THE REASON FOR THIS BOOK

Little has changed in terms of the need for this text since the first edition was published in 2001, but the domain of information systems (IS) has moved on to encompass strategic issues in areas not covered by the original text. In addition to this, some of the strategic concepts in that book have been more widely applied in the subsequent four to five years, thereby enhancing our understanding of information strategy. All of these issues I have tried to reflect in the second edition, through the addition of two new chapters, revision of case examples, and rewriting of sections within existing chapters.

At the time of writing I have now spent twenty years as an academic, subsequent to my fifteen years within a range of commercial organizations. Strategy remains, in my view, one of the greatest challenges to senior management: operational and tactical issues are meat and drink to most managers, but strategic problems seem to prove much less amenable to simple solutions.

The domain of information systems seems to present a particular strategic problem, and a number of reasons can be identified as contributing to these difficulties. The so-called planning/design approach to strategy, whereby, at its extreme, fixed plans are written for future strategic development, might be difficult to apply in a domain such as IS, supported as it is by rapid technological change. The human-centred nature of many IS developments may be problematic: human behaviour is difficult to predict and control, and therefore may not lend itself easily to a long-term planning approach. The focus on technological aspects of IS might be seen as diverting attention from what many see as the real purpose of technology, which is to act as an enabler to human activity. These are just three of the many difficulties of applying strategic thinking to information systems.

Soft approaches to strategic thinking in IS are now becoming ever more mainstream, and the time seems right for a revisiting of information systems strategy from the perspectives of corporate strategy and information systems.
AIMS OF THE BOOK

The general aim of the book is to provide a theoretically and empirically grounded approach to information systems strategy (ISS). Historically, ISS has been seen as something to be ‘planned’ or ‘designed towards’ in an objective or functionalist way. This book will argue such a view to be only a limited perception of how strategy may be perceived within information systems. An alternative, presented here, is the more human-centred, participative approach to ISS. Support for this alternative view is to be found in contemporary approaches to strategy which question the design/planning school.

From this theoretical and empirical background to ISS, key issues are investigated, signposting alternative future directions. Sub-aims may be identified for each of the three parts of the book as follows:

Part One investigates the current empirical and theoretical background to information systems, corporate strategy and IS strategy, and how this background may be used to inform the future development of ISS. Following on from this recasting of information systems strategy, a foundation for the domain is explored in more detail before moving on to specific issues in ISS in Part Two.

Part Two looks at key issues in ISS, always remaining within the framework established in Part One. These issues include: systems failure and ISS; applications portfolio and technology management; competitive advantage; and the impact on ISS of organizational structure, culture and change. Two new chapters for the second edition focus on IS strategy and the internet, and the strategic implications of information security.

Part Three revisits the foundations of ISS in the light of the previous chapters, determining a strategic approach based on the theoretical and practical evidence. From this background, possible future directions are then discussed.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS BOOK?

The book is targeted at students new to information systems strategy, but with some background understanding of corporate strategy and information systems. The main audience is MBA (Master of Business Administration) students, but it is also aimed at supporting final year undergraduate studies in IS Management and Strategy, post-experience courses (e.g. NVQ (National Vocational Qualification), DMS (Diploma in Management Studies)), and other Masters courses (information management (IM), and other courses where IM forms a key part). For MBA, this is a core subject, while for undergraduate, other post-experience and Masters courses, it is more likely to be a supporting text.

STRUCTURE AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE BOOK

The layout followed is standard for the Routledge Information Systems Series. The aim of this, together with the supplied instructor’s manual, is to provide a basis for courses of academic study at the levels identified within its target audience:
At the beginning of each of the three parts, key questions to be answered by each chapter within that part are identified.

Each chapter begins with clear learning objectives.

International perspectives are identified for each of the key topics.

Case examples are provided.

Each chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Review questions and discussion questions are given towards the end of each chapter.

A case exercise is given for each of the main topic areas.

Further reading is suggested at the end of each chapter.

Issues in information systems strategy are fully integrated with current thinking in corporate strategy, in particular the design or planning approach compared to the more human-centred, participative approach, which finds a parallel within IS in the growing interest in the so-called ‘soft’ or human-centred methods. This book aims to do justice to all strategic developments seen to be of relevance to the IS domain, ranging from the planned and political to the totally participative and emancipatory. To achieve this, key approaches to corporate strategy are addressed and related to information systems, allowing the emergence of a synthesized approach to IS strategy which is firmly grounded on current thinking.

By developing ideas from the common ground shared by corporate strategy and information systems, and incorporating within this the standard material common to most ISS texts, this book seeks to provide a more comprehensive view of strategy as it applies to IS.

USE OF THE BOOK FOR TEACHING

Each of Parts One to Three of the book has specific objectives. Part One looks at the background to information systems strategy and corporate strategy, and through a critique of these determines a framework for the rest of the text. Part Two is concerned with the core issues in ISS. Part Three reviews the previous analysis, particularly in Part One, and from this proposes future directions for ISS.

Consequently, depending on the aims of the course of study, students may be directed toward the different parts. In particular, for example, undergraduate study might focus on Part Two, MBA on Parts One and Two, and information management courses on the whole of the text, with a key aim of understanding and extending the issues raised in Part Three. Where interest is mainly on practical issues, Chapter 3 can be ignored without prejudicing understanding of the rest of the text.

In terms of specific pedagogical features:

- Each chapter begins with learning objectives. Chapters are summarized, and key words and phrases listed. Questions for review and questions for discussion are given towards the end of each chapter.
- Suggested further reading, with a guide as to the relevance of the reading suggested, and references, appear at the end of each chapter.
Case exercises and questions to be addressed by the cases are given. Generally the plan is to provide one per chapter, but some chapters may not lend themselves to the use of case material.

A glossary is provided at the end of the book.

A full instructor’s guide is provided on the World Wide Web.

An instructor’s manual is provided containing study guides (with lecture plans and overhead transparencies), worked examples, answers to review questions and discussion questions, and suggested approaches to case studies. The instructor’s manual also gives suggested assignment questions not given in the main text.

Suggested schemes of work are provided.

The instructor’s guide is split into the same chapters as the book, and for each chapter:
- A lecture plan is given.
- Key issues are identified for the lectures, together with overhead projector slides.
- Answers to review questions, discussion questions and case exercises are provided.
- Suggestions for assignments are given.