Swimming in an electronic ocean

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"Swimming in an electronic ocean"

by

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Abstract

Amnesty International (AI) is an international campaigning organisation, promoting human rights globally, which has its headquarters - the International Secretariat (IS) in London. Central to its success and reputation is the dissemination and effective use of information. Although an information management strategy has been developed, a significant number of staff had identified a perceived problem of information overload in their daily activities.

This study was commissioned to assess whether information overload existed within the organisation, how personnel were handling and processing information and, whether the results of the study necessitated any operational changes.

A literature review identified two themes. A large body of research has been done on the causes and effects of information overload from the perspective of the individual user, little has been done from a systems perspective. There is an absence from the literature of studies conducted in information intensive environments like Amnesty International (AI). For Amnesty International (AI) information is both an input and a product.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the study to determine whether information overload existed. An in-tray and out-tray analysis recording electronic and textual sources was used to; determine the amount of information overload being experienced by staff; to obtain quantitative evidence of the type and size of information being processed; to contribute to an understanding of the information behaviour of staff and, to obtain a quantitative picture of the volumes of information that were being moved around and stored. Interviews were conducted to; identify and gather information about the information behaviour of personnel; elicit views; attitudes and beliefs of personnel about the transmission, gathering and processing of information within the organisation; and from these responses to identify evidence of information overload and casual factors.

The findings identified that information overload was not significantly present in the organisation although a large volume of information was handled. A range of information handling and processing skills was found amongst personnel; together with varying levels of organised information systems.

The following factors were identified as contributing to what was perceived as information overload by personnel; ineffective internal communication mechanisms, insufficient information exchange between programs in the organisation, a lack of standardised information systems and the absence of an established information flow.

Recommendations were made which included; an information audit; the development of effective internal communication mechanisms; an e-mail policy and training in information skills for personnel.

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Pam Clarke	Library & Information Officer, International Secretariat, Amnesty International

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Chapter 1 "Swimming in an electronic ocean"

The title is the description applied by one of the subjects in the study to how they felt about the information they were handling.[1] The sheer vastness of the availability of electric information was akin to an ocean.

Information handling skills are becoming more and more important as the fast growth in the amount of information continues. It has been argued that traditional information handling skills are no longer adequate for today's information environment.[2] Information overload is a term used so often to describe the work environment that it has become a cliché and is a subject that is frequently commented on. Most recently being a topic on the Radio 4 "Today" program.[3] However, this change in the information environment is beginning to impact on how managers view their information requirements and systems in their organisation with information management. The presence of information overload as frequently stated in the literature can seriously distort and disrupt an organisation activities[4] and indeed effect the individual user.[5]

This study examines evidence of information overload in an international campaigning organisation - Amnesty International (AI), together with an examination of how personnel are handling and processing information.

Since the organisation is both a major giver and receiver of information it is interesting to note that the organisation's personnel identified a problem of information overload. No one has defined exactly how much information an individual can process, whether indeed this is actually possible. Each person will have varying levels of what they can comfortably handle and process. The literature notes that information overload occurs "when an individual can no longer effectively process information that has been acquired."[6]

The study firstly places the organisation in context giving details of its age, activities, structure, and the background to the commissioning of this study. A definition of the environment that AI operates in - the voluntary sector is also given to aid understanding. With regard to this, information is also given on current information policies and practices in similar organisations.

The literature on information overload is referred to throughout the study to aid understanding of the issues under examination. The dissertation concludes with recommendations for AI to implement.

1.1 Aims

- To identify whether information overload is present in the organisation.
- To identify the information handling and processing activities used by staff.
- To contribute to the review of an information management strategy for the organisation.

1.2 Objectives

- Examine the information received by personnel, to determine the evidence for information overload.
- Examining the volume of information being processed by personnel in the organisation, to determine the quantitative evidence for information overload.
- To examine the strategies that a group of users employs to manage information.
- To identify the processes/systems which the users perceive they need to help manage their information needs and resources.

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[3] BBC Radio 4, *"Today Programme"*. 17 June 1997, 8.10am.

[4] **Rogers, Everett M & R. Agarwala-Rogers.** *Communication in Organisations.* New York: Free Press, 1976, p.90.

[5] *Ibid.*, p.91-92.

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Chapter 2 The Organisation

1. Introduction

In order to look effectively at the issue of information overload within Amnesty, it is first necessary to examine the organisation's background, structure and decision-making processes. Studies have shown that such characteristics of an organisation can affect how information is managed.[1] This chapter also details the background to the research topic and, gives a brief comparative analysis of information management policies in similar voluntary sector organisations.

2. Background

What is Amnesty International?

In 1961 a British lawyer disturbed by the imprisonment of two Portuguese students for drinking a toast to freedom, launched a one year campaign to publicise the plight of "prisoners of conscience" - detained for peacefully expressing their beliefs all over the world.[2] The campaign led to the establishment of Amnesty International (AI) as a permanent organisation.[3]

Its appeals on behalf of victims of human rights violations are based on accurate research and on international law.[4] The organisation is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion.[5]

Since 1961 it has grown rapidly and was described in 1986 as having "outgrown many older human rights movements" [6] to become "one of the world's biggest organisations in its field." [7]

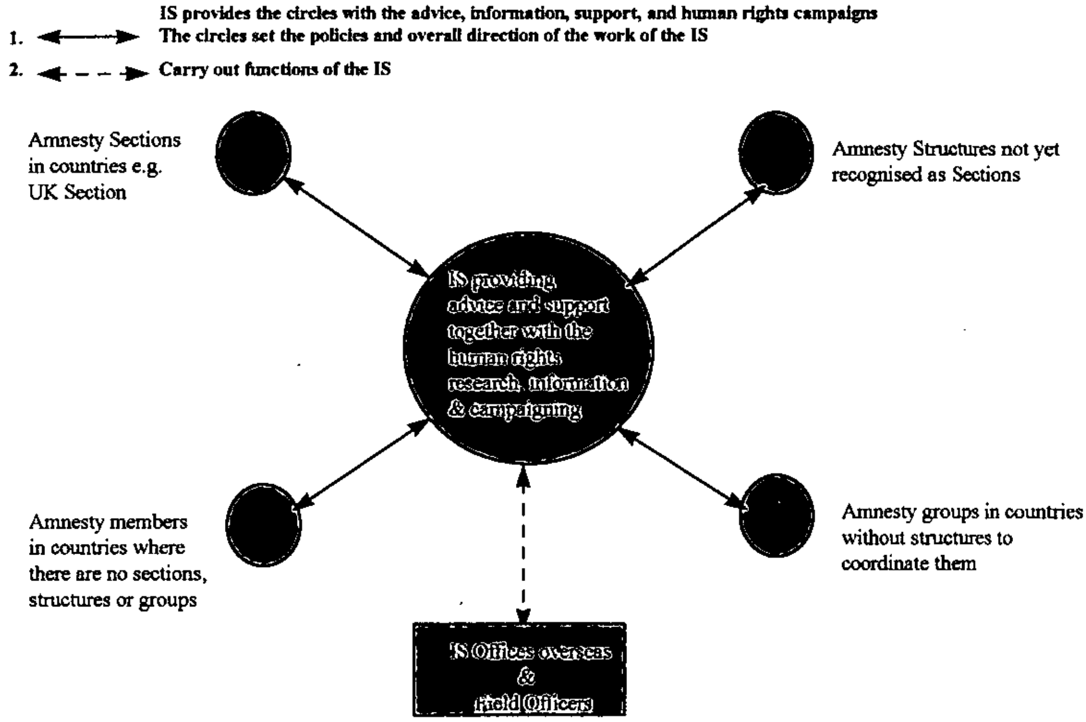
In the 1990's it has over a million members and supporters in over one hundred and fifty countries and territories.[8] There are Amnesty offices in more than fifty countries, thirty of them in areas outside Europe and North America, and more than 8,000 local groups in over seventy countries. [9]

2.1 Organisational Context (Figure 1, p.5)

There are established AI Sections in fifty three countries.[10] In a further fifty countries without recognised Sections, national organisations designated National Coordinating Structures are being developed and this is expected to lead to Section status within two to five years [11]. Eighty other countries have local groups but no organisational structure.[12]

Overall Structure of the Amnesty International (AI) Movement

Figure 1



All Sections elect an executive committee and some employ a secretariat, these provide the link between local AI groups and members on the one hand and the international organisation - the International Secretariat (IS) on the other. Sections are responsible for the coordination within each country of the organisation's campaigning work, and the dissemination of information and activities aimed at developing AI's membership. There are enormous variations in size and strength between AI sections.[13]

The national Sections form the constituencies for the AI's General Assembly - the biennial International Council (ICM).[14]. The ICM elects a nine person International Executive Committee (IEC) which is responsible for the appointment of the Secretary General who heads the International Secretariat. (IS)

2.2 The International Secretariat

This research project focused on the International Secretariat (IS) of Amnesty which is the organisation's research and campaigning headquarters.

2.2.1 Mission Statement (Appendix A)

The IS provides professional expertise and support to the movement. It is responsible for the organisation's day-to-day work but is not authorised to make fundamental policy decisions. It has the following functions:[15]

- to carry out research
- to advise about international law
- to organise approaches to intergovernmental organisations (IGOs)
- to develop strategies and materials for casework, campaigns, and actions for the AI sections and membership
- to write publications and generate world-wide publicity
- to support AI section and group development and member training
- to maintain documentation and information systems
- to provide administrative services to the International Council, the IEC and the IS itself

2.2.2 Organisational Development

In the first twenty seven years of its existence AI has been described as going through "several generations of organisational development."[16] A number of initiatives taken between 1985 and the present have come as the result of demands for more democratic and effective decision-making and greater accountability from within the movement.[17] In addition these initiatives can also be seen as attempts to adapt AI to new global trends and new challenges in the protection of human rights.

As the result of a number of policy reviews there was a radical reorganisation of the IS which took place in 1994-95. This was intended to meet a number of criteria:[18]

- integration of research and campaigning
- increased flexibility for responding to crises
- more pro-active liaison with members
- working more with the broader human rights and non-governmental (NGO) community
- development of regional plans
- a small cohesive management team
- a "flat" - matrix structure and integrated financial planning

The flat matrix structure is one where there is a less rigid hierarchy in comparison with the pyramid structure.[19] The structure incorporates a team system based on geography and function, with individuals having a level of management function and is often referred to as a 'web structure'.[20]
The reorganisation led to the development of the present structure of the IS.

2.2.3 Organisational Structure (Figure 2, p.8)

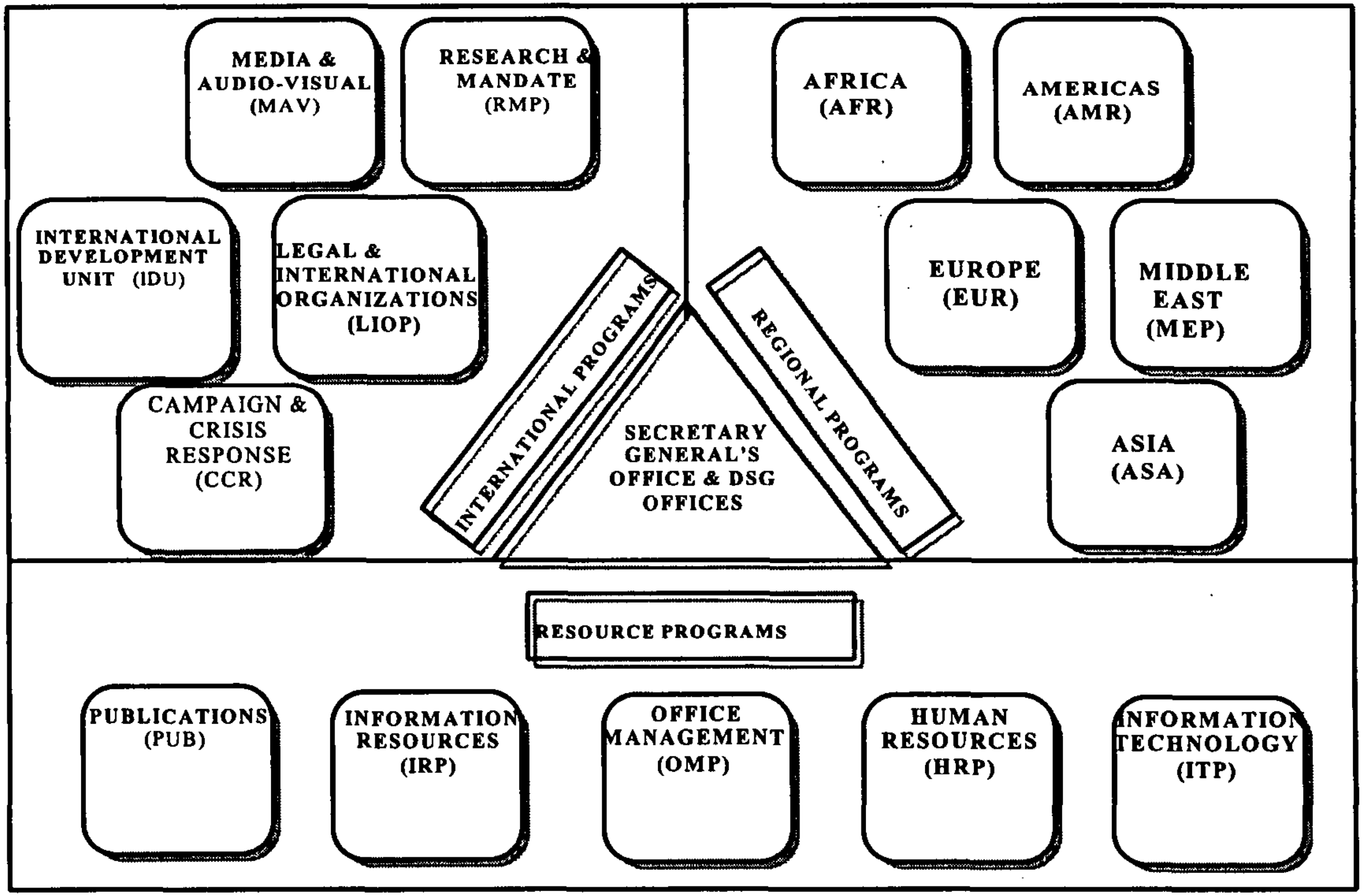
The IS has 390 paid staff and over 60 volunteers.[21] The aim of the restructuring was to give a more flexible and empowering approach to staffing [22] which includes less restrictive job descriptions and, greater clarity and participation in decision making.

It was also an attempt to develop a matrix structure which is flexible and adaptable in the face of change. This is particularly relevant to the IS as it constantly has to react to human rights crises.

Management is based on Coverdale Management [23] principles which promote the evolution of the self managing team. This style of management is based on the theory

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT STRUCTURAL DIAGRAM

Figure 2



that people do best when they are involved in delivering the purposes and setting the directions of their work.[24] The term 'departments' was replaced by the term programs [25] Not all the programs in the IS operate in this manner, others have a more traditional approach with staff reporting to a manager although individually they have more decision making power than in the traditional manager-staff hierarchy.

2.2.4 Horizontal Organisation (Figure 2 p.8)

There are three "program clusters" [26] which "complement each other and provide for a balanced distribution of resources and influences"[27] and the Secretary General's office.

The three program clusters - International Programs; Regional Programs; and Resource Programs are each composed of associated Programs which are responsible for the day-to-day work of the IS and are subdivided into teams. The International Programs cluster is composed of a Deputy Secretary General's office and the following five programs:

- Research and Mandate (R & M)
- Legal and International Organisations (LIOP)
- Campaigning and Crisis Response (CCR)
- International Development Unit (IDU)
- Media and Audio-Visual (MAV)

It also has responsibility for the IS field offices in Geneva and New York.

