PREFACE

For the foreseeable future, information technology is likely to be one of the most potent growth areas in advanced industrialized countries. Indeed it is now widely recognized that long-term economic prosperity will crucially depend upon people's success in developing, mastering, exploiting and marketing information systems.

Although the argument for the rapid development and introduction of information technology (IT) into the many aspects of our everyday existence is extremely strong, unfortunately it remains the case that at present the technology is being used *effectively* by only a small proportion of the people who could benefit from it. As the chapters in this book illustrate, examples of wasted resources, time and effort as a result of poor IT application or implementation are legion. Many countries and institutions are now asking why the mismatch between predicted benefits and actual performance has occured. This book suggests an approach to answering such questions.

The message of the volume is clear. It is that previous attempts to apply and implement IT into many different types of setting have been doomed from the beginning because, typically, one crucial component has been mismanaged: *people*. No matter how well-engineered IT systems (hardware, firmware, software) may be, they remain totally inanimate until people are introduced. Unless the new technologies are designed and introduced with an appreciation of the needs and reactions of those who will use and be affected by them, the chances that they will operate effectively are slight.

It is people who have to operate systems built around the new technologies, and who have to interact with them to make them function. It is people who have to accept the systems and their intrusion into work and home. It is people who are often called on to adapt their habits to the dictates of the system, and who often cannot do so. The simple answer to the questions that are currently being posed about the effectiveness of IT systems is that if people do not,

will not or cannot do these things then the systems will not function adequately; indeed, they may not function at all.

In short, the application of knowledge about human behaviour, actions, thoughts, feelings, education, etc., has often been insufficient or missing. This is both unfortunate and unnecessary, for sophisticated behavioural models and methods are now available. As the chapters in this volume indicate, psychological approaches have much to offer both in predicting and understanding users' potential needs and problems, and in developing new approaches to the crucial issues of technological design and management.

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