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ABOUT FREE PINT

FreePint is an online network of information searchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <<http://www.freepint.com/>> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs & events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive a fully formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <<http://www.freepint.com/member>>.

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EDITORIAL

A very happy New Year to all our readers, authors, advertisers and all who make the FreePint community continue to be successful. Keep spreading the word in 2004 - and keep on sending us your articles, tipples, bar contributions and book reviews.

Both Tim Berners-Lee and Vint Cerf, both early 'fathers of the Internet', have been in the news this week. Berners-Lee has received a knighthood, and Cerf has been talking about his belief that the coming decade will see the Net spreading even further to become the basic communications infrastructure for almost anything. An example is the telephone network becoming part of the Net, rather than vice versa. The full fascinating piece can be seen at <<http://digbig.com/3jqa>>. I do, however, wish that the mainstream press would talk more about the information content of the Internet and not just the technology.

At the moment, it seems that all it takes is a Google search to research the whole breadth of human knowledge since time began. I wish that more people would start to use a broad range of search tools and question everything; it's far too dangerous to rely on just one source. It's the information profession's responsibility to build on the public's new-found searching power by showing them that alternatives exist.

Building up a picture from a variety of sources is exactly what you can do by using the latest FreePint Index, which you will find in your in-boxes this week <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/03indexb.htm>>. It lists, by subject, all the articles FreePint has published in the last six years. Why not print it out and laminate the handy quick reference card? You could use it as a starting point in place of a search engine search. Or give it to a friend who may not have heard of FreePint. Articles are packed with URLs from our expert authors and it can give you some excellent online starting points.

In this issue, we have a useful article on 'Sources of Information on Human Resources' by Linda Emmett. Hopefully, you will have had a seasonal break and -- as we all return to work refreshed -- it is interesting to know that according to the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, the average number of days a year taken off sick is 9 days! The article includes comprehensive and reliable sources for anyone interested in HR issues.

Michelle Romero interviews Dr Denise Lievesley, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics on "Quality and Comparative International Statistics". The UN, OECD, IMF: just how do they come up with those figures? Surprisingly the data from the major organisations are in fact not always gold plated, Lievesley tells Romero. "Some people think that if we've produced it, it must be right. I really worry about it because it is not the case. It's a very fallible system".

Factors affecting data quality include collection inconsistencies and even political manipulation of data. Just as with evaluating all information, Lievesley advises comparing different sets of indices - even those from reputable organisations.

So, it comes back to comparing, contrasting and building up your own picture from a variety of sources. With this in mind, another of my other hopes for 2004 is that as well as training Internet users in the importance of technology, greater prominence is given to data quality and evaluation techniques, online editorial judgement and information literacy. Hopefully this will really start to be recognised and pushed more prominently onto the political agenda.

What are FreePint's plans in 2004? Well, some of the exciting things we finalised in the last quarter of 2003 will start to take shape. There will be more reports for sale from top information industry authors such as Sylvia Webb, Mary Ellen Bates and Paul Pedley. Also, we will be piloting virtual training using teleconferencing.

This month also sees the first edition of VIP, our subscription service for business information professionals. You can view the first issue for free at <<http://www.vivaVIP.com>>. If you want to influence the content of VIP, then visit the VIP Lounge and let Pam Foster, the Editor, know what you want. Perhaps you are using an online product that you would like to see reviewed and/or compared with its main competitor? Or you would like to see their Managing Director interviewed? Maybe there is an important Web-based product growing in popularity that you want to see written about. Let VIP know. It is free to visit the Lounge and give your input, and it's also free to post up your organisation's press releases into the Wire area.

I hope you enjoy the first FreePint of 2004, and remember to tell me what you would like to see from FreePint this year.