The Regional Programs Group is composed of a Deputy Secretary General's Office and five regional programs. It ensures the development of integrated regional strategies for the protection and promotion of human rights in each of the five regions and effects their implementation in the fields of research, action and development.[28]

The Group is composed of regional programs (Africa, Americas, Asia/Pacific, Europe and Middle East/Magreb). The Group also has responsibility for the Paris Research Office, the Moscow field officer and the Hong Kong office.

The Resource Program Group is composed of the remaining five Programs:

- Publications
- Information Resources
- Information Technology
- Human Resources
- Office Management

The operations of the individual programs are delegated to Program Directors with program staff reporting to them.

2.2.5 The Vertical Structure

Overall direction of the IS is provided by a Senior Management Team (SMT) led by the Secretary General and also including the three Deputy Secretary Generals, and the Finance Director. Its task is to ensure that:[29]

- the various programs are integrated so as to use resources effectively
- strategic decisions are taken in good time to analyse AI's work and its interaction with the external environment

The organisation has been structured in such a way with the aim of enabling increased levels of decision-making and accountability. In addition it was felt that the current structure would lead to "the lowering of organisational boundaries "[30] to enable more integration across the programs.

2.2.6 Organisational Type

AI is what is termed a "voluntary sector campaigning organisation' [31]. More appropriate is the term Hudson uses - ' a third sector organisation'.[32] Organisations who operate in the third sector have primary objectives which are social rather than economic. The term 'third sector' distinguishes these organisations from the 'private sector' and the 'public sector'. Third sector organisations have an ethos which tends to be value led[33] that is, established and managed by people who believe that changes are needed and they are driven by a desire to improve the world in which we live.

However, employees in this sector also expect a great deal of personal space, autonomy and say in how the organisation should be run.[34]

The two defining characteristics of such organisations, and can be applied to Amnesty, are, that they do not distribute profits to their owners like private sector organisations and unlike public sector organisations they are not subject to direct political control.

Smith et al[35] go further and term Amnesty as a "transnational social movement organisation"[36] and one that compared to other international bodies is remarkable for its "organisational discipline, formalisation and centralisation."[37]

The structure of the IS and indeed the organisation as a whole bears out Hudson's findings[38] that these organisations are "complex and messy with intricate management structures."[39] AI's need to balance the interests of its different stakeholders has resulted in such a structure which has to be consulted, coordinated and managed in order to achieve its goals.

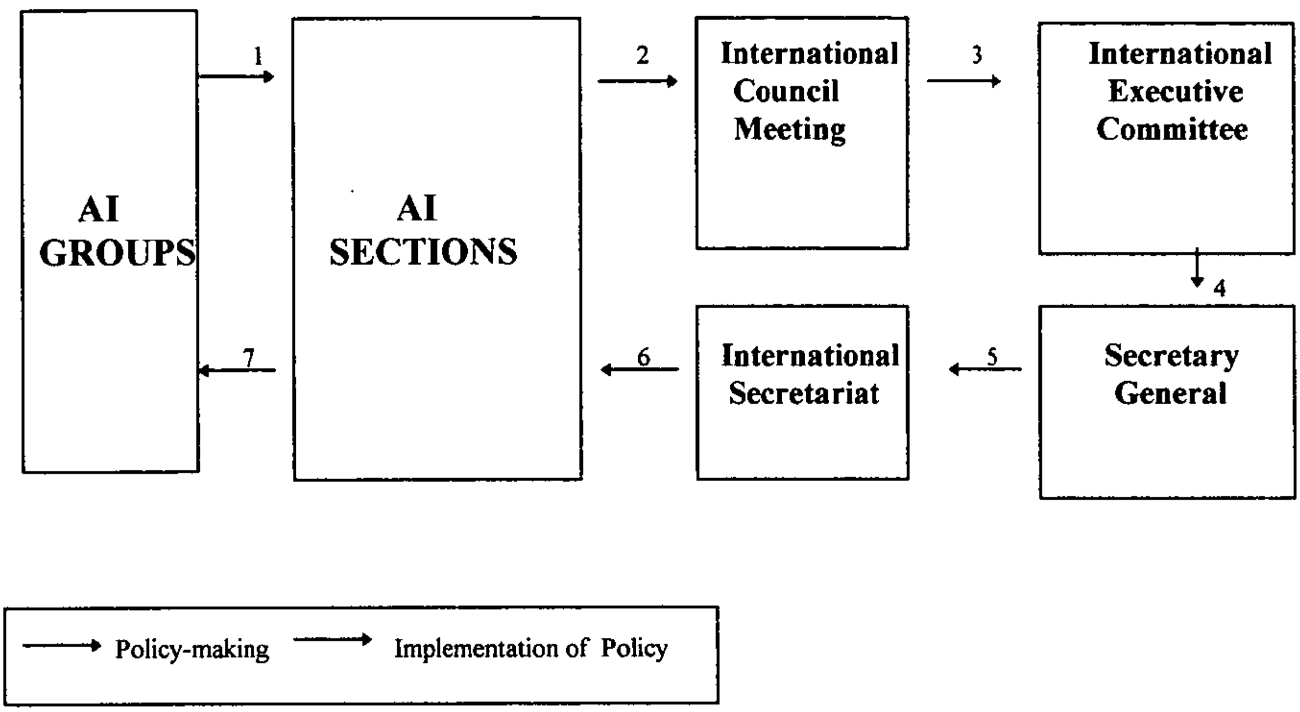
2.2.7 Funding

The IS is funded mainly by contributions from the Amnesty Sections. Each Section makes an "assessment payment" to the IS on an annual basis. The payment level is determined by the membership level of the Section. Neither the IS or the Amnesty movement receive any funding from governments or governmental organisations. Rules about donations are developed in accordance with the organisation's policy of not comprising its impartiality or integrity.[40]

2.3 Decision Making in AI (Figure 3, p.12)

Figure 3 on p.12 outlines the decision-making process in AI and illustrates how the organisation governs itself. When examining the decision-making process one should bear in mind that in having to balance the interests of its different stakeholders, it has

Decision - Making in AI Figure 3



1. AI Groups discuss issues and propose resolutions to their Sections' general meetings and governing bodies

2. AI Sections hold general meetings that debate policy proposals and vote on resolutions to their own locally-elected governing bodies and to the International Council and to the International Executive Committee.

3. International Council Meeting, AI's supreme governing body, comprises voting delegates from sections, and has authority to amend AI's Statute, decide overall policy, and set budget and program plans. Elects International Executive Committee (IEC) to implement its decisions.

4. International Executive Committee acts as the main governing body between International Council Meetings, and provides general supervision of the work of the International Secretariat (IS). Appoints the Secretary General.

5. **Secretary General** runs the day to day affairs of AI, acts as its primary spokesperson, and is chief officer of the IS.

6. **International Secretariat** collects and analyses information about human rights violations, and advises sections, groups and members in their work.

7. **AI Sections** coordinate relations between the International Secretariat and local groups and members.

evolved a participatory decision-making process. Just as the bulk of its work is carried out by volunteer activists, so too are the movement's fundamental policies set by the same activists.

2.3.1 Planning, Policy and Resource Decision Making

As stated the International Council Meeting (ICM) is the ultimate decision making body in the AI movement. All policy decisions, including financial and resource ones, are made here. Although these decisions will affect national sections and structures, each one will make its own decisions on resources and planning for their section. However, the ICM decisions set the priorities for the movement as a whole. For example, decisions taken on an information policy for the Amnesty movement will be taken and then implemented by the IS who will instruct Amnesty Sections and structures accordingly.

Due to constraints of resources there is a prioritisation process at the ICM which also decides which legislation should be acted on. Therefore not all the resolutions passed are implemented.

2.3.2 Implementation of Decision Making

The ICM adopts a four year strategic plan in consultation with Amnesty Sections and structures.[41] This acts as a container for all the resolutions passed at the ICM. Between each Council meeting the IEC will implement and interpret the stated intentions of the ICM.

The four year plan is divided into two years and this is known as the 'operational plan' - activities are formulated with outcomes that are aimed at achieving legislation contained in the strategic plan supplemented by the ICM decision-making.[42]

The operational plan is organised into twenty three thematic 'baskets ' for example Information Management, IT and Telecommunications and will typically span several IS programs.[43] The operational plan is monitored by the IS management and the IEC on a six monthly basis.[44]

3. Information Management in Amnesty International (Appendices B, C and D)

Appendix B refers to the international information management strategy of AI which is for the movement overall. Appendix C refers to the resolution passed at the 1997 ICM. This resolution was prioritised and will feature as one of the five main priorities for AI up to and including the year 2000. Significantly, information management was prioritised over those resolutions concerned with human rights issues underlining the importance with which this is now seen by the movement.

Appendices B and C can be summarised as stating a need for standardisation , information sharing and dissemination throughout AI, an emphasis on redressing the balance between what are termed the 'information poor' and the 'information rich' sections and, a move towards movement wide information systems.[45]

3.1 Information Management in the IS (Please refer to Appendix D)

Although there is an information management policy for the organisation as a whole, by contrast there is no internal information management policy at the IS. There are various associated policies on the following areas; archives, classification, records, indexing, databases, data protection, and IT.

Appendix D indicates the storage of information and information retrieval at the IS

It is not possible to identify either the information flow or assess the information needs of individuals within the IS due to an absence of systems. Although in terms of IT needs there is regular cross-program consultation with feedback invited.

3.2 The Information Resources Program (IRP)

The Information Resources Program which is responsible for the management of information resources includes a library and library team (which includes information officers allocated to each regional program) records management, archives, and a photographic and video library. Although the Information Technology Program (ITP) is separate there is some overlap between the two programs.

3.3 The Problem

The researcher was asked to investigate the issue of information overload following a number of complaints from personnel, to the Director of Information Resources, that they were suffering from information overload. The researcher was unable to ascertain the number of staff who had complained but it was stated as a 'large number' by the Director of Information Resources. In addition it was felt that as information and its management now a priority (following the decision of the 1997 ICM) this presented an ideal opportunity to conduct a study. Both the international information management policy (Appendix B) and the ICM resolution (Appendix C) refer to information overload.

In looking at the question of information overload it would be the first time that an overall picture of the 'traffic' of internal and external information being received by staff would be obtained. It was also anticipated that the methods of information handling and processing used by staff would be revealed.

Definitions of information overload will be dealt with in Chapter 3, p.20. However, two definitions were given by staff at Amnesty. The most common one was that they were suffering from information overload because "there was too much information to process."[46] The other definition used was of "having so much information that it was no longer possible to achieve work objectives."[47]

It should be noted that Amnesty's product in a commercial sense is information. As a global high profile organisation it deals daily with a large volume of information which is diverse in nature, content and form. Its reputation stems mainly from its accuracy in the information it provides and, therefore, like a commercial organisation the onus is on it to continue to deliver its high quality product.

It is important that this factor is borne in mind when examining information and its management within the organisation to enable an understanding of the internal environment staff work in.

4. Information Policies in Other Voluntary Sector Organisations

Three organisations; Christian Aid, Friends of the Earth and Save the Children were asked for details of their information policies and, how these policies were devised and implemented. These three were chosen as they share similar characteristics with Amnesty; all are international with offices in other countries, all are voluntary sector organisations, activities include campaigning and working for change, and they are membership organisations. Although the Amnesty membership has a greater role in the organisation in comparison to the other three.

4.1 Christian Aid

Primarily an education and development organisation which also campaigns on issues such as Third World debt.[48] There is no Information Department, responsibility for information and its management being the remit of the Head of IT.[49] Currently the organisation has no clearly articulated information policy. However, due to problems of information overload, the organisation is planning to look at how it handles and processes information.[50]

4.2 Save the Children Fund (SCF)

SCF is the UK's largest international voluntary agency dealing with child health and welfare.[51] There are two information functions within the organisation; Systems and Organisation which comes under Fund Raising and, Research and Information which is under Planning and Resources.[52] Neither relate to information management within the organisation and there is no clearly articulated information policy. Similar to Christian Aid, the organisation has been forced to examine its information handling and processing due to the increasing volume of information it is now dealing with.[53]

4.3 Friends of the Earth (FOE)

One of the UK's major environmental campaigning organisations, this was the only one of the three to have both an information management policy and an information strategy. It has an information department with responsibility for information resources and management. Due to problems with information handling, the organisation appointed two consultants to work specifically on an information management project.[54] The result led to FOE devising policies on; classification, archives, indexing, communications (both internal and external), recording and acquisition and storage.[55]

The information policy refers to sets of linked policy, strategy, and implementation measures to govern the way that FOE develops and maintains its information management resources.[56] The different policies were implemented over a two year period. The Head of Information stated that the organisation did not have problems with information overload or in dealing with large volumes of information. He felt this was due to having an information strategy and the appropriate systems.[57]

4.4 Conclusion

It was clear from the organisations surveyed that management of information had not previously been a priority. The increasing volume of information being received had forced them to start considering how information was handled and managed in their organisation. It is also not surprisingly that the speed and form in which information is now transmitted has contributed to the increase in information flow.

Despite the professionalisation of the voluntary sector and its increasing professional and skilled approach, information management appears to have remained a low priority on the organisations agendas. In this respect it can be argued that the voluntary sector shares common ground with the commercial sector with both sectors becoming aware of the significance of effective information management[58]

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[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *About Amnesty,* **ref 2,** p.3.

[9] **Office of the Secretary General (OSG),** *Background paper on Decentralisation & Deconcentration.* London: International Secretariat (IS), , 1996, p.4.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Amnesty International Handbook,* **ref 6,** p.117.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Structure of Intentional Secretariat.* London: International Secretariat (IS) 1994, p.3.

[16] *Background Paper on Decentralisation & Deconcentralisation.* **Ref 9,** p.7.

[17] *Ibid.*, p.8.

[18] *Structure of International Secretariat* **ref 15**, p.5.

[19] **Handy, Charles, ref 1**, p.188.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Structure of International Secretariat* **ref 15**, p.10.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*, p.11

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] The American spelling is used by the IS for program and this has been copied by the author for the purposes of this study.

[26] *Structure of International Secretariat* **ref 15**,.12.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p.13

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[50] *Ibid.*

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Chapter 3 Methodology

1. Introduction

The aims and objectives of the research methods are discussed here and working definitions of information and information overload are given for clarity. The methods used to investigate information overload are also described.

2. Definitions

A common refrain made by many, particularly those working in organisations is that too much information is being thrown at them. By this they mean people are unable to take in all the information that is targeted towards them.[1] The problem is that is has become such a common complaint that it could be used as an excuse for not being to carry out work. It is therefore important for the purpose of this research that a working definition is given.

The Reuters study [2] carried out on information load did not define the phenomenon as such merely stating that "people were suffering stress as a result of the sheer volume of information they were now receiving." [3]

Previous studies have indicated that; "information overload occurs when information inputs are too excessive to be processed, leading to breakdown. [4] It is at this point that the individual is no longer able to cope.

Miller[5] has detailed the effects and coping mechanisms of individuals when faced with information overload. However, by contrast studies done by Rudd & Rudd[6]and Iselin[7] have actually shown that information overload can have a beneficial effect by developing an individual's information handling skills and enriching decision making.

It can therefore be argued that the studies are somewhat ambiguous although there is a common strand running through them. Information overload occurs when processing systems - namely the user, is unable to process the amount of information that has been acquired.

For the purposes of this study information overload will be defined as; "the amount of information being received and processed is such that the individual is no longer able to effectively meet their work objectives." This definition is based on the one given by the member of personnel in Chapter Two p.15.

