



The Four Facets of Information Strategy

About 25 years ago I wrote about and taught an important distinction: the difference between Information Technology (IT) Strategy and Information Systems (IS) Strategy. The former, I argued, was about the 'how'; infrastructure and its conceptualisation as architecture, skills and capabilities, and tools and techniques. The latter was about the 'what', namely applications and systems and the wider goals of business change. The reason for making this distinction was that often IT strategy seemed to drive out or dominate IS strategy. In other words technology was trumping business rather than the other way round.

Subsequently, I also proposed Information Management (IM) Strategy as a third leg. This was largely the 'who', namely the governance, organisation and management of IT activities, especially the delineation of roles and responsibilities. Often this had to be sorted out first in order to craft the right questions and credible answers in defining the IS strategy and the IT strategy.

Then in the 1990s, I suggested that a fourth strategy set was required; an Information Resource (IR) Strategy – which many are now calling Business Intelligence strategy. I was seeing this emerge in a few organisations not explicitly, but in the form of local policies or corporate rhetoric about the value and use of information.

Today some organisations might classify themselves as information businesses where information is seen as the strategic resource around which capabilities are built to seek competitive advantage. Google is one exemplar, but so are some e-commerce operations, which recognise the information value of transactions as much as their immediate monetary value, some credit card and digital processing companies, which capture our lifestyle and consumption patterns, and so on.

Other organisations recognise the commercial value of information in certain specific domains, for example, from EPOS systems in retailers, from process control systems in manufacturing firms and from bioinformatics in pharmaceutical companies. They might not re-classify themselves as information businesses, but they know information matters.

Five Keys to Creating an Information Advantage

What can we learn about Information Strategy from Mayer Amschel Rothschild and the Napoleonic Wars? John Sviokla thinks quite a lot. In his recent HBR [article](#) John argues that the Rothschilds used five tactics to get information advantage, one of them being to use the best technology – which at that time was the use of pigeons!

Whilst the technology may have moved on, the five tactics deployed by the Rothschilds are as relevant today as they were in the days of Napoleon.

To read John's article, click [here](#).

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We use innovative experiential learning approaches to develop the insights and capabilities needed by today's business and technology leaders. Our focus is always on outcomes, not process.

But many organisations still see information as a residual – either as a ‘nice to have’ but with limitations or an ‘alright in theory’ but something of a nebulous danger area. However, over time, these organisations get wake-up calls, which often elicit a one-off fix whilst missing the big lessons.

Parting Thought

“We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think.”

Swami Vivekananda, 1863-1902

So is there a best practice template for a model Information Resource strategy? Probably many, but whether they result in meaningful strategies is questionable. I have found organisations that:

1. recognise the role of information in value creation;
2. are willing to invest in data/information capture;
3. have policies and information stewardship in place; and
4. take steps to develop capability in information use

are in a good position to capitalise on their information assets.

Read my full article [here](#).

I welcome your thoughts.

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