Annabel Colley Editor, FreePint <annabel.colley@freepint.com>

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This week's selected listings are below. All new jobs are posted to the Bar and Bar Digest (circulation 12,000+) and matched against the 1000+ live job seeker profiles.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Head of Acquisitions<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2913>>

Exciting opportunity for an experienced acquisitions professional to oversee library processes and strategic partnerships.
Recruiter: Information Provider

Senior Research Specialist<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2927>>

Snr researcher with technology specialism (defence, aerospace, automotive...) needed, value-added work, outgoing personality.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Research Analyst - Global Management Consultancy<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2929>>

Able to liaise at all levels of management, and to package and present information to both internal and external clients.
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Information and Library Officer<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2930>>

A flexible and well organised individual to provide an enquiries and information service to a wide range of callers.
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Factiva and IBM partner on Text Analytics

Text analytics is a powerful new tool that can help your organisation track its reputation. Find out more about how Factiva and IBM are partnering to bring this to market in Factiva's latest InfoPro Alliance newsletter.

<http://www.factiva.com/infopro>

VIP -- Business Information News and Product Reviews

Check out VIP, a new monthly publication with reviews of information products and business information news analysis.

Find out more at <<http://www.vivaVIP.com>>

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Keeping Legal

<<http://www.KeepingLegal.com>>

Legal issues affecting information professionals including copyright, data protection and freedom of information.

Monitors relevant government and industry press releases, consultation papers and new legislation

MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES by Stuart Cliffe



Stuart Cliffe
<<http://www.365-alive.net/>> is an insurance underwriter, computer geek and banking expert who finds errors in bank accounts, locates lost finances and lectures on spam, broadband internet and website development.

- <<http://www.theregister.co.uk/>> - The proud strapline 'biting the hand that feeds IT' is a good hint to the irreverent but highly informative technical items featured here and updated daily.
- <<http://www.mvps.org/>> - Microsoft's Most Valued Professionals. The place to find accurate answers to tech queries about mainstream products. Can be heavy going, but good for really techy things.
- <<http://www.webreference.com/js/tips/>> - OI' Doc Javascript keeps you up to date with the latest developments in XML DHTML and other handy acronyms.
- <<http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/>> - the gateway (it says) to "hundreds of UK regional and local newspaper websites and other related sites". Handy for those with PR and advertising inclinations.
- <<http://www.treepad.com/>> - the database family which from a single floppy can manage anything from your wine cellar to your email correspondence with equal ease, plus cataloguing hard drives, CDs and bookmarks.

EVENTS

United Kingdom

"Patents Searching Clinics" - "to help people make best use of free databases for searching patents of invention". Dates ranging from the 15th October 2003 to the 21st January 2004. Taking place at the British Library, St Pancras, London <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e257>>.

"Knowledge Auditing MasterClass - for Practical Application". January 20-22; February 10-12; March 2-4. A three day intensive training course held in central London <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e283>>.

"Schools and Public Libraries Working Together" organised by the Centre for Information Research (CIRT), University of Central England in Birmingham on 21st January <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e264>>. " ... looking at how schools, school libraries, school library services and public libraries can work together most effectively".

"eLearnInternational World Summit 2004" organised by Scottish Enterprise on the 18th and 19th February at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, " ... designed to facilitate an examination among practitioners, consultants, academics and government officials on Futures for eLearning" <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e241>>.

United States

"Sales & Marketing 2004, West: 5th Annual Executive Summit". Organised by Frost & Sullivan and taking place in Arizona on the 11th-15th January <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e285>>.

Netherlands

"Gartner Business Intelligence Summit 2004" on the 2nd and 3rd February in Amsterdam. Covering strategies for deal with business intelligence <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e273>>.

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

FREE PINT BAR In Association with Factiva a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

It seems that our launch of VIP couldn't have come at a better time <<http://www.vivavip.com>>. Business information questions and topics at the Bar seem to be at an all-time high. The VIP Lounge will be the best place for these in the future, but in the meantime can you help with any of the following?:

Do you know anything about Elsevier's 'Scopus' and how it might compete with ISI's Web of Science <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b26704>>? What about researching companies in Kazakhstan and Russia <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b27038>>? How can a Webmaster put up a share price feed for companies on Indian stock exchanges <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b27037>>? Even more specifically, do you know of sources of company risk beta information as an alternative to Barra Betas, but not Bloomberg Betas, Datastream and the London Business School?