2.1 Information

Information for the purpose of this study is defined as; consisting of written documents, newspapers, magazines, journals, internal memos and electronic information including e-mails, fax messages, databases and the Internet. This is similar to the definition used in the information overload survey conducted by Reuters[8] However, the term documents has replaced reports to give a wider definition from which to work, to ensure all relevant information types used by the organisation and staff are covered.

3. Background Preparation

Prior to the research taking place the researcher familiarised herself with the organisation's internal operations and systems. Informal information sessions were held with key personnel; the Director of the Information Technology Program (ITP) to develop an understanding of the integration of the IT information systems and how users were consulted regarding IT needs; an information officer to gain a working knowledge of the in-house databases and other information resources used by staff (Appendix D); and the Director of the Information Resources Program (IRP), to obtain an overall perspective on the management of information resources.

Various documentary information was also obtained including the organisation's mission statement (Appendix A); information related policies, (Appendices B and C), and strategy and planning documents. This was necessary in order not only to develop an understanding of the organisation, but to "throw light on where the organisation thinks its going"[9] and "whether information activities and resources fitted in with the objectives of the organisation."[10]

3.1 Access to the Organisation

The researcher was already familiar with the work of Amnesty International (AI) and that of the International Secretariat (IS) through her involvement with the organisation as a volunteer. This enabled easy access to both the organisation and personnel concerned. All interviews took place at the IS offices.

4. Selection of Methodology

Two research tools were selected; the focused interview[11] and an in-tray out-tray exercise.[12] Using these two methods a combination of qualitative and quantitative data would be provided. This would take into account the perceptions and opinions of individuals; information behaviour and the volume and flow of information being transmitted. This facilitated a qualified examination of the existence of information load within the organisation.

5. In-Tray, Out-Tray Exercise

Thirty members of personnel were requested to monitor their incoming and outgoing mail on a daily basis for one week. Fifteen personnel members monitored their incoming mail and fifteen their outgoing mail.

5.1 Aims

The aims of the in-tray, out-tray exercise were:

- To determine the amount of information overload being experienced by staff
- To obtain quantitative evidence of the type and size of information being processed by staff.
- To contribute to an understanding of the information behaviour of staff.
- To obtain a quantitative picture of the volumes of information that are being moved around, and stored.

5.2 Reasons for Selecting this Research Tool

An in-tray, out-tray exercise is an effective way of determining the types of information received and sent by individuals and, provides a way of assessing the volume of information flow in the organisation.[13] Due to the time limitations on this research it was felt that conducting an in-tray, out-tray exercise would enable the collection of specific data which was; "close to the point of action"[14]; enabling the transmission of data between the user and information systems to be recorded.

5.3 Design of the In-Tray, Out-Tray Charts (Figures 1, 2, 3 p. 29, 30, 31)

The format for the design of the charts was based loosely on one devised by Anthony Booth for conducting a communications audit [15] and expanded to be relevant for this piece of research. One main factor taken into consideration was the time it would take for those involved to complete the chart on a daily basis. Therefore, to ensure co-operation of participants, both charts were made as simple as possible with individuals having to mainly tick columns.

5.4 Piloting the In-Tray and Out-Tray Exercise

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the subjects would not experience difficulties in completing it." It would also provide a prior analysis to see; (a) whether all the different information processing activities had been accounted for and, (b) to ensure that relevant accessible data would be provided.

5.4.1 Pilot Out-Tray Chart

The chart was devised using a table format to encompass all the necessary data. The following column headings were applied:

Document title this was used so the nature of the document being sent could be identified. The term 'Title' was used in preference to type to enable understanding by the subject.

Length - pages used so volume could be indicated.

Destination used to determine where the document was going, allowing differentiation to be made between external and internal documents thereby assisting in an understanding of the information flow.

5.4.2 In-Tray Chart

The same format was used with the following column headings applied:

- **Document title** and **length**
- **Origin** was used to indicate where the document came from and to differentiate between internal and external information

The following columns were used in order to discover what information processing activities took place and to assist in determining the information flow;

- **Original retained**
- **Passed on - who to**
- **Copied for own use**
- **Copy passed on - where**
- **Returned to sender**
- **Trashed**
- **Filing/Information use**
- **Action/comments**
- **For inputting**
- **For recording**

All of the columns, apart from those stating who the information had been passed and copied onto, required a ✓ only. For these two columns subjects had to write down the organisation/dept/individual who also received the information. Again this was done in order to analyse the volume of information being circulated.

For both charts subjects were asked to record each type separately and each was numbered consecutively to identify the volume of data.

5.4.3 Pilot e-mail In-Tray Chart

A separate in-tray chart was devised for incoming e-mail. Although this meant the subject completing another chart it was felt that with the heavy dependence on e-mail in the organisation, it would provide an useful analysis of the circulation and processing of electronic information.

The same format was used with the following column headings;

- **E-mail type**
- **E-mail with file attachment - type ie report**
- **Origin**
- **Saved**
- **Forwarded - where**
- **Trashed**

A differentiation was made between ordinary e-mail and e-mail with a file attachment. It was felt necessary to make this differentiation as file attachments can contain a sizeable quantity of information.

Processing activities were recorded by applying the columns; 'saved', 'forwarded' and 'trashed'. Again the ✓ was used for these apart from 'forwarded' when the subject was requested to write the destination - dept/organisation/individual.

6 Conducting the Pilot

The sample population was selected on what is termed a haphazard, convenience or accidental sampling.[16] That is, volunteers were the subjects for the study. Four were then selected, according to 'expert choice',[17] because they were deemed representative of personnel by the Director of the Information Resources Program. (IRP)

Two personnel were requested to record their incoming mail for one week and, the other two their outgoing mail. The period covered was 1st to 5th June 1998.

Personnel doing the in-tray exercise were asked to do it after receiving their post - around 11am It had been identified that personnel generally looked at their e-mail twice a day and were therefore requested to record their incoming e-mail at this point.

6.1 Changes Made Resulting from the Pilot In-Tray, Out-Tray Exercise

Generally, the subjects did not experience problems in completing the charts. One participant commented that it did "slow down his normal work pattern"[18] although he was happy to do it.

Suggestions were made regarding changes to the design of the charts which were incorporated. It was identified that in their current form, they did not take account of all of the information processing activities.

6.1.2 In-Tray Chart (Figure 1, p.29)

The following changes were made:

- a column, 'number remaining to be dealt with' was added as two of the subjects commented they sometimes had such a large volume of e-mail in one day that it was not possible to process it all that particular day.
- from the data examined it was felt that there was nothing to indicate the importance/relevancy of information being received by individuals. Therefore another column with; 'Useful (U), Not Useful(NU) and Important (I)' was introduced with subjects having to write in the appropriate abbreviation.

6.1.3 In-Tray e-mail Chart (Figure 2,p.30)

The changes detailed above were also made to this chart. In addition the following new columns were introduced:

- 'Replied' and 'Printed out'. All of the subjects mentioned that they often printed out e-mails with attachments and in addition stated that a proportion of e-mail received were not responded.
- A column to incorporate e-mails being sent with either document/database link ' was added as all of the subjects stated they received these.

6.1.4 Out-Tray Chart (Figure 3,p.31)

One new column was introduced - 'copied to'. Those doing the out-tray exercise stated that many people were copied into e-mail correspondence. As this could be identified as a factor in contributing to the volume of information being circulated and subsequently causing information overload this was added.

7 The Main In-Tray, Out-Tray Exercise

Thirty subjects were selected on the same basis as the pilot. The period covered was the 6th July to 10th July 1998. The charts were distributed with written instructions to the subjects as it was not possible to hold sessions with them due to time limitations. Although not shown, the subject's name and program was inserted at the top of each chart.

7.1 Problems and Limitations with this Research Tool

The main problem with this research tool is that it requires a high degree of co-operation on the part of the subjects and time to complete. Although only one subject in the sample did not carry out the exercise citing lack of time.

There is also the question of completeness. It is not possible to ascertain whether everything has been recorded although a lot of data was presented. People can forget and lose motivation and interest in doing it, particularly if they do not have enough time [19]. Finally, the subjects may feel that this exercise is intended to see how much work they are doing on a daily basis which can lead to fears about job security. A number of comments were made on completed charts saying the exercise did not reflect all the work they had done that day. This happened despite all the subjects receiving a copy of the aims of the exercise.

With using the method of sample selection, "expert choice" [20] it is difficult to know how representative the sample really is which raises issues of bias. To some extent this was countered as a representative sample taking into account, job level, gender and ethnicity was conducted.

Figure 1 In-Tray Chart

	Document Title - eg memo	Length (pages)	Origin - Dept/Org	Orginal Retained ✓	Passed on - who to	Copied for own use ✓	Copy passed on where	Returned to Sender ✓	Trashed ✓	Filing/Information ✓	Action/comments ✓	For inputting ✓	For recording ✓	Useful(U) Not useful(NU) Importar	Number Remaining to be deal with	
1																
2																
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																
8																
9																
10																
11																
12																
13																
14																
15																
16																
17																
18																
19																
20																

Figure 2 Incoming e-mail Chart

	E-Mail - type eg memo	E-Mail - file attachment type	E-Mail-document/databaselink	Origin -dept/internal/external	Useful (U) Important (I) Not useful (NU)	Replied ✓	Saved ✓	Forwarded - where	Printed out ✓	Trashed✓	Number remaining to be dealt with	
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
13												
14												
15												
16												
17												

Figure 3 Out-Tray Chart

Document title - eg report	Length - eg pages	Destination - programme/dept/organisation

1. Under document title state what you are sending e.g memo, letter
2. Under length state how many pages there are in the document even if it is only 1.
3. If you are sending 2 items e.g. a report with a memo or cover sheet please count these as 2 separate items.
4. Under destination state where the document is going - if it is internal state which programme, if external which organisation.

8 Interviews

Twelve interviews were conducted with personnel using the focused interview method.[21] Interviewees were also asked to complete a grid before the interview (Figure 4, p 33) to assist in ascertaining; the frequency and quantity of information and the transmission of the different document types. Following the background preparation detailed in Chapter 2 p.14 and Chapter 3 p.22, it was possible to draw up the main document types used in the organisation and design the grid accordingly.

Job descriptions for each interview subject were requested in order to identify the information aspects of the job and, to distinguish between stated job functions and actual job activities.

8.1 Aims of the Interviews

The aims of the interviews were:

- to identify and gather information about the information behaviour of staff.
- to elicit opinions, attitudes and beliefs of staff about the transmission, gathering and processing of information within the organisation.
- from these responses identify evidence of information overload and casual factors

8.2 Reasons for Selecting this Research Tool

The interview method was chosen to complement the in-tray out-tray exercise to enable an extensive exploration of the relevant issues. It is also an "effective way of gathering information about past behaviour and experiences, beliefs, values and attitudes."[22] Variables that cannot be measured directly.

The focused method was chosen to enable the "collection of discursive information" [23] That is, qualitative data that contains a high degree of opinion, attitudes and provides a means to the exploration of problems being experienced by individuals.[24] Since the research is attempting to identify the information activities of personnel and problems they may be experiencing this method is appropriate.

Figure 4 Information Grid

Information Type	Source Type		Frequency Received						
Information Type	**AI**	**Non AI**	**Not at all**	**Annually**	**Quarterly**	**Monthly**	**Weekly**	**Daily**	**Other - please specify**
Urgent Actions									
Forward Activity Plans									
To Government correspondence									
Action Files									
Regional Action Networks									
Reports									
Briefing Papers									
Newsletters									
Memos									
Letters									
Minutes									
Journal articles/cuttings									
Press releases									
Weekly Mail documents									
Financial Information									
Statistical Information									
Policy documents									
Statutes & Legislation									
Information from Non Governmental Organisations (NGO)									
Information from Inter Governmental Organisations (IGO)									
Newspapers									
E-mail									
Information for input to AISTAR									
Information for input to Paradox									
Information for input to other database please specify:									
News Manager									
Other sources not mentioned - please specify below:									

8.3 Problems and Limitations with this Research Tool

The method is time intensive with each interview lasting up to one hour. Therefore only a dozen people were interviewed. There is also the problem of bias[25] and of 'leading' the interview.[26] This was countered by tape recording the interviews. Due to the nature of the interview - where patterns of behaviour and attitudes were being elicited, it was considered that tape-recording would aid the interview process as well as give a clear record of the discussions that took place.

8.4 The sample

For both the pilot and the main interviews the sample was selected on the same basis as for the in-tray and out-tray exercise using sample selection and "expert choice".[27] The need for confidentiality was expressed by some personnel so all interviewees were labelled alphabetically rather than names being used.

8.5 Design of the Interview Schedule

Before the interview subjects were asked to complete a grid (Figure 4, p.33) This was done to save time in the interview and to act as general introduction and discussion points to the issues of information handling and processing. Subjects were asked to indicate the frequency with which they received documents by putting a number in the relevant frequency column. A differentiation was also made between external and internal information. Consultations with personnel in the Information Resources Program (IRP) ensured that the grid covered all document types and information used in the organisation. Instructions were also given on how to complete the grid to each interviewee.

8.6 Interview Questions

For the focused method a "framework is established by selecting topics around which the interview is guided."[28] Certain questions are asked but the subject is given the freedom to talk about the topic and give their own views.[29] The questions were formulated according to certain criteria which are detailed as follows:

- to ascertain the length of employment at the IS;
- to distinguish between the duties stated on the job description and what the subject's actual job involved;
- to determine the ethnicity of the subject as it has been shown that cultural differences play a part in the transmission and exchange of information[30]

The following questions were asked;

1. **How long have you worked at the IS?**
2. **What does your job involve?**

- to identify the information behaviour of staff - practices and skills
- to describe the patterns of information behaviour related to sources, channels and topics;
- to determine the existence or evidence of information overload associated with topics, sources and channels;
- to evaluate the quality and relevancy of information from these sources and channels;

The following questions were asked;

3. **Looking at the grid you filled in, you receive......**
   What do you do with it, Is everything you receive relevant?
4. **Are some sources more important than others?**
5. **Once you have finished with the information is it stored, recorded etc**
   Where?
6. **Does the information that you get provide you with data relevant to decisions you have to make? If so what percentage - 25%, 50%, 75%, other?**
7. **Do you feel able to handle the amount and the different types of information that you receive?**
8. **Do you need large amounts of information to perform your job effectively?**
9. **If you received less information would you feel that you would not have enough information to make accurate decisions/perform effectively?**

Question 7 was also asked to identify any commonly occurring negative and positive experiences regarding the handling of information by the subject.

- to get general views, opinions and recommendations

The following questions were asked;

12. Generally how do you feel information is handled by the organisation?

13. Have you any suggestions which you think would improve the situation and/or help you in your work when dealing with information?

9 Conducting the Pilot Interviews

Two personnel participated in the pilot stage. They were each sent a copy of the questions a week before in order to enable them to consider their responses and a copy of the grid to complete. They were also sent a copy of the aims of the interviews. Each interviewee was coded to ensure confidentiality and permission was sought prior to the interview for taping the proceedings.

9.1 Changes Made Resulting from the Pilot Interviews

Both subjects completed the grid without difficulty. However, both commented on how difficult it was to estimate the amount of information they received and dealt with. It was also apparent during the interviews that the subjects found it difficult to describe their information handling and processing behaviour. This is a common problem which arises in studies of information behaviour.[31] However, with probing and the use of supplementary questions this problem was overcome.

An issue that arose during the interviews was the lack of internal communication between the programs. It was therefore decided to introduce two new questions to the main interview schedule with the following criteria:

- to assess the quality of communication and the exchange of information

- to recognise the organisational networks for the transmission and exchange of information

10. Does part of your work involve exchanging information with colleagues? Who with & what methods do you use to exchange information?

