“The Information Universe is expanding in a similar way to the physical universe. Despite information being so pervasive, it has one of the most important and yet least understood phenomena of our times. This foundational book by Guus Pijpers is an interesting, unconventional book that contributes to better understanding the information phenomena and, more importantly, provides insights on how better to manage it. Read it and be enlightened.”

—Professor Martin Curley, Director, Intel Labs Europe

“This is a book for all managers and their managers. Guus Pijpers’ Information Overload is an excellent brain-manual. It près information on the impact of data overload and how to better manage it. The book itself avoids-causing information overload, because it is neatly divided into bite-sized chunks. You can start anywhere, stop scaling when you learned something new, see how you can apply it yourself, do it, and return to the book.”

—Dr. Theo Compenoone, MD, PhD, independent international consultant, coach, trainer, keynote speaker, and adjunct professor-at-large at INSEAD

“Pijpers creates valuable and new insights on how to structure information and make more effective use of it. I highly recommend this book for executives and anyone engaged in the information age.”

—Boet E.J. Kreiken, Managing Director, KLM Cityhopper, and former CIO, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

“Easy to read and with good humor, Guus makes the reader aware of the many processes in the brain and body that are of great help to handle the everyday growing load of information and to avoid information overload!”

—Hugo Peters, General Manager, Human Resources, ING

“By focusing on the limitations of the human brain to cope with vast quantities of data, Guus Pijpers offers a unique perspective on this information overload problem and discusses strategies to fight it. While his work reflects solid theoretical underpinnings, it also provides the reader with practical advice on how to become a ‘smart information worker,’ develop appropriate information behaviors, and use IT tools to address the human bottleneck. This is really an important book for all managers and their knowledge workers, especially those who need to sift through large amounts of data in search of relevant information for their daily work.”

—Professor Ramon O’Callaghan, Dean, TiasNimbas Business School, Tilburg University

Written by renowned information management expert Guus Pijpers, Information Overload reveals how the mind works, how it can be used to think most effectively, and how to avoid the feeling of being inundated with information. Do you ever wish you could get yourself organized and handle information in a smarter way? Information Overload explains it all.


(continued from front flap)
INFORMATION OVERLOAD
INFORMATION OVERLOAD

A System for Better Managing Everyday Data

GUUS PIJPERS

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
To my wife Wilhelmine, who also lives and breathes information
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This age is heralded as the information age. We live in a world more filled with information than any of our predecessors. We have to deal with huge amounts of information every day, information that affects our daily life and activities. Most people want to be “in the know.” From early in the morning, when we watch the news or read the paper, until late in the evening when we talk to friends and relatives, we are exchanging information, including all that comes from our emotions. Indeed, we live and breathe information, as our five senses are continuously bombarded with stimuli to interpret. It is surprising that we human beings can still survive in today’s world, where so much more attention is needed than a century ago but as a species, we continually get used to the increased amount of information and learn to live with it.

As a society, we have arrived at a point where almost all information is available to almost everyone. Information is no longer scarce; instead, it’s overwhelming. And in the next five years, the amount of information available is expected to increase tenfold, mostly thanks to the Internet. However, the Internet only shows information available to the general public; it doesn’t include all the information stored within organizations or in private homes that is not yet accessible to
the public, not to mention the information that people have stored in their own digital memory, their brain.

The sheer amount of it makes some people nervous and tense. They experience a strong loss of concentration, a high level of stress, and feelings of guilt because they still have so much to read and digest. People start to miss important information; they select from the huge quantity available and unintentionally pick out the wrong parts. As a result, they feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with the information flow.

The feeling of being overwhelmed by an enormous amount of information is by no means a new one. In fact, too much information is a fundamental problem of the human condition. People had the same problem in the old days, as humans invented newspapers, radio, and television—among other things—to increase the flow of information. Processing that information, though, is not a technological issue but a human problem. The vastly increased information flow over the last 20 years does not present any problems to technology, but our brains have not quite found the right answer to it.

We do not know exactly how people inform themselves, how they remain well-informed over a period, and how they make sense of all the information they receive. Our memory occasionally fails us—justly so, as we discuss later in this book. Our brain has its own laws. It is mainly aimed at survival, avoiding danger and acting instinctively. From an evolutionary point of view, it’s obvious: Humans are unable to adjust to the growing amount of information within a single generation. One generation is nothing compared to the age of the Earth and the development of mankind.

But it is not what information does to people that counts, but what people do with information. New stimuli, emotional situations, and deviating behavior are really good for our brain. Therefore, we should cherish these stimuli and search out unusual or different situations.

However, very few people have been highly trained in how to make effective use of information. A better understanding of the characteristics of the brain is useful in determining how to handle large amounts of information.

How often do you hear people say: “Oh, if I had only known that...” But obviously, we did not know, and nobody told us. Probably we do not know the right people, or we don’t know how to get to
the information that will make our lives much easier. And we do not necessarily search out the correct information, or look in new places for it. Numerous excuses can be given as to why people do not want to change their information behavior. Fear, anxiety, or just being an information control freak: More information is hardly ever seen as a solution.

But our information behavior plays an important part in the management of information. A computer is capable of collecting large amounts of information; only we human beings are capable of, hopefully, turning that into wisdom.

So today, you may complain about the increase in information, but complaining does not help. What does? The solution lies in seeking and finding that particular information that is important to you.

In this book you will find all kinds of tips and tricks on how to lead a more pleasant life in the information society. How can you make sure you receive the information you need? How can you organize information so that it is always accessible to you? How can you avoid the feeling of being inundated with information and having no grip on your life?

To better manage information, you will need to change certain habits and learn new ones. This is only possible if you are convinced that change is needed. We often lack the will to make changes, claiming that we have no time or are simply too lazy. Do you really wish to organize yourself better and handle information in a smarter way? Then a change between your ears is required.

Better knowledge of your brain, your information-processing factory, is a prerequisite for changing your information behavior and for driving changes in other people’s information behavior. One of the most effective ways is knowing how you deal with information, as described in your information profile. Only the right knowledge, attitude, and behavior will help you truly improve your information-processing capacity. You will benefit from this for the rest of your life.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into two parts, which deal respectively with the principles of information, people, and the brain and with measures for using information better.