Here's one for the information professionals: can you help with the issues surrounding archiving of CD-R media <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b27068>>? I'm sure this will increasingly be a major issue for records storage and the perfect chance for information professionals to demonstrate their knowledge.

Finally, don't forget to check out the FreePint Index if you haven't already. This is our quick-reference guide to all the articles we've published in the last six years <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/>>.

William Hann <william.hann@freepint.com>
Managing Editor, FreePint

The FreePint Bar is where you can get help with your tricky research questions, for free! <www.freepint.com/bar>

Help with study for information-related courses is available at the FreePint Student Bar <www.freepint.com/student>.

Twice-weekly email digests of the latest postings can be requested at <www.freepint.com/member>.

Yes, Long URLs are difficult to communicate

They break in emails and newsletters, are tricky to say over the phone, and are prone to errors when re-typed.

Use the free DigBig service to shorten URLs substantially. Find out more about this handy free utility:

<<http://www.DigBig.com/>>

TIPS ARTICLE

"Sources of Information on Human Resources" By Linda Emmett

Linda Emmett is the Information Manager at the CIPD. She has worked there in several roles, initially starting off in the Library and Information Centre. She has a Masters in Information and Knowledge Management, and has worked previously in the civil service and the education sector. She is particularly interested in how people communicate at work to ensure the best practical transfer of knowledge and information, and can be contacted by email l.emmett@cipd.co.uk

She is also a professional body & group junkie - working for one, and a member of three others, though some might not think that is a lot!

Human Resources, 'HR' or 'personnel' are terms used to encompass the entire spectrum of managing and developing people and it is the effective management and development of people that is important - not what it is called.

Many of us will have responsibility at some point for managing and developing others - either directly through line management or supervisory responsibility, or just by being part of a team. This article is arranged into:

* General information sources * Journals * International sources of HR information * Books * Email alerts and online resources * Government and not-for-profit information sources.

General information sources

The first port of call should be the website of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development <<http://www.cipd.co.uk>>. The CIPD is the leading professional body (118,000 members) for those involved in the management and development of people. This excellent website contains a wealth of material, including basic free information <<http://www.cipd.co.uk/infosource>> including benchmarking surveys <<http://www.cipd.co.uk/surveys>>. For example, did you know the average number of days taken sick is 9 per employee, or that the most popular method of advertising recruitment vacancies is still the local paper?

* Details of courses, conferences and books to develop skills and competencies <<http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore>> * Summaries of on-going research <<http://www.cipd.co.uk/research>> * Details of professional qualifications and membership at both degree and certificate level

Another useful general source is ACAS - the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. They produce a wide variety of booklets and advice leaflets on issues such as inducting new staff, employee appraisal and discipline and grievances. They also run advisory and small business seminars around the UK <<http://www.acas.org.uk>>.

Newspapers

These are another good source of information, as the broadsheets often contain a weekly business supplement. Each of you will have your own preference, especially if you don't have access to an online subscription service. Remember the Guardian archive is still free <<http://www.guardian.co.uk>>.

Journals

A huge range of journals is published in the area. The key ones being:

People Management - the journal of the CIPD. The current issue is on the website <<http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk>> -

access to the archive in the research area is member-only access and includes the comprehensive 'how to ...' series of articles.

Personnel Today - a fortnightly news-focussed journal, with the feel of a newspaper. It contains good overview articles and benchmarking data <<http://www.personneltoday.com>>.

IDS Brief/IDS Report - both are produced by Incomes Data Services. IDS are specialised publishers - the Brief covers employment law, the Report covers pay and conditions. Also published are books and reports on employment in Europe, managers' pay and pensions. Their website also offers a very useful economic area that pulls together inflation and pay settlement forecasts, so if you are looking for a pay rise ... <<http://www.incomesdata.co.uk>>.