11. Do you experience any problems exchanging information?

The complete interview schedule used for the interviews is shown in Appendix E.

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Chapter 4 In-Tray & Out-Tray Results

1. Introduction

This chapter details the results of the data collection from the in-tray and out-tray exercises. The statistical package SPSS for Windows, 6.1 was used to assist in the analysis. This enabled information on the frequency of the occurrence of each category of a variable to be obtained. In addition cross stabulation was used to determine the presence or absence of a relationship between variables.

2. Problems with Data Collection

Initially thirty personnel had volunteered to participate in the exercise. However, the final participation was eight for the in-tray exercise and seven for the out-tray exercise. There were three main contributory factors for this; some members did not feel they had time to do the exercise in addition to carrying out their work duties; the time period during which the two exercises took place were during three main political events which impacted on human rights issues- the death of the Nigerian leader; the continuing crisis in Indonesia and the developments in Kosovo. This resulted in some personnel who had originally agreed to participate withdrawing as their workloads increased. However, it was felt that the data from the thirteen personnel participating could be usefully applied in developing an understanding of the issues under analysis.

3. In-Tray Results

3.1 Data Processing Procedures for In-Tray Data

The variables were defined according to the column headings on the in-tray and e-mail charts. A standardisation procedure was carried out with regard to the document types. Each document type was given a value. The same process was carried out with regard to the variables "Origin", "Passed on" and "Copy Passed on". Each department/program was given a value. However, in the case of documents being sent externally it was not possible to specify the destination as precisely due to the use of the general term "external" by the subjects in the exercise. This was therefore defined as a variable. The general term "internal" was also used as a variable due to this term being used by some subjects in place of specifying the exact destination of a document. In the case of a document being circulated to more than one dept/program this was expressed in terms of repeating the data entry with the necessary changes being made. A variable "colleague" was also defined as it was found that some documents were circulated to colleagues. Hence a yes or no label value was given for this. For the variable "length" values were defined as; 1to10 is = 1 and so forth up to 200. All the information processing activities defined in the charts such as "trashed" were defined as variables and given the label values of yes and no. The variable "number remaining" was given a yes and no value label.

A similar process was carried out with the e-mail chart. For the different attachment variables where possible value labels were defined in terms of the types of attachments. In order to take into account responses which did not name the types of attachments, the value labels "Yes" and "No" were also included.

As can be seen the data procedures were quite complex but needed to be done in this manner to incorporate fully subjects responses in the charts.

3.2 Problems with Data Processing

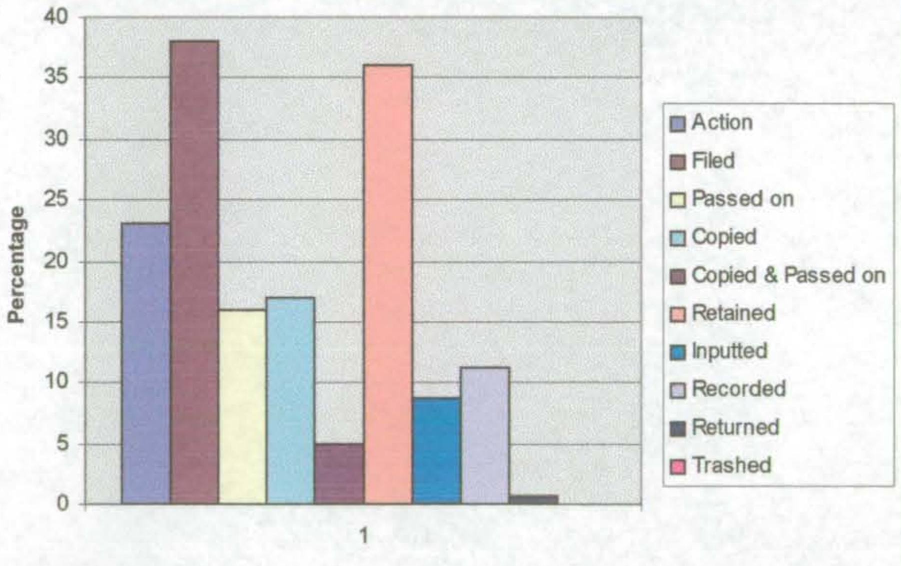
It was apparent that there were differences in how subjects had recorded their incoming mail. In some cases specific responses were recorded naming each programme that documents had originated from and where going to. In other cases people had used general terms such as "internal" in which case specific programmes/departments could not specified although it could be seen that documents had been circulated internally. In all cases no specific destinations were named for documents being sent outside the organisation so the global term "external" could only be applied to these. However, it was felt that with the steps taken above, in defining variables and values, these problems were largely overcome and date entry was complete. In addition there was no missing data.

3.3 Results of In-Tray - Hard Copy

3.4 Information Processing Activities (Figure 1, p.42)

In order to ascertain the frequency of information processing activities used by individuals a frequency procedure was used. Figure 1 on p.42 illustrates the results. As can be seen, filing is the main information processing activity constituting 38% although 36% of documents are also retained. Action is taken with 23% of documents and 17% of documents are copied. The circulation of documents, taking into account both activities - "Passed on" and "Copied & Passed on", is at 21%. A small percentage - 6% of documents are being "trashed". Only 20% of documents are being used for recording/inputting purposes.

Summary of Information Processing - Hard Copy Figure 1



3.5 Cross Stabulations of Information Processing Activities

In order to determine whether there were relationships between certain information processing activities and certain document types the following relationships were tested:

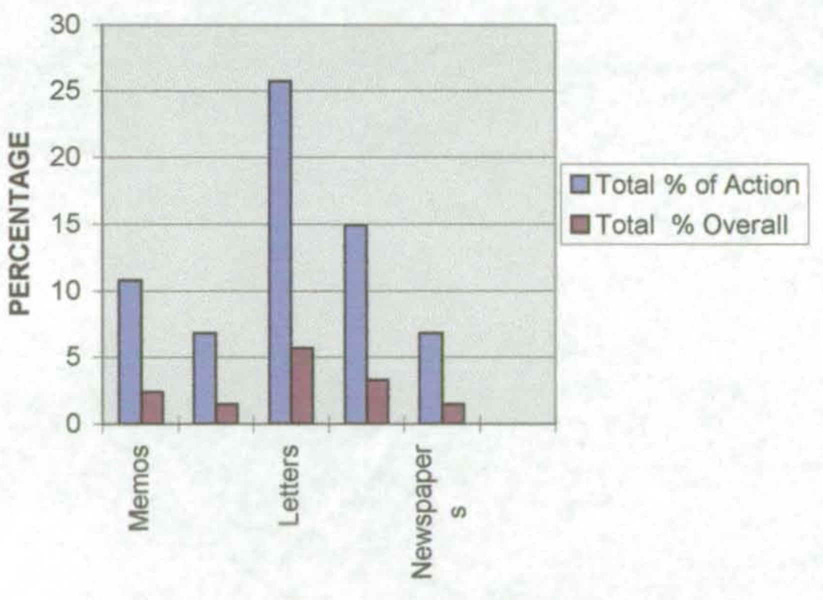
- Document type and action

- Document type and retained
- Document type and trashed
- Document type and passed on
- Document type and copy passed on
- Document type and filed

3.5.1 Document Type and Action

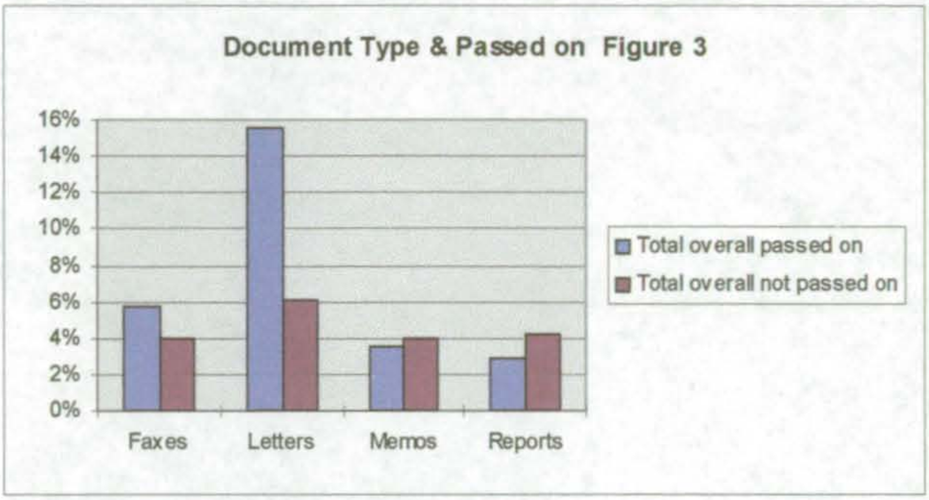
From the data it was evident that there was no significant relationship between these two variables. However, it was apparent that five main document types produced the 'action' processing activity. These were: memo, reports, letters, faxes and newspapers. It was significant that with the volume of documents received the proportion of 'action' processing activity was still slow. This is shown on Figure 2.

Document Type & Action
Figure 2



3.5.2 Document Type and Passed on (Figure 3, p.44)

No significant relationship could be found between document type and passed on. The data for four main document types were examined. Figure 3 on p.44 compares the percentage of document types passed on against the percentage not passed on. It is clear from Figure 3 that letters are the highest document type passed on at 15.6% and faxes at 5.7%. Interestingly, in the case of reports and memos the percentage not passed on is higher.



3.5.3 Document Type and Retained

No significant relationship was evident from the data.

3.5.4 Document Type and Trashed

Again no significant relationship was shown by the data. It is clear from the results that a high proportion of documents received are not being trashed.

3.5.5 Document Type and Copied and Passed on

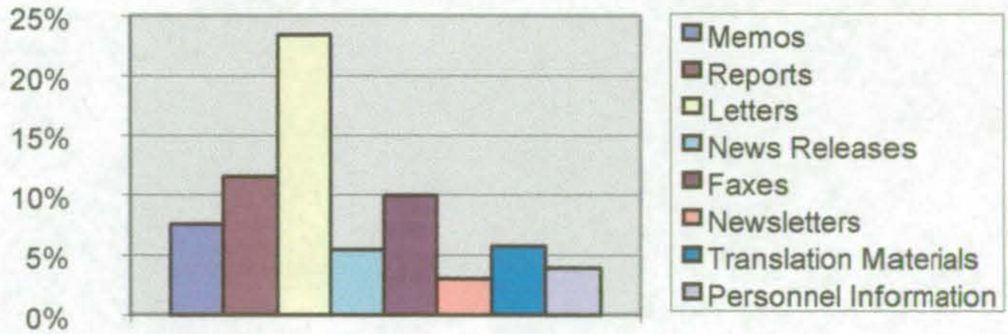
In examining the data for this activity a selection of document types, - those with the highest of percentages were looked at. Again no pattern was found but it was noted that in the case of the document type letters, 16.8% were not being copied and passed on which was significantly high than the percentage being copied and passed on - 6.6%.

3.5.6 Document Type and Filed (Figure 4, p.45)

This activity was the main one as determined by the data findings illustrated by Figure 1 on p.42. In examining the data it was noted that letters accounted for the main

document type being filed accounting for 23.4%. Figure 4 indicates the main document types being filed. 59.5 % of document types are not being filed.
It is interesting to note that faxes account for 10% of document types being filed.

Main Document Types Filed Figure 4



3.5.7 Summary

In examining the data for information processing activities two things were apparent. Firstly, due to the different number of document types - 28 in total, and the fact that the subjects received a combination of these with some receiving documents which others did not, the data was very scattered. This meant that a lot of the document types received very small scores i.e. .3%. Secondly, it became clear that in some cases a core of document types being processed could be identified. Only in one case was the variable " number remaining to be dealt with" used and this was due to the subject having been away from the office for a week. Therefore they had to deal with the mail that had arrived during that period..

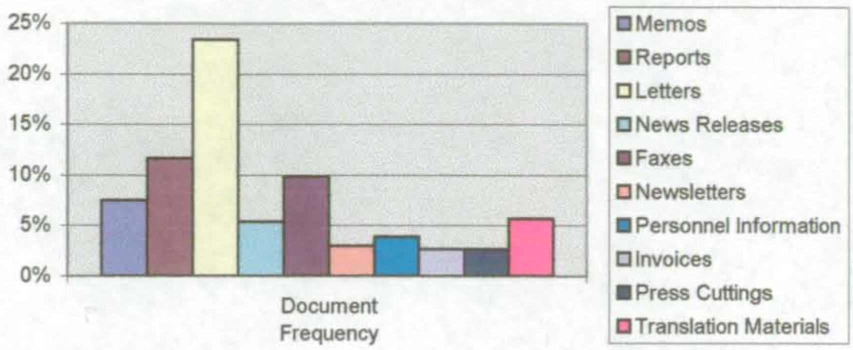
3.6 Volume & Frequency of Document Types

Having looked at information processing activities, the data was also examined in order to determine volume of information being received.

3.6.1 Frequency of Document Types (Figure 5, p.46)

The data showed that letters were the most frequently received of document types accounting for 23.4%. Figure 5 p.46indicates the frequency of document types. Only those accounting for 2% and over are shown.

Frequency of Document Types Received Figure 5

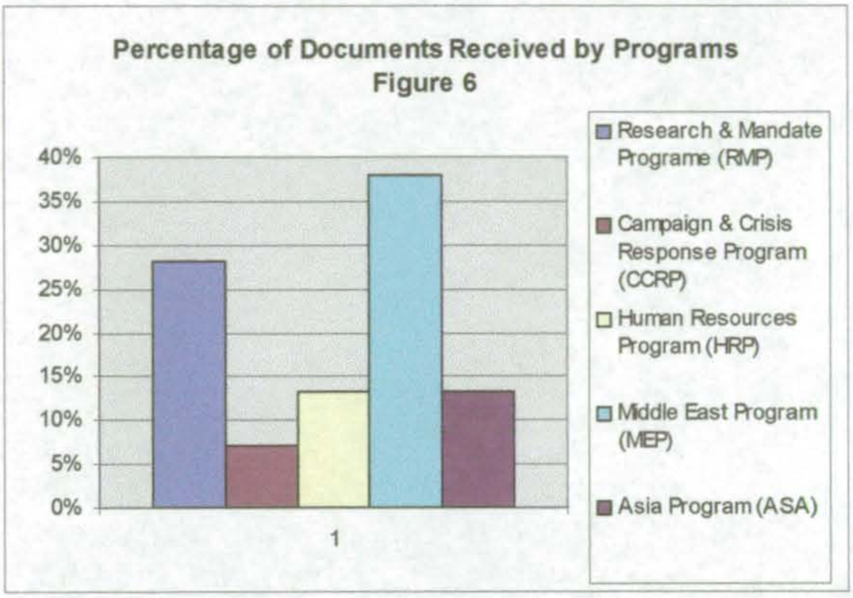


3.6.2 Volume of Document Types Being Received (Figure 6, p.47)

In examining the data to determine the amount of information being received the percentage of document types being received by each of the subjects was looked at. The data in the Figure 6, p.47 illustrates the findings. It was expected that the findings would show that the regional programmes were the research is carried out would record the highest percentage. While this was true in the case of the Middle East Program (MEP), the Asia Program (ASA) scored significantly lower than (MEP) at 13.3%. However, it could be argued that this was because the subject worked part time and if the figure was added twice it would come to 26%. The Research & Mandate Program (RMP) scored highest at 28.2%. This is one of the core activity areas of the International Secretariat (IS) so it not a surprising figure. It is also interesting to note that despite campaigning being a main area of work for the IS, the proportion of document types being received was low at 7.2%.

