

A Message

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Over the past two decades it has become widely accepted that information technology (IT) is of key importance for the success of individual enterprises and even of the industrial future of nations. In that period the technology has become pervasive. It is to be found in laboratories, in offices, on farms, embedded in domestic (and military) products, in schools and universities, and, more and more frequently, in the home. The technology has facilitated new industrial developments and provided new services for the consumer. It has made fortunes for those who know how to make, market and use it effectively. And yet technological developments are increasing the power and versatility of IT products daily.

In the early years of computers, those who were involved in research, teaching or practice had a pretty good grasp of most aspects of computing. But, as computer technology developed, new application areas were invaded, and related technologies such as communication technology converged; it became more and more difficult to retain any feeling of what was happening to other parts of the technology. The problems of understanding and communication were exacerbated by the way each specialist area in information technology developed its own expertise supported by its own specialist terminology and mystique. In order to advance the different areas of specialization its professionals set up specialist groups. Societies formed to bring the range of professionals into association found themselves organized into fragmented groups unable to talk together. The

problem was brought home to me recently at a meeting organized to bring together senior managers from companies with large data processing activities and academics with an interest in artificial intelligence and expert systems. It was clear that the two groups found it difficult to understand each other's problems or that the work done by one group was seen as relevant by the other.

The Association for Information Technology was conceived because some of us felt that it was essential for the different specialists to learn to speak to each other again. The Association exists to bridge the growing communication and understanding gap which has grown up within information technology. The scope of this, its journal, will range from issues related to machine architectures to concerns with some of the social impacts of the technology, and will cover such topics as problems relating to the politics of research funding, and issues arising from Alvey-type programmes and the intellectual property rights. In the words of the founding father of the Association, Igor Aleksander: 'The formation of the Association for Information Technology should primarily enhance communications between those involved with IT, whether they be users, computer scientists, consultants, teachers or industrial or commercial practitioners'. To this I would add, 'whether they be engineers, accountants or social scientists, or whether they work in laboratories on the systems of the future, or work in offices with the systems of today'.