IRS Employment Review - now part of the LexisNexis Butterworths Tolley family with sections on employment trends, pay and benefits, recruitment and retention, employment law and attendance and absence. It contains in-depth case studies and employer surveys, investigating what is current practice within organisations <<http://www.irsonline.co.uk>>. Within this family are a range of legal journals including ECJ Employment Law Watch, Industrial Relations Law Bulletin, Industrial Relations Law Reports, Electronic Industrial Relations Law Reports, Discrimination Case Law Digest and Equal Opportunities Review.

Other professional bodies and membership organisations produce a variety of material on HR issues. But be aware that some websites have restricted access. A good starting line-up would be:

- Business in the Community <<http://www.bitc.org.uk>> - corporate social responsibility
- CBI <<http://www.cbi.org.uk>> - the voice of business
- Chartered Institute of Management <<http://www.managers.org.uk>> - management focus
- Chartered Institute of Marketing <<http://www.cim.co.uk>> - marketing focus
- Engineering Employers Federation <<http://www.eef.org.uk>> - manufacturing information
- Institute of Directors <<http://www.iod.com>> - director focus
- TUC <<http://www.tuc.org.uk>> - the voice of Britain at work
- Work Foundation <<http://www.theworkfoundation.com>> - think-tank looking to improve productivity and working life.

International sources

Looking beyond the UK, in the US, the Society of Human Resource Management <<http://www.shrm.org>>, American Society for Training and Development <<http://www.astd.org>>, American Management Association <<http://www.amanet.org>>, and WorldatWork <<http://www.worldatwork.org>>, all have journals and offer a range of services. Other useful journals include: HR focus <<http://www.ioma.com>>; Harvard Management Update <<http://hmu.harvardbusinessonline.org>>; Human Resources <<http://www.humanresourcesmagazine.com>>;

Related Free Pint links:

- 'Employment/Recruitment/HR' articles in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p43>>
- Post a message to the author, Linda Emmett, or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/080104.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

Workforce <<http://www.workforce.com>>.

If you have offices in -- or do business often -- with particular countries, the following umbrella organisations will be useful as they can give details of personnel professional body equivalents in various countries:

- European Association for Personnel Management (EAPM) <<http://www.eapm.org>>
- European Training and Development Federation (ETDF) <<http://www.etdf-efed.org>>
- International Federation of Training and Development Organisations (IFTDO) <<http://www.iftdo.org>>
- World Federation of Personnel Managers Associations (WFPMA) <http://www.wfpma.com>

Books

As well as the publishers mentioned already, many of the general publishers of management books produce HR titles. These include Palgrave Macmillan, Routledge, the Free Press, Wiley, McGraw-Hill, Prentice-Hall and Butterworths. Kogan Page publish the excellent 'A handbook of human resource management practice' by Michael Armstrong that offers a good introduction into all HR practice.

Specialist publishers

More specialist publishers include Taylor and Francis, Nicholas Brealey, Tolley and Croner. Croner produce the A - Z of pay and benefits amongst other very useful loose-leaf manuals containing examples of personnel policies.

Gower produce a range of training exercises covering all aspects of training. Including how to open a training session ['icebreakers'], team building exercises and large group facilitation <<http://www.gowerpub.com>>.

The Reward Group, part of Croner CCH, produce a range of salary surveys which give benchmark salaries across a range of functions. Roles are categorised by levels of responsibility, and include directors, managers, clerical staff, and skilled workers <<http://www.reward-group.co.uk>>.

And finally, Roffey Park <<http://www.roffeypark.com>> - a research-based organisation that produces the Management Agenda (latest 2003, next will hopefully appear in January 2004).

Email alerts and online resources

The most popular are from:

- TrainingZone <<http://www.trainingzone.co.uk>> offering topical briefings, community discussions and email alerts
- HRZone <<http://www.hrzone.co.uk>> offering news and features, email alerts and partner discounts
- UKHRD <<http://www.ukhrd.co.uk>> operated by Fenman, with a daily email alerting service highlighting discussions from the site
- Xperthr - <<http://www.xperthr.com>> a subscription service, offering policies and documents, and service provider information.