3.7 Document Length

In looking at the volume of information being received, it was felt necessary to examine the length of documents that were being used in the organisation. Seventy per cent of document types were in the first category of 1 to 10 pages long with 12.3% in the second category of 10 to 20 pages. The remaining percentage were scattered throughout the ranges. In terms of specific document types letters, memos and reports were in the first category with reports also occurring in the second category.



3.8 Importance of Document Types

The data was also examined with regard to the percentage of importance and usefulness of the documents received by the subjects. Interestingly 18.7% of document types received were regarded as not useful compared to 48.3% which were stated as important and 30% as useful. 2.7% had not stated the importance type of the document. In terms of specific document types; 9% of letters were regarded as not useful compared to 4% being important, faxes were the document type with the closest degree of importance with only 0.6% being regarded as not useful. It was significant that the "Weekly Mail " which is a summary of all the documents that AI has produced in that week and which is sent to all programmes in the organisation scored low in terms of importance - 0.9% and 0.3% in terms of usefulness.

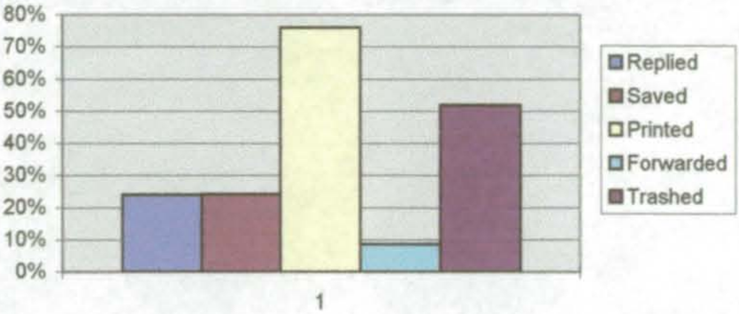
4. E-mail In-Tray Results

4.1 Information Processing Activities

Figure 7 on p.48 indicates the total percentage of each information processing activity.

The data showed that a high proportion - seventy six per cent of e-mails were printed out and fifty two per cent were trashed. A low proportion of e-mails - 8.7% were forwarded. The data was then examined with regard to document type and activity.

Information Processing Activities
Incoming e-mail Figure 7



4.1.2 Document Type & Replied

The percentage of e-mails replied to - 24% were related to queries from AI members, AI Sections and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Interestingly only 1% of internal e-mails were replied to.

4.1.3 Document Type & Saved

No significant relationship was found between these two variables. However, it could be determined that the document types that tended to be saved were memos and reports.

4.1.4 Document Type & Printed

It was evident from the data that all reports were printed out - 2.1%. Reports accounted for 2.2% in document types received. Fifty per cent of memos were also printed out. The remaining percentage was scattered with no pattern being able to be identified.

4.1.5 Document Type & Forwarded

There was no significant relationship evident between these two variables.

4.1.6 Document Type & Trashed

The data indicated that mainly memos - 43% were the main document type trashed. The All users messages accounted for 4.8% of document types trashed.

4.1.7 Summary

It was clear from the data that the two main information processing activities were trashed and printed out. The data also showed that like the hard copy processing activities a low percentage of documents were being circulated.

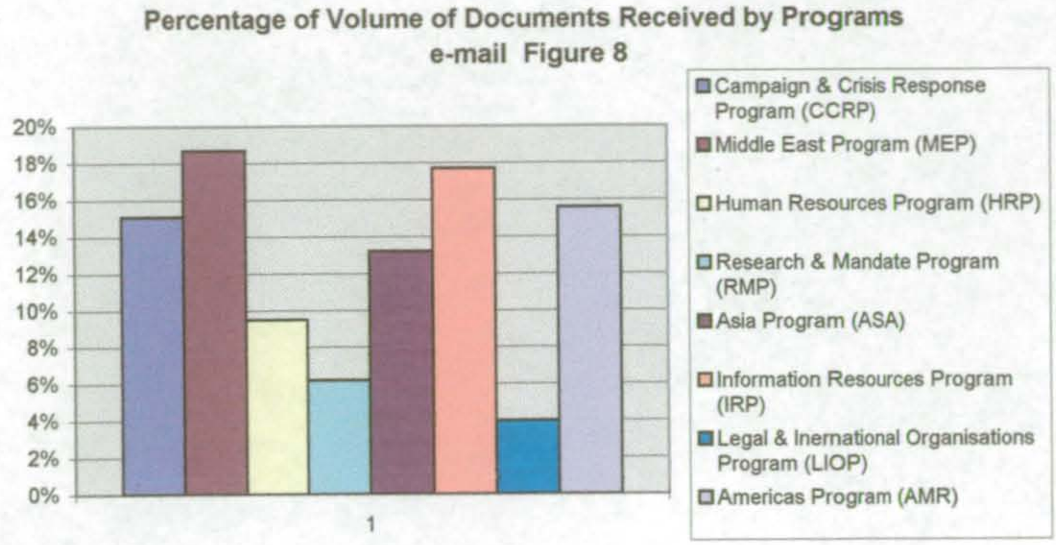
5. Volume & Frequency of Document Types e-mail

5.1 Frequency of Document Types

There were 12 document types in the e-mail in-tray chart. Of these it was clear from the data that there were four main document types being received by the subjects; memos, reports, notices, and all users messages. Memos account for seventy nine per cent of the main e-mail document type received with the other three document types accounting for 2% each. External e-mail was low at 8%. In terms of the proportion of file attachments and document linked data received, this was low. File attachments accounted for 10% and consisted mainly of word processing files being sent. Document linked data accounted for 12% and consisted of documents sent by the IT program.

5.2 Volume of Document Types Received (Figure 8, p.50)

The findings in this area were similar to those of the hard copy with the regional programs receiving the most documents. MEP received the largest amount of e-mail with 18.7%. The findings are indicated in Figure 8 on p.50



5.3 Document Type Length

The data findings in this category were similar to those of hard copy with most documents - fifty five per cent occurring in the 1to10 category, although the proportion of document types in the 20-30 range was higher at 45%. The document type which occurred most in this category were reports at 30%. The remaining 15% related to materials received in bulk.

5.4 Summary

From an examination of the data it can be seen that the findings from the e-mail in-tray are similar to those of the hard copy in-tray with certain document types being identified as being commonly received by all the subjects. In addition it is apparent that the regional programmes receive the greater proportion of document types.

6. Origin & Importance of Document Types e-mail

6.1 Origin

Data concerning the main e-mail document type - memo was examined. It was clear that seventy per cent of memos received were internal.

6.2 Importance of Document Types

In terms of correlation between the document type and its importance there was a lower percentage as compared to the hard copy. The importance and usefulness of the main document type received - memos was low - at 30%.

7 Out-Tray Results

The data processes for the out-tray exercises were the same as for the in-tray exercises.

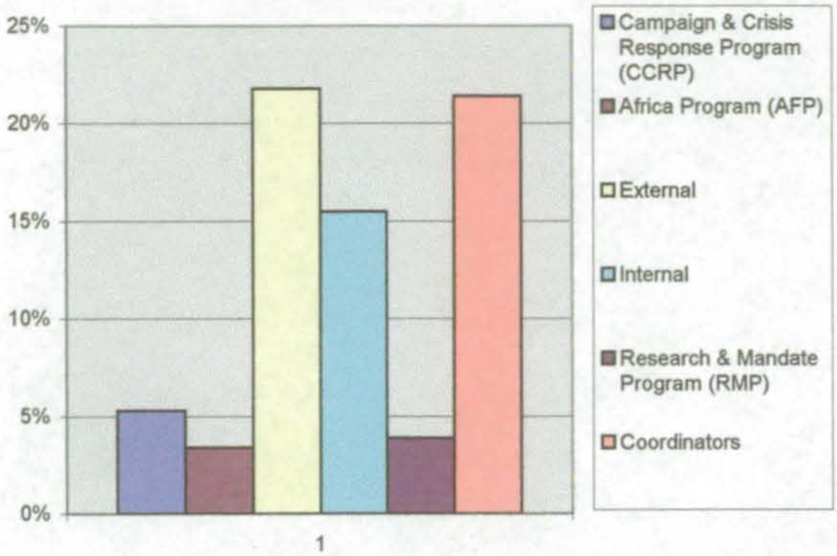
7.1 Main Document Type Sent

The main document types sent were; email; letters, memos, reports, agendas, Regional Action Network (RAN) documents, Urgent Actions (UAs), briefing, press releases, faxes, bulletins, invoices, and financial correspondence, The data showed that the main document type sent was e-mail which accounted for 41.3%. Of this 41.3% memos accounted for 14.6%. The rest of the data was scattered so no other significant pattern could be determined.

7.2 Destination of Documents Sent

The destinations of documents sent are illustrated in Figure 9 on p.52.Only those destinations which are over 3% are included. As indicated documents sent externally account for 22% which is low. This is compared to 15.5% of documents sent internally. It is important to note here that this 15.5% is in addition to those internal destinations stated by program. The 15.5% is where the specific program is not mentioned but internal is stated. In total the destination internal accounts for 78% overall. It must be remembered that internal covers not only the program at the IS but the whole Amnesty movement - other AI sections and the AI membership

Destination of Documents - Out- tray
Figure 9



Although not shown on the table above sections only accounted for 2.4% of the document destination. Coordinators who are part of the AI membership accounted for 21.4% of destinations as indicated in the table above.

7.3 Document Type Length

The data findings were similar to those already discussed with 70% of documents occurring in the category of 1-10 pages in length.

7.4 Volume of Information Sent

There was great variety in the volume of information sent by each program. This can be accounted for by the fact that on some days subjects did not send anything out due to meetings and other work activities taking place. However, it could be determined that on average six document types were sent a day with the highest being fifteen.

7.5 Summary

The most surprising aspect of the data findings for the out-tray was the amount of information sent internally and the low proportion sent externally. This will be examined in Chapter 6 p.71 together with the other findings.

Chapter 5 Results of Interviews

1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from the interviews conducted with the organisation's personnel. From the findings key issues are identified which together with the in-tray and out-tray data are then discussed in Chapter Six.

2. Sample

A sample of twelve interviewees were selected using "expert choice"(see Chapter 3 p.26) This included a member of the International Executive Committee (IEC) of whom all are volunteers.

Interviewees were sent the questions a week in advance to enable them to consider their responses. (see Appendix E for the interview schedule). They were also asked to complete the information grid (see Chapter 3, Figure 4 p.33) before the interview to assist in determining; the frequency and quantity of information and the different document types.

This also assisted the interview process by getting the interviewees to consider their information load and the processes they used in dealing with it. A copy of the project's aims was also supplied with the questions and the grid.

3. Data Collection

3.1 Problems with Data Collection

Three of the interviewees did not complete the grid prior to the interview mainly due to lack of time. This was compensated for by going through it at the beginning of the interview although it extended the interview time. In addition those that did complete the grid tended to tick rather than put a number to indicate the frequency of received document types. Again this was gone through during the interview.

Many of the interviewees found it difficult to describe how they dealt with information in terms of the handling and processing methods they used. However, with the use of probing techniques and supplementary questions this problem was overcome.

3.2 Personnel Profile

On average interviewees had worked for eight years at the IS with two years being the minimum. Job descriptions compared favourably with the responses given by interviewees. It was clear that ninety per cent of the interviewees felt that resources were insufficient to adequately deal with the increasing workload of the organisation as a whole.

The interviewees working in the research and campaigning fields all concurred that their jobs were "information intensive."[1] There was agreement that Amnesty was "clearly an information based organisation."[2]

3.3 Information Processing

3.3.1 Grid analysis

Due to the variability in the receiving of the different document types by the individuals it was not possible to do a complete statistical analysis. The nature of their job determined which document types they received. However, it was possible to determine that the most common documents that individuals received were: Urgent Actions, reports, newsletters, memos, letters, journal articles, press cuttings, policy documents, information from non governmental organisations (NGOs), e-mail, e-mail with file attachment and News Manager. The absence of Internet usage is due to the fact that at present individuals cannot access it through their work stations only via the library.

Apart from the e-mail which averaged out at 40 a day, and the use of News Manager, the quantity of other document types tended to fall into single figures. It has to be remembered that the figures were estimates. All interviewees commented that they found it difficult to indicate how much information they were receiving. Additionally those employed in research and campaigning noted that they had not estimated the amount of information dealt with when an amnesty campaign or action on their country or region was taking place. During these periods it was stated that the information flow peaked.

It was also evident that the differences in the world regions, for example in the use and availability of IT in some countries compared to others, affected the types and volume of information received. Despite receiving News Manager an electronic source of news information, fifty per cent of interviewees still subscribed to international newspapers for their particular countries and regions. However, those interviewees who used News Manager in addition to receiving hard copy newspapers, indicated that having the relevant foreign newspapers gave them that extra quote when writing a report.

Seventy per cent of the interviewees felt that there was a balance between hard copy and electronic information sources. Two of the interviewees indicated that they received more electronic information but this was due to their particular job.[3] Three of the interviewees commented that they would prefer an electronic and paper less office.[4]

Seventy per cent of interviewees preferred dealing with hard copy and commented that too much information had become electronic having previously indicated that they felt there was a balance between hard copy and electronic.

It was significant that all the filing systems were paper and little if any use was made of electronic filing systems by the organisation in general.

Those that completed the 'other sources not mentioned' tended to identify specific documents relating to their country such as U.S. Justice Department reports, phone contacts and personal contacts.

With regard to the 'other' frequency the term variables and periodic were used by the two management interviewees.

News groups was indicated by one interviewee.[5] Interestingly discussion groups and news groups generally were not mentioned despite interviewees being questioned about the content of their e-mails. One interviewee did state that she no longer subscribed as she was receiving enough information.[6]

3.3.2 Sorting of Information - Hard Copy

In terms of the sorting of information, the interviewees had developed a variety of techniques and systems. Information tended to be sorted according to; whether it came under the remit of Amnesty's mandate, if it was related to a 'live issue' i.e a particular topic or issue which was relevant at that time, or if the information was relevant to their area of work. Reports tended to be dealt with by reading the executive summary or looking at the heading and skimming to see if relevant information was contained within the document. Magazines and press articles were dealt with by looking at the headline to see whether it was relevant. Apart from the interviewees who had management responsibilities, eighty per cent of the interviewees were inclined to disregard policy documents and general internal organisational information. Five of the interviewees delegated by dividing up information such as reports and passing them onto colleagues to skim for relevant data. Two of the interviewees had a list system whereby they kept a list of what they had to read. Documents types such as letters tended to be sorted according to who they had come from. There was a common complaint that there was a lot of irrelevant information coming through that was not to do with Amnesty's work and it took a lot of time to sort through this to get to the information that was related to the areas covered by Amnesty.

With regard to the storing of hard copy information, ninety per cent of the interviewees followed the common filing system used by the organisation. Information was filed according to topic, issue or theme. In addition researchers and campaigners had their own filing systems whereby information relating to issues they were currently working on was kept by them. Once they had finished with the information it went into the central filing system. Subject F commented that one of the problems with this is;

" I know these files and I know where everything is, but when I am away the information that came in would be put somewhere else and I would not be able to find it when I came back."[7]

A similar comment was made by another interviewee on having a personal filing system.

" I have to have my own files which is not ideal but I need to have that stuff, I need to have control."[8]

Information that was not filed was either put in in-trays for dealing with later, recorded on the appropriate database, or thrown away in the case of duplicate copies.

In terms of the importance of particular sources of information, interviewees were inclined to judge information in the following manner; the author of the source, personal knowledge of a particular organisation and/or individual, if it was from an amnesty section or amnesty member.

