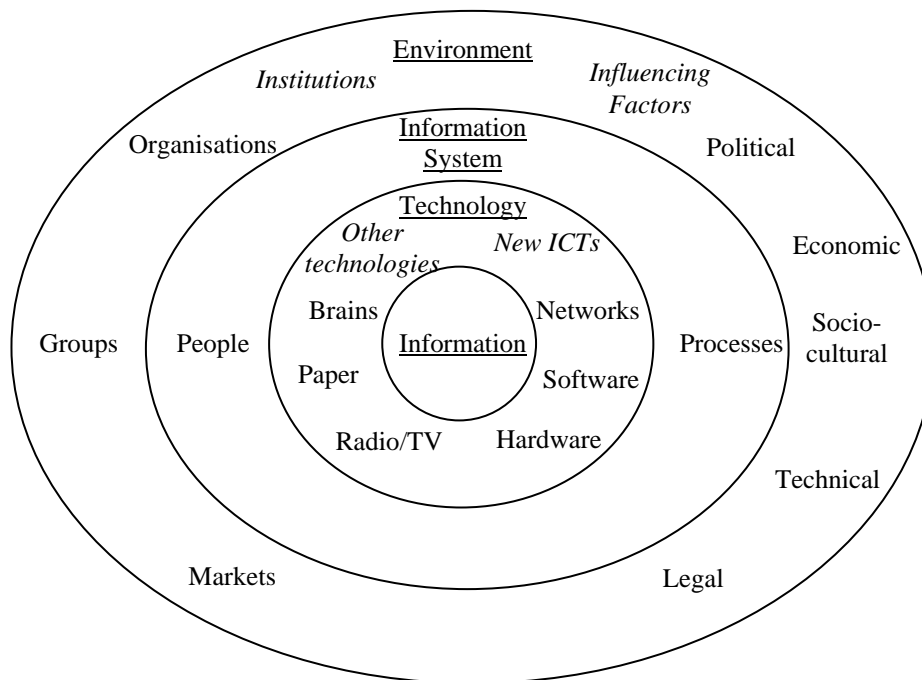


Foundations of ICTs in Development: *The Onion-Ring Model*

Many "e-development" projects – those using ICTs for socio-economic development – focus too much on the technology. But they misunderstand. Technology must be understood in its context: a picture provided by the "onion-ring" model:



There are four main lessons of this model for e-development:

1. **Information is at the heart.** To understand the role of ICTs in development, a good start is to understand the role of information first; only then looking to the technology. A process model for information – the information chain – is presented in eDev Briefing 3, to complement the structural model shown here. (Though we discuss in other eDev Briefings the dangers of going too far down the information-centred road.)

2. **Embrace all information-handling technologies.** Most information systems in most people's lives still rely on non-digital technologies. Many of these are informal information systems. Don't cast such a spotlight on digital technology that these are ignored.

3. **Information systems not information technologies add value.** Information technology is just a dead box in the corner of the room until you add what's needed to

make it an information system: information to handle; people to work with it; processes to contribute to.

4. **Information systems sit in a context.** Information systems are like trees with their roots buried in the surrounding "soil" of organisations, institutions, and environment: political, economic, cultural, etc. This brings two sub-lessons:

- a) **Take account of context.** So many e-development failures happen because of context factors: legal restrictions, infrastructural and economic constraints, cultural factors and, above all, politics. In proposing, planning and implementing an e-development project, you ignore context at your peril.
- b) **You can't just photocopy e-development solutions.** If you rip a tree from its roots and thrust it down into different soil, the result will be a transplant failure. So too with e-development systems. You can't just pull solutions from one context and imagine they will work in another. Yet, too often, this happens – naïvely thinking that what works in one place must work the same way in another; or that what works for the private sector will work for the public or NGO sector. Every context is different, and work must be done to match system and context. The watchwords must be "customised" not "off-the-shelf", and "adapt" not just "adopt".

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<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/dig/briefings.htm>