The act requires all federal agencies to designate chief information officers who will rationalize information technology investments across the enterprise. John Koskinen of the Office of Management and Budget, quoted in Government Executive magazine advises these chief information officers to ask three questions related to integrating information technology into the processes and functions of the enterprise: 1) "Should the agency be doing the work at all?" 2) "Could another agency or outside contractor do the work better and cheaper?" and 3) "Is the work being performed in the most efficient manner or do processes need to be reengineered." (Corbin: 1A). These are serious questions, and the answers go beyond upgrading office communications and automation to the very manner in which enterprises--U.S. government agencies--conduct business. The third question is especially significant. No longer is information technology peripheral to the core function of the enterprise. Information technology is now a major factor in defining the fundamental processes of the government enterprise. Another aspect of this elevation of information technology to process-defining force is the effect on the organizational culture of changing the decision matrix. The chief information officer and his or her opinions about business processes may not be universally welcomed into the inner circles of decision making and strategic planning.

Clinger-Cohen works against the argument that private enterprises are not ideal models for reinventing government enterprises. State and its embassies, in fact, share many characteristics with private enterprises that render them susceptible to the forces of the information age, budget and personnel resource constraints, accountability to and changing expectations from clients and the public, increased domestic and international competition, and the crumbling national boundaries of the enterprise. The forces of change in the information age act on government enterprises as well as private and much of the reinvention currently taking place in the private sector applies also to the public sector. The reinvention of both public and private enterprises is essential. All enterprises, and the professions they represent, run the risk of eventual irrelevance if they don't reinvent themselves to function efficiently in the information age.

The first and most evident impact of the information age is on the individual.

Information and technology evolutionary milestones once measured in centuries, now happen in years or months. Consider that today's middle aged, senior professional has adapted to multiple generations of information technology with no end in sight and no clear course. Today's 20 year career began with electric typewriters, replaced by desk-sized word processors with dedicated operators, replaced by personal computers now connected in global networks. Individuals must deal not only with learning and integrating these new systems, but with the uncertainties of what the next evolution will bring. The potential insecurities are deepened by the fact that the younger generation of professionals already has, or can probably more easily acquire, the technical competence in the new systems and adapt the systems to required information technology skills. These workplace changes and insecurities are reinforced by changes in information technology in day-to-day life. In professional and private life, individuals are accustomed to dealing with successive generations of information technology with all the excitement, imagination, anxiety, insecurity, or fear this new technology may cause.

New systems like voice and electronic mail and video teleconferencing have the potential to improve efficiency and productivity, once accepted by the individuals within the enterprise and intelligently integrated into the business processes of the enterprise. Since learning the technical operation of new systems is the easiest problem to define and solve, it generally receives the most attention. Enterprises have made great strides in training staff to operate and accept the new systems. Using electronic mail as an example, the Department of State's diplomats and other staff abroad send back ten times as many electronic mail messages per year as cables. (Zimmermann). By itself that figure is impressive. Department of State professionals are learning to use the new information technology. But more is required. Peterson, in his foreword to Reinventing the Business, writes, "Underlying the future of all other business processes, services, and products is the need to productively utilize state-of-the-art computer and telecommunications technology." (Harmon xiii). Information technology that is implemented in absence of a rethinking of the basic processes of the enterprise is likely to increase rather than decrease the information burden on a beleaguered staff. Information technology has to become the means an enterprise uses to master information, not simply another source of information.

Learning where to click the mouse, indeed even what that means, is simple compared to integrating all that the mouse represents into new business processes. Zimmermann devotes one third of his critical commentary of the State Department to problems in handling information, including 25 million electronic mail messages each year. (Zimmermann). What is good news at the individual level for State's use of electronic mail, is bad news at the organizational level. Electronic mail is not being used as a tool to control information. The yin and the yang of electric mail in any enterprise is its ability to rapidly move essential information and quickly coordinate global actions or policies along side its potential for the uncoordinated dissemination of problems and potential solutions without regard to organizational hierarchy and without adequate staffing. A quick and easy solution to the uncontrolled flow of information is to treat electronic mail as a cable and control release authority. The right answer,

however, is not limiting the use of electronic mail, but integrating electronic mail and other information technology into new ways of doing business. Such changes can have profound implications for the corporate culture of any enterprise or profession, including diplomacy.