3.3.3. Sorting of Information Electronic Sources

All the interviewees concurred that they received too much e-mail. In terms of the sorting of e-mail the following techniques were identified; interviewees read all their e-mails and then trashed irrelevant ones which tended be about internal/housekeeping issues in the form of all user messages, or being copied in on an ongoing discussion about an issue that was not relevant; others had developed more selective techniques and looked at either the title of the e-mail or the source, which determined whether it was deleted without being read, it was looked at only if it was related to their work, or a live issue they were currently working on. E-mails with file attachments which tended to be reports or briefing papers were printed out. Ninety per cent of interviewees printed out their e-mails if they were more than two pages long.
In terms of the processing of e-mails this largely depended on the IT skills of each interviewee. This also related to the confidence of the individual on their handling of electronic information. One commented:

" I feel like I am swimming in an electronic ocean." [9]

Seventy per cent of interviewees had complex sub-directories of files which restricted access of information to that particular individual. Other interviewees had no electronic files commenting that they did not have the time to sort the information into files or did not know how to.

"I don't know how its done and it would require going to the help desk for 30 minutes and I haven't got that half hour to spare." [10]

Information that was printed was eventually filed in the central filing system or circulated to colleagues. It was evident that there was variety in the 'housekeeping' of e-mail:

"I'm really bad at all that housekeeping stuff. The e-mails will stay on my screen until I have done something with them." [11]

"I haven't the time to go through my e-mails and bin ones that I don't need." [12]

Fifty per cent of the interviewees were particularly rigorous in how they dealt with their e-mails. This ranged from going through files every six months and deleting information no longer required, deleting at the end of every week, or deleting on a daily basis.

Electronic information was treated in the same way regarding the importance of particular information sources.

3.4 Relevancy of Information to Decision Making

It was found that the relevancy of information to the decision-making process was quite high with sixty per cent of information being the average quoted as relevant. Those in management stated a higher rating of eighty per cent. The minimum relevancy rating was fifty per cent given by two interviewees.

Interviewees were also asked about the relevancy of e-mail in general to their work. By contrast the average was given as fifty per cent with four of the interviewees stating that 5% of e-mails received were relevant.

"I could probably lose a day's email and maybe 5% of them would be really inconvenient to lose." [13]

Another interviewee commented:

"There is too much reliance on e-mail, its become undisciplined." [14]

All interviewees remarked that on average 100-200 e-mails would be waiting for them after a week away from the office.

Again there was a variety of responses from interviewees about their ability in handling the amount of information they received.

"I do deal with a lot of information and at times it piles up on my desk."[15]

"I am getting more information than I can adequately deal with."[16]

"I feel comfortable in that I know what I need and when I get something I know where to put it."[17]

"Personally I don't have a problem."[18]

"Its piling up - the non-processed stuff, waiting to be filed, waiting to be read. Therefore you haven't got stuff in the filing system so you don't know what's come in. It sits in piles around the room and you think oh my god."[19]

Despite stating that they could not handle the amount of information, those interviewees were then able to describe their coping mechanisms. It was emphasised throughout by all interviewees that once you knew what you were looking for and were focused that was the main way to stay on top of the information being received.

" You have to know what your priorities are and know what you are looking for. You have to be focused."[20]

A variety of techniques had been developed by the interviewees to cope with the information loads. These included: being highly selective in the types of information that were used, not going to meetings apart from team ones as this avoided receiving any more information, not using News Manager, and prioritising. Miller [21] outlines several different responses to information overload. It could be argued that two of those were used by the interviewees; filtering - neglecting to process certain types of information according to some scheme of priorities [22]and escaping from the task[23] - used by one interviewee in the form of not attending meetings. In using a filtering mechanism it should be argued that those interviewees are actually adapting to the situation.

The researchers and campaigners talked of the information flow peaking when a campaign on their country or region was coming up. This did enable one campaigner to become more focused on how she dealt with information.

It was evident that those that had particular defined systems were less likely to be having problems with information. This was particularly the case with those working in management although this did apply to some of the other interviewees.

"I cope with it by being pretty rigorous about what I read and what I keep. If I kept everything and read everything I would be swamped." [24]

"The way I tend to view it is that not so much that there is an unreasonable amount but I read what I need to know." [25]

"If you have a central filing system, you have electronic filing and if you have a reasonable system of bringing forward things and dealing with them, then you don't have a big pile up. [26]

All interviewees concurred that you had to stay on top of things in order to be able to deal effectively with the information received. In addition each stated that they either felt guilty or worried about missing something with the information that they did not look at.

The interviewee who had the most rigorous and organised information system was the management committee member who was a volunteer. This it can be argued is due to the fact that the individual is in full time employment and more significantly, does not have office space, all information having to be kept at home.

3.5 Volume of Information

There was general agreement by all the interviewees that they needed a large amount of information to be able to perform their jobs effectively.

"As a manager its inevitable. You need to keep up to date with the output of the organisation, what is going on internally and externally. You need that overview."[27]

"Yes. My job involves a lot of complex issues in regional and international contexts."[28]
"Yes because you have to be accurate."[29]

The two interviewees with management responsibilities were the only interviewees to note that they were happy not to receive certain documents because they know they could request them from the central filing system. By contrast ninety per cent of the interviewees felt they had to have access to information all the time.

In terms of receiving less information all interviewees concurred that they would like to receive less e-mail particularly internal and all users messages. Generally it was felt that it would depend what type of information they received less of. Additionally all interviewees expressed a desire to receive less information but of a higher quality.

3.6 Exchange of Information

It was evident that with one exception little exchange took place between the programs. Any exchange of information between the programs was done by e-mail to save time. Although two interviewees preferred face to face communication and did this when possible. No central system of sharing information within the building was apparent apart from the all users e-mail messages which tended to be about domestic/computer issues.

The comment that there was "no time" and that the current organisational culture of working in isolation were frequently commented on by the interviewees. Lack of organisational structures for the sharing of information was also given.

"Teams have become very insular."[30]
"I would share information if relevant but there is no system."[31]
"We have tried but the problem is that there are no mechanisms for doing this."[32]

"I have no information to share."[33]

One of the interviewee stated that the lack of exchanged information had led to embarrassing situations:

"AI has been referred to in the press and I know nothing about it. You look pretty stupid if as a member of the Senior Management Team you are out somewhere and someone refers to it and you know nothing about it."[34]

Sharing of information between colleagues within the programmes ranged from e-mails, memos, common in-trays and team meetings. There was no common system of exchanging information within the teams, each having their own system.

"There isn't any particular kind of system in our team. We don't have team meetings which makes it quite awkward sometimes because sometimes I don't know what's going on. We are too busy to have team meetings."[35]

"There is a memo system with names on it that gets circulated with any information that needs to be shared."[36]

3.7 Organisational Handling of Information

Generally it was agreed that the IS handled information well. The inevitability of having to deal with a lot of information due to the nature of the work and the fact that it was a global organisation with an emphasis on democratic decision-making structures was frequently commented on.

"The result of creating wider participation is the need for more information and the sharing of that information."[37]

Three interviewees commented that there was too much hard copy and more use should be made of electronic information. They felt that IT was under utilised in the organisation.

3.8 Suggestion to Improve Information Handling

A range of suggestions were made which can be summarised as follows:

- Training in information handling. All interviewees raised the issue of training in this area.
- An e-mail policy to enable a more disciplined approach to its use within the building.
- An improved central library system to enable better exchange of information
- Filtering systems within the e-mail to reduce certain types of e-mail being received.
- Guidelines and circulation lists to ensure the flow of relevant information to the appropriate individuals.

4. Key Issues Raised

4.1 Volume of Information

It was clear that all the interviewees dealt with large amounts of information particularly in the research and campaigning sectors. Comparing the volume of hard copy information with electronic information there was a balance although to a certain extent it depended on the individual's job. Electronic means of sending information had led to a drop in the number of letters received by some programs. On the other hand those individuals that worked on countries where electronic information sources were not readily available continued to receive hard copy.

With regard to the volume of external information this is not controllable and there was agreement by the interviewees that this was expected to increase due to external factors. By contrast all interviewees felt there could be more control on the volume of internal information that was received. All concurred that a lot of internal information was too lengthy and that the organisation was not good at summarising its internal information particularly in relation to policy documents. The issue of e-mail was seen as contributing to the high volume of internal information. People tended to be copied in on discussions that were not relevant to them and the volume of the all - users messages received was felt to be disproportionately high. There was also a feeling that an over reliance on e-mail in the building had contributed to the high volume of e-mails being received. Hence many of the interviewees suggested an internal e-mail policy for the organisation which they saw as a possible solution to the problem.

Only one interviewee indicated that she felt overwhelmed by the information that she was receiving and that the quantity of information was effecting how she did her job.

Both interviewees with management responsibilities complained of a lack of external information. They defined external information as being on a topic or issue they were interested in such as articles on management and training.

4.2 Relevancy of Information

As stated previously this rated quite high with a lower average for the electronic information being received. It was apparent that the culture of the organisation is such that there is an attitude that it is better to send an individual information whether it is relevant or not rather than get into trouble for not informing a person about something. This should also be seen in the context of an absence of information on the details of the circulation of documents within the building, there being therefore, no indication of what information programs and individuals within those programs would like to receive.

4.3 Exchange of Information

The responses given by interviewees indicated little exchange of information between programs and the insular nature of the organisation. Seventy per cent of interviewees had attempted to exchange information but stated there were no mechanisms for doing this properly. The other factor of not having the time to do so was also given. This was a common theme throughout the interviews. Personnel had no time to do things apart from their work. There was no internal news sheet or in house publication. Reference was made to a previous news sheet that was produced weekly giving details of what each program had done. This had stopped due to the fact no one was willing to be editor and a culture of non cooperation had developed during the restructuring of the organisation which was also remarked on by the interviewees.

It was also clear that with the lack of exchange of information there was no facility for the sharing of good practice. Eighty per cent of the interviewees concurred that they were working on issues within their region that had been successfully dealt with by other regional programs. Yet there was no mechanism for sharing this. Exchange of information within programs was markedly better although one program did not have team meetings choosing to e-mail each other when necessary instead.

4.4 Information Skills & Lack of Systems

The differences in those interviewees who stated they had no problems in dealing with information and those that did was marked. It was significant that those who dealt with their information load had organised systems and methods. Those interviewees whose office systems were not as well organised complained that they were suffering from having too much information to deal with. This illustrated both the diversity in information handling and the fact that there were no standard systems for people to operate to apart from the filing systems. This pattern was also repeated in the handling of electronic information where there were also marked differences in how people sorted their e-mail.

Notably all the interviewees had learnt from experience how to handle information which could to some extent explain the differences in how individuals handled information. All expressed the need for training in handling information but emphasised that the training should be practical based and, be carried out by someone who was familiar with the information handled by the organisation

It was also recognised that within the organisation, issues such as filing and administration are seen by many as unnecessary bureaucracy. It is felt that the emphasis should be on the campaigning and the action work without the realisation that by doing the bureaucratic work a lot of time could be saved.

4.5 Role of Information Officers

The issue of the role of the information officers who were attached to each regional program but based in the information resources program was raised in the interviews by the interviewer. This was done because it was significant that when discussing information handling and processing there was no mention of the information officers. It was found that there was confusion over their role with most of the regional programs not using them for fear of receiving more information. Only one regional program out of the four used their information officer who through the use of IT was selecting and disseminating relevant regional information to them. It was not apparent to the other regional program teams that their information officer could to some extent assist in helping them to handle their information. Their role was seen mainly to do with organising relevant magazine subscriptions.

5 Conclusions

Firstly it is apparent that those interviewed are not suffering from information overload with the exception of one interviewee however, they may have problems in dealing with it. There is variety in the amount of information being dealt with due to the different nature of each program in the organisation. It is clear however, that all deal with large amounts of information due to the nature of the work and the organisation's credibility. Individuals are more likely to send information to Amnesty International (AI) due to the reputation and high profile of the organisation.

It is also clear that like many other voluntary campaigning organisations, resources are stretched but the workload is increasing. As a result all of the individuals are 'overworked'; a word that many of them used during the interviews. It could therefore be argued that staff may feel they are suffering from information overload when in fact it is the volume of work needing to be done set against insufficient resources that leads to this perception.

Secondly, those who indicated that they were having problems with information handling did not have adequate office systems in place. Systems tended to be haphazard and other resources were not being fully utilised.

It is apparent that the absence of an in-house training programme on information skills and handling is contributing to the lack of established information management systems.

Thirdly, the lack of exchange of information is adding to the problem overall because better communication between the programs would enhance the information flow within the building. There is no doubt that the organisational culture and the tendency to work in isolation within individual programs is contributing to this problem. Additionally, no mechanisms are in place to aid an information flow within the organisation.

Fourthly, the absence of an established information flow in the organisation - details of the types of information that are being circulated to named individuals is both creating an assumption that individuals are getting the relevant information and encouraging the tendency to hoard information within your particular program.

Fifthly, the over reliance one-mail is adding to the volume of internal information being circulated. It is clear that an undisciplined approach to e-mail is prevalent within the organisation. The main reason being that e-mailing saves a lot of time.

Finally, the relationship of information officers to their allocated regional program needs to be examined. The diversity in how each one works is to some extent explained by the differences in the world regions that are covered. However, the differences between how each information officer works is, it can be argued, contributing to the unorganised systems that some of the individuals are working to. This is because a more defined role and better knowledge of what the information officer could do, could contribute to better systems being established and improved management of information.

References

[1] Interview: Subject A, 2nd June 1998. 10.00am. International Secretariat (IS).
Interview: Subject B, 2nd June 1998. 11.00am.(IS).
Interview: Subject C, 2nd June 1998 2.00pm. (IS).
Interview Subject D, 2nd June 1998 3.00pm. (IS).

[2] Interview: Subject A, 2nd June 1998. 10.00am. (IS).

[3] Interview: Subject B, 2nd June 1998. 11.00am (IS).

[4]Interview: Subject D, 2nd June 1998. 3.00pm. (IS).
Interview: Subject F 18th June 1998. 10.00am. (IS).
Interview: Subject G 18th June 1998 11.00am. (IS).

[5] Interview: Subject H 18th June 1998 12.00pm (IS).

[6] Interview: Subject I 18th June 1998 2.00pm (IS).

[7] Interview: Subject A 2nd June 1998 10.00am (IS).

[8] Interview: Subject B 2nd June 1998. 11.00am (IS).

[9] Interview: Subject C 2nd June 1998. 2.00pm (IS).

[10] Interview: Subject H 18th June 12.00pm (IS).

[11] Interview: Subject C 2nd June 1998 2.00pm (IS).

[12] Interview: Subject E 2nd June 1998 4.00pm (IS).

[13] Interview: Subject I 18th June 1998 2.00pm (IS).

[14] Interview: Subject A 2nd June 1998 10.00am (IS).

[15] Interview: Subject B 2nd June 1998 11.00am (IS).

[16] Interview: Subject E 2nd June 1998 4.00pm (IS).

[17] Interview: Subject K 19th June 11.00am (IS).

[18] Interview: Subject L 19th June 2.00pm (IS).

[19] Interview: Subject E 2nd June 1998 4.00pm (IS).

[20] Interview: Subject D 2nd June 1998. 3.00pm (IS)

[21] **Miller. J.** 'Living Systems; The Organisation'. *Behavioural Science* **17** p.120

[22] *Ibid., p.121*

[23] *Ibid*

[24] Interview: Subject J 18th June 1998. 3.00pm (IS).

[25] Interview: Subject K 19th June 1998 11.00am (IS).

[26] Interview: Subject G 18th June 11.00am (IS).

[27] Interview: Subject K 19th June 1998 11.00am (IS).

[28] Interview: Subject B 2nd June 1998 11.00am (IS).

[29] Interview: Subject A 2nd June 1998 10.00am (IS).

[30] Interview: Subject L 19th June 1998 2.00pm (IS).

