
by Vanessa Middleton

This work represents a significant contribution to the dearth of publications analyzing the integration of computer-based information systems (CBIS) in organizations located within developing countries. The book specifically focuses on the six Arab states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates), referred to as The AGC (Arab Gulf Countries). The author, Dr. Al-Abdul-Gader, provides unique theories and models related to the integration of information systems and applications in developing countries. His framework and analysis can be replicated for similar studies with other developing nations.

The global digital divide is expanding at an alarming rate. The author states that only six countries -- The United States, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and The United Kingdom -- were collectively responsible for 80% of the global expenditures in technology. Therefore, issues regarding technology and developing countries need to be researched. This publication is a welcome entry into the small forum of scholarly discourse about the subject.

I must admit, initially I found it difficult to classify Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and other countries that make up The AGC, as developing countries. But the author points out early on that The United Nations classifies these six Arab states as developing nations. In fact, these countries rely solely on oil revenues to sustain their vulnerable economies, which justifies their classification as developing countries.
Dr. Al-Abdul-Gader stresses that information systems play an integral role in the modern economic advancement of developing nations. The primary focus of this book is to provide an indigenous perspective of the management of information systems (MIS) within developed nations, specifically the AGC. The author argues that numerous consultants have come to the AGC and delivered prepackaged information technology solutions. Many of these consultants ignored the local issues, local problems, and cultural norms. Far too often, MIS models from developed countries are expected to transcend global borders and cultures, and work flawlessly in developing regions. The author gives countless case study samples illustrating this practice and the casualties that followed.

He emphasizes the key to successful information systems integration is to design information technology solutions within the cultural context of the society. This includes the process of gathering cultural, economic, and sociopolitical information, and determining its impact on information technology. The process should be done in an effort to design computer-based information systems that meet the needs of local users, and provide solutions to the local organization. He dedicates an entire section to the implications of operating within a cultural context.

Part II of the book is entitled, "Understanding the CBIS Environment in the AGC". It reads like a "doing IT consulting in Arab states" manual. The focus, however, always returns to strategies of successfully integrating information systems within the cultural context of the environment. Detailed and insightful information is provided regarding the Arab cultural society and it implications on information technology integration. Cultural faux pas are discussed at length. Dr. Al-Abdul-Gader provides an insider's perspective and expertise on this topic. He is currently an associate professor of Management of Information Systems at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM).

The structure of the book is as follows: Part I (chapters 1-3) provides background information about general MIS concepts and theories. Each chapter closes with a case study that provides real-life or fictitious examples of the issues discussed in the chapter. Some sample case studies are entitled: "Challenges to Implementing an GPS system," "Successful Communication Electronically," and "Brain Drain: Are the AGC Immune?" The case studies are open-ended and should provoke interesting discussions related to the various topics. Chapter 3 deals with a discussion about the diffusion theory (Roger Clarke, 1995), and its implications for organizations within the AGC. The author refers to the diffusion theory created by Roger Clarke, which describes the evolutionary stages of new technology:

- relative advantage (the degree to which it is perceived to be better than what it supersedes)
- compatibility (consistency with existing values, past experiences and needs)
- complexity (difficulty of understanding and use)
- trialability (the degree to which it can be experimented with on a limited basis)
- observability (the visibility of its results)

In addition, the diffusion theory analyzes the acceptance of new technologies into the social system by different groups:

- opinion leaders (who have relatively frequent informal influence over the behavior of others)
- change agents (who positively influence innovation decisions, by mediating between the change agency and the relevant social system)
- change aides (who complement the change agent, by having more intensive contact with clients, and who have less competence credibility but more safety or trustworthiness credibility)
Part II (chapters 4-6) analyzes issues related to successful management of information systems and barriers related to this process, specifically for organizations in the AGC. Dr. Al-Abdul-Gader presents the findings from a study utilizing the Delphi method to evaluate current barriers to successful diffusion of information technology within AGC organizations.

Part III (chapters 7-9) seeks to provide specific strategies to overcome the barriers to information technology diffusion. He analyzes his findings to determine the level of response to successfully manage computer based information systems in the AGC.

Part IV provides more conclusive findings related to other areas such as implications for multinational organizations in the AGC, and global information technology policy. In addition, he prescribes the focus and direction of future research related to this area. The references and studies cited are interesting, although some are very specific to the Middle Eastern region. A slightly misplaced item located in the Appendix is the Bachelor of Science in MIS course descriptions, and the MIS degree plan of work from KFUPM.

Overall, this book provides a good analytical framework for designing strategies for successful information technology diffusion in developing countries. The author's basic viewpoint is that indigenous models and theories must be developed that will lead to successful information systems implementation and integration in developing countries. According to the author, computer based information systems must be developed and designed to solve local problems, while optimally incorporating cultural, sociopolitical, and economic issues and concerns.

The audience level borders between beginner and intermediate. The terminology used is not overly technical. This book would supplement and support an international business, management information systems, marketing, and business curriculum. Again, the case studies included would enhance class discussions. This publication would also be a viable candidate for an academic library international business collection.

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by Ray Olszewski

"We've found a computer outlet, sir."
"Plug in. He should be able to interpret the entire Imperial network."

-- Star Wars
Amid the flashiness of light-saber duels, travel faster than light, and the mysticism of the Force, the Star Wars movies hid a more subtle miracle. An off-the-shelf astromech droid, R2D2, could connect to any data port in the galaxy and, in a few seconds, obtain any information required to advance the plot. An impossibility back in 1978, such simple connectivity of devices remains a dream today.

Jini is one of the attempts to make such simplicity a reality. Or better said, it was one of them. Announced with a splash by Sun Microsystems a couple of years ago, it gradually drifted to the margins of the networking world and now seems destined for the dustbin of history. That marginalization of the topic of this book makes it hard to review the book itself meaningfully.

