Outline of today’s lecture

1. Individual use of information and knowledge in a changing context

2. Some case studies and surveys:
   - the UK public health sector
   - managers in a number of sectors
   - cleaning staff

1. How do individuals use information within organisations?

   - In IMS1603, we looked broadly at individuals’ use of information
   - Today, we’ll look at what this might mean in particular organisational contexts
   - Next week’s tute reading will look at the information needs of ‘new starters’

1. Price: Information, meaning, technology

   Price (1997) argues that individuals:
   - develop knowledge
   - through finding meaning
   - in information they have acquired

1. Price: access isn’t enough

   She also argues that while more and more information is available in societies like Australia, something more is needed to create knowledge:

   ‘knowledge is information that makes a difference in the way other information is perceived’ (Price 1997: 171).

1. Price: the importance of information organisation

   ‘The way we search for information influences and sometimes even determines how we develop knowledge, and the way information is organized obviously defines what we find’

   (Price 1997: 173)
1. Price: the impact of technology’s use

- Print culture reinforced the place of reading/writing in information systems, at the expense of oral traditions
  - eg in many legal contexts, textual documents assume greater legitimacy than verbal testimony
- The growing use of IT around us similarly changes the context in which we learn

As a consequence, she argues, ‘The learner becomes more and more responsible for figuring out the context of the information. When information is distributed in small bits rather than in larger contexts such as books … the information may be “context-free”’ (Price 1997: 175).

The growing use of IT means that:
- ‘learners take more responsibility for information gathering’
- ‘the unit of information shifts from books to bits of information’
- ‘the way we search for and locate information changes’ (Price 1997: 173)

2. Learning from case studies

Case studies allow us to:
- ‘investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin 1994: 13).

Some interesting IS and IM case studies are reviewed in Walsham (2001).

Some questions to ponder in the following case studies and surveys:
- How do various organisations value information?
- What role does technology play in the process?
- What is the impact of power relations within an organisation?

What can we learn from a look at
- the National Health Service in Britain?
- managers’ information use?
- cleaners in an American university?
2a. National Health Service (NHS)

‘In a typical week:

• 1.4 million people will receive help in their home from the NHS
• more than 800,000 people will be treated in NHS hospital outpatient clinics
• 700,000 will visit a NHS dentist for a check-up
• NHS district nurses will make more than 700,000 visits
• over 10,000 babies will be delivered by the NHS
• NHS chiropodists will inspect over 150,000 pairs of feet’

http://www.nhs.uk/thenhsexplained/what_is_nhs.asp

2a. National Health Service

‘In a typical week:

• NHS ambulances will make over 50,000 emergency journeys
• NHS Direct nurses will receive around 25,000 calls from people seeking medical advice
• pharmacists will dispense approximately 8.5 million items on NHS prescriptions
• NHS surgeons will perform around 1,200 hip operations, 3,000 heart operations and 1,050 kidney operations.’

http://www.nhs.uk/thenhsexplained/what_is_nhs.asp

2a. National Health Service

Looking at information management in the NHS, Brittain and MacDougall (1995) found:

– For much of the 1980s, design emphasis was placed on collection and storage, rather than use of information

– No integrated system linking local and national bodies

2a. National Health Service

Looking at information management in the NHS, Brittain and MacDougall (1995) found:

– A job classification divide between information officers and librarians

– A lack of critical mass in directly employed IT staff, due to outsourcing

– ‘textual information had been underutilised, especially by management’

2a. National Health Service

By the 1990s, pressing issues to address included:

– Growing patient demand for consumer information

– Growing need for ‘purchasing intelligence’ within individual NHS units

Brittain and MacDougall (1995)

2a. National Health Service

Responses to that point had included:

– establishment of PC workstations with access to both textual and numeric information

– a new research infrastructure

– growing cooperation between regional NHS librarians

– ‘a national informal network of consumer health information providers’

Brittain and MacDougall (1995)
2a. NHS - answering our questions

• How does this organisation value information?
• What role does technology play in the process?
• What is the impact of power relations within this organisation?

2b. Reuters’ surveys of managers

Reuters is a key information provider to managers around the globe:
– ‘the world’s largest international multimedia news agency’
– ‘more than 90% of our revenue derives from our financial services business’
– ‘458,000 financial market professionals ... use Reuters products’

2b. Information use in private firms

The company commissioned phone interviews with managers in 1994, 1995 and 1996. The sample was as follows:
– 1994: 515 middle and senior managers (plus 10 follow up indepth interviews) in Britain
– 1995: 500 middle and senior managers in Britain
– 1996: 1313 managers at all levels (drawn from Britain, USA, Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore)

2b. Reuters 1994 study (Oppenheim 1997)

• 72% described their company as ‘information based’
• 60% + said: ‘our organisation has no information policy’
• ‘Almost one third’ thought information had been withheld from them at some time
• Most felt ‘that they wasted a lot of time seeking information’
• ‘librarians and information scientists are very unpopular as sources’

2b. Reuters 1995 study (Oppenheim 1997)

The focus shifted to the manufacturing sector (63% of respondents), and role of information as an ‘asset’:
– Almost 25% called information ‘the most important asset’ of their organisation
– 50% said: it’s more important than brand and trade names
– 10% said: it’s more important than their staff

2b. Reuters 1995 study (Oppenheim 1997)

The focus shifted to manufacturing sector (63% of respondents), and role of information as an ‘asset’:
– 40% said ‘it would take their company more than one month to recover from the loss of key information’
– 25% did not monitor information management costs
2b. Reuters 1996 study (Oppenheim 1997)

More small and medium enterprises this time round, with smaller manufacturing presence (34%). The topic was information overload:

- Two thirds required a lot of information to do their job
- Nearly half called information gathering a 'distraction' from their job
- One third complained of "enormous amounts" of unsolicited information

2b. Reuters 1996 study (Oppenheim 1997)

• 41% called their work environment 'stressful'
• More than half claimed ill health due to information overload
• More than half claimed damage to personal relationships due to information overload

2b. Reuters 1996 study (Oppenheim 1997)

Main reasons offered for information overload?

- increased communication within their organisation
- increased communication with clients and suppliers
- nearly half identified the Internet as 'the prime cause'

2b. Reuters - answering our questions

• How do the managers interviewed value information?
• What role does technology play in the process?
• What is the impact of power relations within their organisations?

2c. Information needs of janitors

In the early 1980s, Elfreda Chatman interviewed 52 cleaners who worked at an American university

2c. Information needs of janitors

Chatman (1987) was seeking to discover:

a) Their information needs
b) What work-related information they received at work itself
c) Whether public libraries played a role in a) and b)
2c. Information needs of janitors

According to those interviewed, their main areas of information need concerned:

- Health and safety
- Job benefits and career options
- Improving relationships with other workers and supervisors
- Ways to relate to academics

The nature of their work environment:

- ‘heavy, manual work’ (official job description)
- Low status and pay
- Working in isolation across the campus
- Strong competition for promotion
- Strong competition for ‘better’ buildings (those easier to clean)

What they had learned about their work environment:

- ‘This job is not about training’
- ‘Why don’t they tell us what’s in these things?’ (chemicals)
- ‘I learnt early on this job not to trust people’
- ‘People around here see more in a dog than they see in me’

Use of library and other information sources:

- 94% watched television
- 81% listened to radio
- 81% read newspapers
- 44% read magazines
- 54% read books (for 88% of these, this book was *The Bible*)
- 29% then used public libraries

2c. Janitors - answering our questions

- How does this organisation value information?
- What role does technology play in the process?
- What is the impact of power relations within this organisation?

3. Further reading