[31] Interview: Subject B 2nd June 1998 11.00am (IS).

[32] Interview: Subject H 18th June 12.00pm (IS).

[33] Interview: Subject B 2nd June 11.00am (IS).

[34]Interview:Subject K 19th June 1998 11.00am (IS).

[35] Interview: Subject E 2nd June 1998 4.00pm. (IS).

[36] Interview: Subject L 19th June 1998 2.00pm (IS).

[37] Interview: Subject J 18th June 1998 3.00pm (IS)

Chapter 6 Discussion

1. Introduction

The research data suggested that information overload as such is not prevalent in the organisation. However, a high volume of information is dealt with. This chapter discusses the data findings and examines them in the context of the available literature on information overload together with the author's definition. (See. Chapter 3 pp.21-22.).

2. Volume & Frequency of Information

2.1 Regional Programs

The data collected from the in-tray and out-tray analysis showed that the regional programs - Middle East Program (MEP), Americas Program (AMR) and the Asia Program (ASA) received the highest volume of document types in terms of both hard and electronic copy. This is hardly surprising given the nature of their work and the fact these programs are carrying out the main core of Amnesty's work. The job descriptions of the campaigners and researchers also suggest a high level of information work:

> " To monitor, investigate and analyse human rights conditions…."[1].
> " To provide the IS and relevant AI structures with expert and authoritative advice ……………to prepare materials both for internal and external use including briefings, reports, letters….."[2]

This finding is consistent with the study by Shook & Rice[3]who showed that there was a relationship between an individual's job category, and volume of information processing.

Although these programs are experiencing the greater volume of information, only one commented that the amount of information she had to deal with was affecting her work (See Chapter 5, p.64.). It can therefore be argued that the author's definition of information overload: - "the amount of information being received and processed is such that the individual is no longer able to effectively meet their work objectives," does not apply to the current work environments of the interviewees. No personnel actually stated that they were unable to do their work because of the amount of information they were receiving and having to process.

The subjects in the regional programs spoke of information coming in "peaks and troughs"(see Chapter 5, pp.55 & 60) particularly when country campaigns in their particular region were running. In addition Amnesty International (AI) is a highly reactive organisation, responding to human rights crisis as they happen. Therefore, the external environment can be a major determinant on the level of information flow and the appropriate systems need to be in place to reflect this.

As referred to in Chapter 3, p.21, the professional literature on information overload talks of information overload occurring when "information outputs are too excessive to be processed". The research data did not record significant examples of this in the sense that it only featured in one case.. This can be illustrated by the following: with regard to the in-tray analysis no one had any e-mails remaining to be dealt with apart from one subject who had returned from holiday. It is evident that information via e-mail is being processed; from interview responses there was only minor evidence of some information not being processed effectively , this was indicated by the subject who had stated that she could no longer cope with the information load.

2.2 Incidence of Information Overload

The incident of information overload which was being experienced by one of the subjects in the sample is worth examining even though it appears to be an isolated case. The regional program where the subject is based is a particularly busy one which "works differently to the rest of the regional programs because of the size of the region."[4]. It was this regional program where no team meetings took place. The subject repeatedly stated during the interview that she could not cope. Yet it was interesting to note that when a campaign came up and the volume of information was even higher, this actually aided her in her work as she could focus on the information relevant to that particular campaign and ignore everything else. This concurs with those in the organisation who stated that information was not a problem "if you knew what you were looking for."(see Chapter 5, p.59) This is to some extent confirmed in the literature by Rudd & Rudd [5] and Simpson & Prusak [6]who argue that information overload can actually enhance the quantity of information processed. Alternatively the view of Miller [7]can be applied to the situation and it can be argued that what is actually taking place is the "filtering process" [8] a response to information overload in which the individual "neglects to process certain types of information according to some scheme of priorities.[9] It could be argued that this is a type of information processing that is not necessarily a response to information overload but, a mechanism for selecting relevant information. This incidence of information overload illustrates not only the importance of having effective information skills but; having an awareness of the mechanisms needed to avoid information overload. Therefore recognising the ways in which information processing adds value to the information.

2.3 Information Flow

When referring to information flow, one is really talking about the channels of communication that are used to pass information around the organisation. In examining the data it is evident that e-mail is the main form of communication used internally. In determining the type of information flow it can be seen that horizontal communication that is communication between colleagues is the most frequent. This can be identified by the in-tray and out-tray in which the origin and destination of document types was predominately internal and with colleagues rather than management. It is significant that there appears to be an absence of downward or upward communication. However, the literature [10] confirms that horizontal communication is the most common type of communication flow found in organisations. It could be argued that the perception of information overload could be due to the amount of internal information that is being transmitted.

In comparison the interview findings show that there is a lack of internal communication between programs so there appears to be a contradiction in the research data. However, one could argue that this could be due to the form and content that internal communication currently takes. There is a low figure in the in-tray data for the passing on of information - 21%.(see Chapter 4,p.42) It must also be remembered that the term "internal" is global and applies to all Amnesty International (AI) structures - Sections, Regional Offices, and the membership. Despite the fact that the research did not include looking at the content of the information being transmitted and received, it was possible to discern, through the interviews, that there was an absence of effective internal communication mechanisms. An information audit would give a more appropriate picture of the content of information being circulated.

The external flow of information given as 22% as evidenced in the out-tray data appears to be low.(see Chapter 4, Figure 9,p.52). However, it must be remembered that this was done in a one week period so is not necessarily typical of the volume of external information being sent. In examining further the out-tray data of one of the subjects who worked in the Media & Audio Visual Program (MAV) their external output was seen to be high with a total of twenty five press releases produced. Overall it could be stated that with 22% of information being sent classed as external with only seven subjects participating it can still be regarded as high

3. Organisational Factors

In referring to the channels of communication that are used for information flow in an organisation it is also necessary to look at the organisational structures that support the communication flows This is particularly relevant in the case of information overload where it could be argued the organisational structures are at fault. In addition it has been stated that the way information is managed and used is very much a product of the culture and management style of the organisation. [11]

3.1 Organisational Structure

The matrix structure of the International Secretariat means an absence of the hierarchy commonly found in organisations which Rogers and Rogers[12] argue can "restrict the accessibility of receivers to information sources and therefore help to deal with the problem of information overload."[13] Such a structure was implemented by the management of the International Secretariat (IS) to relax hierarchical control and increase participation in decision making.[14] This in turn has led to an increase in the span of control by programs particularly the regional programs. Hence the comments made by the interview subject on the sheer size of her regional program. With such a non rigid or clear organisational structure and the absence of hierarchical systems there is less opportunity to condense the information. This taken together with the complex structure of the International Secretariat can be seen to be contributing to the high volume of internal communication.. Freer communication flows which are often the result of a matrix structure imply no restriction on the flow of information.

However, it should also be pointed out that the matrix structure also works in terms of who is sending and receiving information. It was noticeable in the data that no communication was received directly from the Secretary General - the Director of the organisation. Nor was a significant amount of communication received from Program Directors. One of the main concepts behind the matrix structure is to enable information to bypass the Chief Executive or Director of the organisation.[15] The lack of information received from Program Directors also fits in with the change to more participatory decision making by staff.[16] The disadvantage of this is of course that staff may not be receiving much communication from senior management about what is happening in the organisation. This is in fact illustrated by the comments made about the sharing of information. (See Chapter 5, p.61,& p.64).

3.2 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture has been referred to as "the sets of shared values and beliefs which are themselves articulated by participants in the organisation by the from of shared meanings and understandings."[17] Gilchrist argues that organisational culture can have a direct impact on the organisation and its information management.[18] The data findings in this study do reflect the culture of the organisation in the following way. Amnesty is traditionally a research organisation and the fact that a high proportion of information is retained together with the lack of an effective information flow between programs is indicative of the way that many research and development organisation have worked.[19] There is also the issue of, whether due to the volume of information being received, the editing and selecting of information in effect, results in the subject getting closer to their subject area and therefore becoming more detached from their colleagues.

Responses made during the interviews to having organised systems for the handling and processing of information, implied that three of the subjects saw the administration side of their work as important as the actual practical or human rights area of the job. In addition all remarked on the lack of career development at Amnesty although they were not asked about this in the interview process. This indicates what is commonly found in voluntary sector organisations[20], the tension between the need for formal organisation and support systems on one hand and the needs of the staff to preserve both autonomy and personal development. This was confirmed by a senior Management member who stated that "while everyone will say having such and such a policy is a good idea, when it comes down to it, everyone will then say they will not be adhering to a policy because they have a right not to.[21] This could be a contributory factor in why there are few standard systems for staff to follow in regard to information handling and processing.

Handy [22]would term this a "person culture"[23] where the individual is the central point and the organisation exists only to serve and assist the individuals within it. This also fits in with the self managing team concept which is in operation at Amnesty. Hence any change in information systems will necessitate a change in culture. This should also be seen in regard to what Handy terms the "task culture" [24] where the individual has a high degree of control over their work and any changes over day to day working or procedures cannot be made without disturbing the cultural norms.[25]

4. Information Behaviour

The main factor that emerged from the research data on information behaviour was the role that experience played in information handling. All interviewees stated that they had read everything when they first commenced their job and how hard they had found handling the volume of information. All commented that it was through experience that they had learnt what to look for and become selective. One can state that with experience they had become familiar with their information environment and the information needs and priorities of their jobs. Though one could argue against this is a mechanism to cope with information overload as personnel are selecting information according to priorities. However, it was clear from the data that personnel were also selecting information based on source, reliability, relevance and quality.

It was significant that the two interview subjects from the management team - one a volunteer and member of the International Executive Committee (IEC) and the other a member of the Senior Management Team had a rigorous attitude to information management. Unlike the other ten subjects they did not keep documents they knew were maintained elsewhere in the organisation and could therefore get a copy of. The other interview subjects felt the need to have copies of everything despite its availability elsewhere in the organisation.

The high retention rate shown in the in-tray data - hard copy through both filing activities, and retained, demonstrates the research nature of the organisation, the need to hold onto information whether or not it is relevant. It also illustrates the fact that electronic media is not yet regarded as a reliable source in legal terms by users. There is still a preference for paper. There is also the inherent feeling stated by the interview subjects that the nature of their job and the high credibility of the organisation meant that all information should be looked at. The fact that a low proportion of information is being actioned further illustrates this.

Interestingly these data are reversed in the case of information behaviour relating to e-mail in the sense that half are being trashed and only 20% are being saved. The seventy six per cent of e-mails being printed out indicates that these are being used for some purposes although it was not clear for what because of the limitations of the methodology utilised. However as with the hard copy in-tray a low proportion - 8.7% are being forwarded.

5 Summary

The research data has demonstrated that as such information overload is not significantly evident within the sample chosen for the purpose of this study. However, it has been shown that a variety of factors are influencing how information is being managed, handled and processed in the organisation. Having identified these it is now possible to make recommendations for the organisation to adopt.

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[8] *Ibid.*

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[24] *Ibid.,* p.188.

[25] *Ibid.,*p.189.

Chapter 7 Recommendations

1. Introduction

Having completed the research methodologies and analysed the findings, recommendations can now be made with reference to the areas of information management, handling and processing. These recommendations are made for the organisation to consider implementing. It is not possible to suggest a definitive time scale for implementing these recommendations because, some operational changes will be dependent on what resources and personnel are available. These decisions will obviously have to be taken at senior management level.

2. Recommendations

2.1 An information audit of the International Secretariat (IS) should be conducted by the Information Resource Program (IRP).

An audit will enable the International Secretariat (IS) to identify both the internal sources of data available and the external sources of data required. This approach would show how these two interrelate by identifying the information flow. An information flow would then be established that identifies the origin and destination of information types. This in turn would create a greater awareness in the organisation of:

- what information is available - particularly within each program
- where it is held
- how to match information to need

In addition it would identify the information needs of staff in each program.
The audit should also lead to the establishment of procedures such as circulation lists for documents.

2.2 Training should be provided for staff on information handling and processing. This should be included where possible in the Induction Program for new staff as well as be offered to existing staff. The training should be a combination of in house and consultancy provided training.

2.3 Internal communication mechanisms need to be set up to ensure better and more effective communication between personnel and programs. This should include the relaunch of an in-house bulletin. Organisational responsibility for producing this needs to be clearly defined and communicated internally. Obviously this will have cost/benefit and personnel time implications.

2.4 In addition to the above, a system should be set up which enables the sharing of good practice by the research and campaign programs.

2.5 The International Secretariat's (IS) existing policy on the use of e-mail should be reviewed and publicised in order to familiarise personnel in appropriate usages of the e-mail system. One outcome of this process might be a reduction in frequency of e-mail usage and a corresponding reduction in overall volume of e-mails sent and received. This is highlighted in the data in which many personnel commented on being inappropriately involved in e-mail discussions that were not relevant to them or their work.

2.6 The role of the Information Resource Program (IRP) should be reassessed to provide a range of services to selected personnel. One example of this would be the piloting of a current awareness service.

2.7 The role of the Library and Information Officers within the Information Information Resource Program (IRP) needs to be reviewed. Data collected in the research findings indicates that there are differences in the role of each and how they are utilised by the various programs in the organisation. While it should be acknowledged that there is a role for a diversity of approaches within the regional programs, some standardisation of tasks undertaken would aid the information management process.

2.8 A monitoring and review system should be established to ensure that the mechanisms and processes in place are effective and meet the requirements of both the organisation and personnel. Review and monitoring should be done on a yearly basis.

3. Summary

Some of the recommendations made as a result of this study involve the International Secretariat (IS) in examing and reviewing the systems and processes which are currently in operation. However, by examining the systems and processes which are the channels for communicating and transmitting information, it will be possible to identify appropriate systems which will enable the organisation to deal more effectively with the handling and processing of information. A thorough implementation of these recommendations will enable the International Secretariat (IS)to address the existing deficiencies which have been identified in the study.

The implementation of those recommendations, which refer to internal communications, will require a shift in the cultural pattern in the organisation to enable a more effective exchange of information. A change in the organisation's culture is a difficult process to achieve, although it has been shown that "harnessing the power of organisational culture can promote effective information flows across the organisation." (1) Clearly any organisation which embarks on a significant change to its corporate culture or its operational practices needs to do so sensitively and involve personnel in all aspects of any change process. Emphasis should be placed on the positive benefits for personnel.

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Chapter 8 Conclusion

The purpose of this research project has been to examine whether a major international voluntary organisation has experienced information overload, and the information behaviour of personnel within the agency. Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies - an in-tray and out-tray exercise and interviews with personnel examined the areas of volume and frequency of information and analysed the information behaviour of personnel in the organisation. As a result of this assessment it is possible to categorically determine that there was no evidence of information overload within the International Secretariat (IS) as defined in the professional literature referred to in Chapter 3 pp.21-22 and as defined by the author on p.21 .It must be stated that the limited resources of the organisation taken with the coverage of work that the International Secretariat carries out is a contributory factor in the large volume of information that personnel in the organisation have to deal with.

However, because Amnesty International (AI) is an international organisation with a highly democratised membership and has adopted a regional organisational structure, it is inevitable that this necessitates a large volume of information from a range of sources and in a variety of formats. The research findings from this study indicate that the organisation's existing systems and processes are not appropriate to deal effectively with the increasing amounts and new forms of information. Furthermore it is evident that personnel in the organisation require a high level of skill in information handling processing to enable effective information management. Personnel profiles of existing staff demonstrated varying degrees of information handling and processing skills.

"Information Overload" is a term which is frequently used by organisations, both commercial and non-commercial and individuals, to describe their information environments. It is a truism of the professional literature that as technology becomes more advanced the information available to users will become greater. As this study has shown it is vital for the organisation to have effective systems and processes in order to deal effectively with information and utilise fully the different types of information that are available. The isolated case of information overload found could easily become the norm if this does not happen. The necessary counterpart to this is ensuring that an organisation's personnel have the necessary information management skills for this new environment.