Taken on its face, it is a good book. The writing is good, the technical explanations clear, and the presentation is reasonably complete. But it teaches the use of a system that is unlikely ever to see widespread implementation.

And though good, the book is not good enough to be instructive in a more general sense. In some ways, understanding Jini would be good grounding for anyone interested in developing device-connectivity systems for home gateways, Internet appliances, network printers, and specialized devices like MP3 interfaces for home stereos. Certainly, portions of this book are illuminating in that regard, covering the kinds of information one host needs about other hosts that it relies on to provide services transparently to users. Jini itself was well thought out, with good provisions for dealing with the main problems involved in device and service discovery.

But Jini suffers from a serious limitation: It is closely tied to the Java programming language. As a result, the details of its presentation do not instruct in anything more than how to use Sun's favored programming language to implement Sun's favored system for announcing and providing Internet services.

Unlike every other book I have ever read on Internet services and protocols, this one describes the proposed standards it discusses solely in terms of Java methods, classes, and libraries. Every established standard -- TCP/IP, e-mail, the protocols that underlie Web traffic ... you name it — is documented in terms of the messages sent between client and server, or peer and peer, possibly supplemented by guidance as to suitable data structures to use to implement communication. None mandates that all developers will use the same programming language.

Had Sun managed to sell Jini to the Internet-services community, it would have achieved a coup for Java, all but forcing it into the role of the standard language for programming Internet services. No doubt developers like me would then be praising Sun for its forward-looking, innovative approach, promoting the unification of the development community behind a single, ubiquitous set of interrelated standards. But it didn't, so we don't.

In short, skip this book. In the unlikely event that Jini makes a comeback, it will do so with a more standard specification, and documentation suited to the new version will appear. (In fact, some already has appeared. This review is based on the first edition of The Jini Specification. A second edition (ISBN 0-201-72617-3), not available to this reviewer, was published in December 2000 and is the current edition of this very book.) Even if it does, information of the sort presented here is of more interest to developers of networking services and appliances than to consumers of Internet services.

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by Rob Withers

Business, Government, and Law on the Internet: A Hands-On Workshop is part of the Library Solutions Institute (LSI) Series, which aspires to present Internet training programs in book form. Books in this series target both prospective students who wish to learn about a particular subject area and trainers looking for models for similar workshops. Some titles in the LSI series are also available in a PLUS edition, which includes presentation slides and additional aids for presenters. A PLUS edition of Business, Government and Law on the Internet is not yet available.

The book begins with a glossary and an annotated list of more than 250 Web sites. Bookmarks to these files also appear on a floppy disk packaged together with the book. An overview of the Internet is also included, along with two modules. The first module focuses on the World Wide Web and guides readers in using Netscape Navigator to access and use Web resources. The second module provides an overview of other protocols, including FTP, Gopher, and telnet, and explores examples of potentially useful resources which end-users can access with these protocols. Both modules include several chapters, each of which ends with a review of topics covered and an exercise that asks learners to explore one or more Internet resources relating to business, government or law. Since the book uses Netscape as the default Web browser in its modules, an appendix providing an overview of Microsoft Internet Explorer rounds out the work. Finally, students are encouraged to contact the author, Gary R. Peete, by e-mail with further questions.

Business, Government and Law on the Internet provides a good overview on how to access and use various Internet protocols, and surveys core Internet resources available in business, government and law. The exercises at the end of each chapter ensure that users will explore some of the resources discussed and, hopefully, will wish to explore additional resources. This arrangement is ideal for novices to the Internet, however, persons familiar with browsing software and basic resources might wish to skim through the introductory chapters and much of the material introducing each protocol, and instead proceed to the Webliography. A companion volume might provide an extended list of Internet sites arranged by subject rather than protocol, and include exercises challenging readers to locate detailed information.

A major challenge confronting any book about Internet resources is anticipating rapid change and developments that will occur within years, months, or even days after the book is published. This second edition of Business, Government and Law on the Internet dates back to 1999. The Webliography remains mostly up-to-date, with approximately 83% of the sites mentioned still accessible by way of the URLs printed in the book. The publisher's Web site provides a more up-to-date listing with corrected URLs, so readers need not fear that they will lack access to such Web sites. Of more concern is the book's presentation of browsers. Because of changes in browsing software since the book's publication date, the versions of Netscape and Internet Explorer are not the most current ones available. Perhaps the publisher of this series
might address the frequent changes in browsing software by including a list of major changes in newer releases of this software on their Web site. More importantly, future editions of this book may need to address changes in the market share of browsers. The main text of the book trains users how to use Netscape, and Netscape appears in the pictures illustrating the World Wide Web, FTP, and Gopher resources. While an overview of Internet Explorer is available as an appendix, future editions of the book may wish to include pictures of both browsers. If Internet Explorer continues to have a dominant market share, future editions may wish to use it, rather than Netscape, as the featured browser.

The chapter on e-mail is disappointing, as it only provides information about Netscape's e-mail client. Future editions may want to include discussions of other popular products including Eudora and Microsoft Outlook, and possibly one or more Web-mail providers. Business, Government and Law on the Internet succeeds in providing an overview of Internet resources that is as up-to-date as a two-year-old book about Internet resources can be. Changes in browsing software mean that some parts of the current edition are dated, but can hopefully be addressed in future editions. Moreover, these changes by no means render the book unusable. The book and its accompanying Web site and floppy disk provide users new to the Internet or new to business, government and law resources available on the Internet with a good launchpad for exploring the Internet. Experienced users may wish for a more comprehensive Webliography to further expand their knowledge.

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