

Opening Remarks to Third Session

Information technology is an enabler. We are probably going to hear this several times during the seminar. It is an instrument which, if used properly (this being a big caveat), can make organizations operate more effectively.

We have gone through a decade (the 90's), during which a massive influx of investments led to profound transformations in the way organizations operate. The adoption of the PC in the work-place, the emergence of the Internet and the massive equipment and software replacement driven by the Y2K concerns were behind this secular change.

So, where are we now? Y2K came and went.

The state of ICT today can be characterized as being in a plateau. In technology the challenges nowadays do not relate to capacity. They relate to managing technology effectively to sustain 24x7 operations, to design and implement secure and reliable operational environments to ensure business continuity. ICT services, which had previously been considered mere productivity enhancers, became basic necessities in the daily operation of organizations. Electronic mail, office software suites (word processing, spreadsheet, desktop database software), file and document sharing and Internet access are essential to sustain normal operations. An analogy with basic utilities such as electrical power and telephones is not far-fetched

Now on the information management side.

Organizations now generate enormous amounts of information. Infrastructure has become inexpensive and ubiquitous. The capacity of computing and data communications infrastructure, at least in the industrial countries, matches or exceeds the requirements of currently available software applications.

However, despite the plentiful infrastructure, organizations still tend to operate driven by business processes which were established way before the information age. The vast amounts of information generated by organizations is now stored in electronic media, and in many cases even well indexed and is made accessible over the Internet, Intranets or Extranets. This notwithstanding, the processes which are necessary to transform this information into knowledge and intelligence and with this facilitate decision-making are still in their infancy. Most organizations "do not know what they know". The technology to share information is there. However the business drivers of knowledge sharing are still quite immature.

While the functional process behind the purchase of goods, for example, is very well defined, as people have been trading goods since the beginning of time, functional processes geared towards transforming data into information and this into intelligence, in

areas where the business function has not yet been clearly defined are more difficult to tackle.

Hence, the challenges today are more in information management than in information technology. The technology is there. We just need to use it better. And it is not solely up to the technology folks to champion this. The thrust must come from management, from the information owners and from the information users.

This session of the seminar will address the role of information technology as a tool in situations of crisis. In no other circumstances, the effectiveness of decision support system is as critical. We will hear from the civilian side as well as from the military side. Given the credentials of the speakers, it should be a most interesting session.

Our first speaker, who will give the keynote address, is Mr. Brent H. Woodworth. Brent is the manager of IBM's Worldwide Crisis Response Team. IBM's Crisis Response Team services are provided to subscribed customers anytime and anywhere a disaster occurs. He participated in rescue efforts following catastrophic events around the world.

Brent's background and experience are especially relevant to this session. Disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery are key elements in crisis management, on which Brent is a highly recognized specialist.

In appreciation to his dedication and competence the magazine Contingency Planning & Management named Brent to their Hall of Fame. The magazine Computerworld named Brent as Laureate for leading IBM's on-site recovery efforts in New York following the 9/11 attacks.