While professional diplomats struggle at the personal level for answers to the question, 'What additional training do I need?' and 'How do I use these new systems to improve my capability as a diplomat?', they must answer at the organizational level, 'How should the processes and organization of the Department and embassies be changed to make the business of diplomacy more effective and efficient?' and 'How will these systems effect my ability to lead within the organization?' Not only must information technology become part of the thought processes of individual professionals, that technology must also be integrated into the fundamental processes of the enterprise. Peterson writes "Enterprises must take care to avoid the application of the latest technology to outmoded business processes and organization structure. To do so will waste development and operating costs at an even faster rate than in the past." (Harmon: xiii). Organizations will have to be flexible enough to handle the increased rate of information flow and the increased volume of information--not necessarily complete or unbiased information--available to the enterprise and to the environment in which the enterprise operates. The focus must change from the paper on which the information is recorded to the information itself. The successful enterprise will be the one that most efficiently sifts intelligence from the vast amounts of information available.

The increased capability to analyze and act on information will allow changes in the level of decision making. Increased capability to manage information will also allow an organization's structure to be more fluid which can provide increased capability in a rapidly changing environment. Information technology makes the information available to decision makers at any level in the organization, so decisions can be made at the lowest appropriate level which increases efficiency. Organizational leadership must decide which decisions can be moved lower and define the organizational structure that will allow and support that diffusion of decision making. In many organizations, the corporate culture will not readily embrace delegated decision making. Another major area of organizational change is in resource allocation. New information technology is expensive and becomes obsolete before it wears out. Major goals of reengineering business processes are to decrease operating costs and increase efficiency. At the same time, information technology improvements make increasing demands on the budget. The information technology cost should be viewed as part of the organizational reengineering process to enhance the core functions of the enterprise rather than take resources from the core functions.

At yet another level, the information age will effect the society in which an enterprise operates by changing the way individuals participate in society and by introducing new issues and interests. These societal changes will effect the manner in which enterprises deal with their clients and the public and in strategic planning to mold the future of the enterprise. The information age is changing the way people play, learn,

think, and react. Enterprises will have to function in an environment where human perceptions and expectations of the world continue to change as technology unimagined or thought to be fantasy becomes commonplace. New or redefined social, legal, cultural, psychological issues are arising in the information age, for instance, computer viruses, telecommuting, internet publishing. The supra-national nature of the global communications network has already stretched the interpretation of laws and ethics and required new laws with issues like intellectual property rights, commerce on the world wide web and governmental control of the internet. The world's population is already being divided into the technological haves and have nots. The distinction is likely to become more pronounced. Successful international enterprises and their professionals will have to operate in both extremes of the information environment. Government agencies like the Department of State are already dealing with changes in domestic and international policy in the information age with even bigger changes to come.

These extremes of global information technological development challenge not only the physical organization, but the intellectual aspects, the products, of organizations like State. Strategists who are molding the futures of their enterprises must define the fundamental nature of the enterprise in the information age. Defining the skill set required for the professionals making up the reinvented enterprise is critical. What specialties will be required in the organization? What is the minimum acceptable level of technological proficiency required for all staff? For State, this means answering the question, how much training in information technology should a diplomat be expected to have to enter or advance in the career? That answer isn't obvious or easy to determine but will affect not only the profession, but the educational and developmental process for professionals.

Information technology has already drastically affected the way enterprises conduct their business and the nature of professions, but the ultimate affects are even more profound. The struggle today with the implementation of new information technology is not an isolated storm after which calm will return, but a process of evolving change as the information age matures. The task of the current generation of professionals is to structure their professions and organizations to be able to adapt to that change.

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