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Appendix A

Mission Statement International Secretariat

The mission of the International Secretariat (IS) is to support the membership by designing, coordinating and monitoring action at the international level to carry out AI's mandate and objectives. The IS provides professional expertise and support to:

- enable the movement to expose human rights violations, by researching and reporting the facts;

- enable the movement to act on behalf of victims, by recommending case, country and theme strategies;

- enable the movement to work to prevent human rights violations, by designing strategies and techniques for the promotion of human rights awareness, international standards and practical safeguards;

- enable the movement, through collaboration with other organisations, to contribute to the development of the broader human rights movement, by devising appropriate strategies and coordinating their implementation;

- enable the International Council Meeting , International Executive Committee and other membership bodies to monitor the work of the movement and to make decisions, by providing them with information, advice and administrative support;

- enable the movement to conduct the day-to-day work across countries and regions in a coordinated way and take direct action at the international level when appropriate.

Appendix B
An International Information Management Strategy for Amnesty International (AI)

1.0 Introduction and Definitions

1.1 Introduction

Information is the key resource for Amnesty International. It is the main tool we use to oppose human rights violations. The task of managing information, in all its forms, is fundamental to the success of Amnesty International; if we do not manage information to the highest standards, then the organisation will fail in its goals. This strategy aims to define the key principles that underpin information management in Amnesty International, and to set a direction for information management which will further the overall goals of Amnesty International.

1.2 Definition of Information Management

Information Management is the acquisition, organisation, retrieval, communication and dissemination of information within the Amnesty International movement. The information may be in various formats - digital, image, paper. It includes all information that is important to Amnesty International: information on victims and violations; financial information; information about Amnesty International itself, its structures, its membership, and its effectiveness and performance; country information; and information about the cultural, social, political, economic and technological environment in which AI works.

1.3 Mission Statement for Information Management

The mission of Information Management is to contribute to the human rights work of Amnesty International by acquiring, organising, retrieving and communicating relevant information within the Movement in an effective, appropriate and timely way, based on the needs of the members and staff of the Movement.

1.4 Definition of Information Management Strategy

The information management strategy for Amnesty International identifies strategic aims for information management and the principles which underpin them. These aims are linked to the long-term organisational objectives, and define where information management adds value. The strategy will act as a map for the assigning resources, and will guide decisions. Sections, the IS and other structures will follow this strategy, and will develop (as appropriate) their own more detailed versions to operationalise the strategy within their own circumstances. An information management strategy flows from the basic principles underlying information management, which include quality standards and the values of the organisation. The strategy will define targets to be achieved within a specific time period. Progress will be measured against these targets on a regular basis.

1.5 Scope of the Information Management Strategy

The information management strategy will deal only with information internal to AI-information that has been accrued from outside or produced inside, and which is used (managed) within the organisation (stored, retrieved, processed, packaged and communicated as appropriate). It will complement other policies and strategies, such as the Media and Publication Strategies, which deal with the flow of information across the boundaries of AI to the outside world.

1.6 Benefits - Why do we need an Information Management Strategy?

An information management strategy will:

- Be a formal expression of our information management objectives and priorities, to guide future planning and decision-making;
- Ensure maximum added value to organisational objectives from Information management;
- Highlight the importance of information management in the Movement;
- Facilitate effective deconcentration and decentralisation;
- Ensure accountability for those who are responsible for information management;
- Be a basis for testing what we do now for relevancy and appropriateness;
- Ensure we have the skills and knowledge to manage the information and technology;
- Present information management in terms other than purely technological;

- Ensure that IT investment is compatible with overall information management aims;
- Be a tool for comparing what we do in AI to what is happening in the outside world, in other similar/dissimilar organisations;
- Ensure that parts of AI are not disadvantaged in access to information due to lack of access to technology;
- Provide a means of monitoring information activities, which will ensure continuing relevancy and change in response to changing needs/environment;
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of owners and users of information;
- Identify overlaps and duplications, with potential cost savings;
- Act as a guide for decision makers to make informed strategic and resource decisions;
- Enhance our effectiveness to protect victims and expose human rights violations;

1.7 What happens if we do not have an Information Management Strategy?

Not having an Information Management Strategy will:

- Result in different parts of the Movement being unable to communicate and exchange information;
- Greatly reduce the effectiveness of deconcentration and decentralisation;
- Lead to an inability to filter the relevant information from the irrelevant;
- Cause information overload;
- Disadvantage parts of the movement from accessing information;
- Leave members and staff without the skills and knowledge to exploit the potential of information technology;
- Leave Amnesty International behind in terms of investment in information management;
- Reduce massively our effectiveness to protect victims and expose human rights violations;
- Lead to disillusionment with IT;
- Result in missed opportunities for innovation and achievements;

1.8 Relationship of Information Management to the Mission and Long Term Objectives of Amnesty International

The Information Management strategy must link closely to the Long Term Objectives(LTOs), and be compatible with them, in order to be relevant and effective. In Amnesty International's Mission (1995 Ljubljana Plan, POL50/07/95), "accurate and timely information" is explicitly mentioned; and information management is key to many of the LTOs.

2.0 Principles of Information Management in Amnesty International

Underpinning information management are principles - our information policy - which reflect the values and aims of Amnesty International. Information management in Amnesty International will:

- Contribute significantly to the pursuit of Amnesty International's objectives;
- Conform to the general values of the organisation;
- Achieve the highest standards of accuracy;
- Deliver information in a timely way;
- Deliver information relevant to the purpose for which it is to be required;
- Deliver information in the appropriate format to suit the purpose for which it is required;
- Present information in a clear and understandable way;
- Present information in straightforward language which aids communication and translation;
- Adhere to standards of security which protect sources and individuals;
- Promote sharing of information within the Amnesty International Movement;
- Minimise costs and unnecessary duplication;
- Protect the health and safety of members and staff;
- Maximise the return on resources invested in it;
- Contribute to effective work organisation;
- Make full use of the appropriate technology available;
- Ensure that no part of the Amnesty International Movement is excluded from access to information through technology or language barriers;
- Deliver information in all core languages;
- Ensure responsible archiving and/or disposal of information when appropriate;

- Adhere to international standards of data protection;

3.0 Strategic Aims of Information Management until 2001

3.1 Develop People and Skills for Information Management

Employ professional information management and IT staff in all developed Sections, the IS and decentralised structures;

Involve information management specialists in the human rights work of Amnesty International, including campaigns, development and research;

Provide high quality training to staff and volunteers, to gain maximum potential from IT, with integrated training programmes in all Sections and at the IS;

3.2 Standardisation of Information Management

- Develop and implement international standards for information for all aspects of information management across the Movement;
- Agree and implement standards for IT hardware and software in the Movement;
- Develop, promote and implement standard systems for classifying, indexing, filing and storing AI documents, and managing paper;

3.3 Information Sharing

- Actively promote the idea that Amnesty International's information resources belong to all the Movement and take account of this, when planning new resources such as databases;
- Develop collaborative ways of working, through group ware and other solutions, and implement these in key areas including campaign planning;
- Provide appropriate access to all parts of the Movement to corporate databases held at the IS;

3.4 Security of Information

- Develop and implement Movement-wide guidelines on Data Protection, which conform as a minimum to the 1996 EU Directive;
- Ensure protection and security of all Amnesty International sources, with clear systems of security classification of information and documents;

- Maximise the security of all e-mail communication and implement encryption and other security systems as appropriate;

3.5 Access to Information

- Develop and implement minimum standards of IT capacity for all Sections;
- Develop and implement systems of customisation of information dissemination in the Movement to reflect user needs and capacities;
- Implement policies and practices which close the information gap for the information-poor parts of the Movement;
- Implement the Archives Policy adopted in 1996, and encourage exploitation of the wealth of experience and organisation memory contained in the archives;

3.6 Resources for Information Management

- Ensure adequate human and financial resources are assigned for information management in the Movement, including with the International budget and Section budgets;
- Ensure all strategic and operational plans explicitly address information management issues;
- Ensure investment in IT reflects the agreed aims of the Movement, including the need for standardisation;
- Fund raise for information and IT resources, including maximising potential for world wide corporate sponsorship and support;

3.7 Quality of Information

- Ensure with the application of standards that all information needed by the Movement, including human rights, financial and organisational, is subject to the same standards of accuracy, relevancy, timeliness and clarity;
- Develop and implement systems for information filtering to ensure relevance and minimise information overload;
- Ensure all information units and departments within the Movement implement systems for monitoring the needs of users;

3.8 Technological Innovation in Information Management

- Maintain Amnesty International's information management systems at the cutting edge of development, including by exchanging experiences with other organisations and sectors and adequate investment;
- Identify and exploit the potential of IT to open up new ways of mobilising people and campaigning for human rights;
- Assess the potential for applying information management innovations when planning campaigns and actions;

3.9 Communication of Information

- Link all Sections, Standing Committees and other appropriate structures of Amnesty International through electronic mail;
- Enable all parts of the Movement to access the Internet, as part of minimum IT capacity;
- Upgrade to one standard e-mail solution for all Sections and the International Secretariat;
- Provide guidelines on appropriate and responsible use of e-mail as a communication tool in the Movement;

3.10 Image as Information

- Promote the use of stills and moving images in all parts of Amnesty International's work as a legitimate and effective means of communicating information;
- Develop a shared database of digital stills images within the Movement;
- Develop the capacity and systems to exchange digital stills and moving images within the Movement.

APPENDIX C

ICM Decision 44 - International Information Management Strategy

The International Council

recognising that effective information management is a key tool in Amnesty International's human rights work;

recognising that developments in information management practice and IT offer great opportunities for innovation in AI's work;

recognising that AI has already invested many resources in the area of information management;

concerned that future investment should bring significant gains from the contribution of information management;

concerned that AI's systems and resources for information management should reflect the importance of this area;

concerned that the growing problem of "information overload" is one that will threaten the efficient work of the movement;

concerned that all parts of AI should be able to benefit from information management and IT innovations and that no inequality is created;

DECIDES to endorse the key elements of the International Information Management Strategy, in particular the implementation by 2001 of the key elements listed below;

ENCOURAGES all large sections, the IS and decentralised structures to provide adequate human and financial resources;

DECIDES that policies and practices will be established to close the information gap for the information-poor parts of AI, including minimum standards for IT capacity for all Sections, of which access to the Internet will be part;

DECIDES that standards will be developed and implemented for IT hardware and software in AI to ensure compatibility and maximum benefit from investment;

DECIDES that AI information resources will be actively promoted as shared resources of the whole of AI, and account will be taken of this when planning new resources such as databases and that collaborative ways of working, through group ware and other solutions, will be developed and implemented in key areas including in campaign planning and in decentralised and deconcentrated operations;

DECIDES that customised systems of information dissemination will be implemented within AI to reflect user needs and capacities, with emphasis on solutions which will give control of quantity and flow to the users, together with the responsibility to acquire information as necessary;

DECIDES to develop streamlined systems to collect standard information on a regular basis about the performance of AI, including financial and development information;

DECIDES that a shared database of digital stills images will be developed within AI and that capacity and systems will be developed to exchange digital stills and moving images within AI;

DECIDES that the 1996 Archives policy will be fully implemented by all parts of AI, and all AI structures will be held accountable for their archive management under the policy;

DECIDES that AI-wide guidelines on Data Protection will be developed and implemented, which conform as a minimum to the 1996 EU Directive;

DECIDES that clear systems of security classification for information and documents, and other necessary measures, will be developed and that security of e-mail communication will be maximised, with encryption and other security systems as appropriate;

DECIDES to endorse the other recommendations of the International Information Management Strategy;

DECIDES to request all Sections to develop their own information management strategies compatible with the AI Information Management Strategy, and to reflect the aims of the strategy in their own Section operational plans and budgets;

DECIDES to instruct the International Executive Committee to make recommendations, in close consultation with sections, about the implementation of the policy, including with particular regard to standardisation;

DECIDES to request the IEC to review on a regular basis the implementation of the International Information Management Strategy, to ensure effective implementation of its strategic aims.

(Arising from Resolution C6.1)

Decisions of the 1997 ICM. London: International Secretariat, Amnesty International, January 1998.

Appendix D

Map of Information Management Tools in the International Secretariat (IS)

Group 1 - Applications Used By Individuals Or Teams

TOOLS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES OF USE
Excel	Spreadsheet/database	Design spreadsheet containing financial or other data
Lotus Tools	E-mail package	Exchange internal and external e-mail
Paradox	Relational Database	Maintain list of prisoners, case information and other tabular data
WordPerfect	Word Processing	Type a report, letter memo or fax: create an AI document using a prescribed template
WordProcessing - Arabic Word	Arabic languages word processing	Allows writing, editing and sharing of Arabic documents
WordProcessing - Chinese Partner	Chinese text inputter	Can be used with other Windows applications - Notes, databases and word processing

Group 2 - Corporate Databases Available Within The IS

TOOLS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES OF USE
AIDOC(TOPIC)	Text-database search engine used for searching over a range of full text-databases	Search for an electronic copy of AI document or a document in the non-AI documents collection
AISTAR	Database of AI Groups, Action Files, Regional Action Networks (RAN), Cases	Create and receive details of all AI groups and the Actions and Cases on which they work.
AV Database	Paradox database available via TOPIC containing information on videos held at the IS	Retrieve information on videos held in the AV unit
Electronic Archives	Full-text database containing AI Indexed documents	Retrieve an electronic copy of an AI-Indexed document
Integrated Mailing List	Shared IS database of contact names and addresses and information on all AI-indexed documents	Maintain and search for IS contact and document information.
Lotus Notes	Group ware	Create a database of information shared internally or with a remote site.

Group 3 Databases of External Information Some Of Which Can Be Accessed Throughout The IS

TOOLS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES OF USE
CAIRS	Library database management system	Search for a particular book or journal
CDROMs	Compact Disc (Portable) Read-only memory - containing geographical and textual databases	CDROMs held at the IS allow searching for the text of a UN treaty, obtain statistics on a country or retrieve information on organisations
Greennet/Geonet	NGO/Environmental (non-commercial sector) providing access to e-mail conferences and bulletin boards	Retrieve textual information on a range of topics including countries, political events and organisations
News Manager	Real-time networked newswire information including: Reuters, EFE (Spanish newswire), AFP (English/French newswire), SWB(BBC/English newswire)	Immediate access to an event in a particular country
Online databases	Commercially available online databases FT Profile, Knight-Ridder, Mintel company databases	Retrieve information on a particular company, country or event
Internet	World Wide Web	Retrieve information on a range of topics, including countries, events, people and organisations

Appendix E

Interview Schedule

1. How long have you worked at the International Secretariat (IS)?
2. What does your job involve?
3. Looking at the grid that you filled in, you receive……………………
   What do you do with it,?
   Is everything that you receive relevant?
4 Are some sources more important than others? If so why?
5 Once you have finished with the information is it stored, recorded, inputted ……
   Where?
6 Does the information that you get provide you with data relevant to decisions you have to make? If so what percentage - 25%, 50%, 75%, other?
7 Do you feel able to handle the amount and the different types of information that you receive?
8 Do you need large amounts of information to perform your job effectively?
9 If you received less information would you feel that you would not have enough information to make accurate decisions/perform effectively?
10 Does part of your work involve exchanging information with colleagues?
   Who with & what methods do you use to exchange information?
11 Do you experience any problems exchanging information?
12 Generally, how do you feel information is handled by the organisation?
13 Have you any suggestions which you think would improve the situation and or/help you in your work when dealing with information?