HR consultancies and legal firms offer more

specialised services, usually taking the form of a free email update service. Organisations include:

- Deloitte and Touche <http://www.deloitte.co.uk>
- KPMG <<http://www.kpmg.co.uk>>
- McKinsey <<http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com>>
- Mercer Human Resource Consultancy <<http://www.mercerhr.com>>
- Towers Perrin <<http://www.towers.com>> strong on remuneration
- Watson Wyatt <<http://www.watsonwyatt.com>>

Legal firms include Lovells, Charles Russell, whose recent client list includes Wagamama, Hammonds, Eversheds, Dickinson Dees and Irwin Mitchell. Firms will also offer online support - for a fee of course! Many employment law cases are covered in the online legal services from Lexis <<http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk>>, Lawtel <<http://www.lawtel.com>> and Justis <<http://www.justis.com>>.

Government and other not-for-profit information sources

Government sites are a useful source of information, especially for basic leaflets. The Department of Trade and Industry site has leaflets on maternity rights, unfair dismissal and the national minimum wage.

Current DTI consultations on proposed future legislation can be found in the Employment Relations Directorate area <<http://www.dti.gov.uk/er>>. These currently include fair piece-rates for output workers and the new Employment Relations Bill.

For advice on skills, the Department of Education and Skills website <<http://www.dfes.gov.uk>> contains details of programmes such as the modern apprenticeships.

The Home Office site <<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>> contains details of, or links to, work permits, data protection and employing ex-offenders.

Other useful websites are:

- CRE - Commission for Racial Equality - <<http://www.cre.gov.uk>>
- DRC - Disability Rights Commission <<http://www.drc.org.uk>>
- DWP - Department for Work and Pensions - <<http://www.dwp.gov.uk>>
- EOC - Equal Opportunities Commission - <<http://www.eoc.org.uk>>
- HSE - Health and Safety Executive - <<http://www.hse.gov.uk>>
- IIP - Investors in People - <<http://www.iipuk.co.uk>>
- ONS - Office for National Statistics - <<http://www.ons.gov.uk>>
- Inland Revenue - <<http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk>>

I hope you have found this useful. I have tried to identify the main areas, but am conscious there is a lot more around. If you are aware of other, perhaps better sources, I would be happy to hear from you, or discuss further in the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar/>>. Perhaps you would like to post some additional international HR sources to the Bar too.



Barbara Sen is a senior lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University in competitive intelligence, business information, strategic information management, and health information. She has a background of working within both the public and private sector including business libraries, the NHS, government and academic libraries. Research interests include strategic development in information services, research governance and health information.

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" Super Searchers On Competitive Intelligence: The Online And Offline Secrets Of Top CI Researchers "

Reviewed by Barbara Sen

This book is a great addition to the Super Searchers series. The Super Searchers books are always really practical as the contributions come from some of the best in the business. It is enjoyable and easy to read, with tips and techniques applicable to a host of working situations.

This volume is particularly welcome as it covers an area which is a little neglected by publishers and writers: the area of competitive intelligence, or CI.

The foreword is by Jan Herring, who has forty years experience in CI. Jan picks up on two problems; firstly, the difficulty in defining competitive intelligence in a simple straightforward way, which leads to difficulties in communication. Secondly, the poor use of technology in CI. These could both be areas for future research and development within the field of competitive intelligence which would help business operations.

The winning "super searchers" formula is used, with each chapter taking the form of an interview with an expert in the discipline. The interviewees are at ease with the subjects, and pour out a wealth of practical tips, techniques and models useful for either the novice or the experienced practitioner. Each chapter concludes with a summary of "Super Searcher Power Tips" - wisdom in bullet points.

The "super searchers" have a wide range of professional backgrounds. They come from business research, industrial engineering, wireless technology, market research, library science, pharmaceuticals, molecular biology, military intelligence, finance and business administration. Despite this diversity, they all share a determination to succeed, and seem to have a hardworking attitude and enthusiasm for what they do.

Books in this series do have a North American focus. With this volume it is not a disadvantage. In the States, businesses are far more CI-savvy

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<<http://www.freepint.com/icc>>

than in the UK and some other European countries. The value is mainly in the experiences recounted, though a useful source list is appended in a directory, a regularly updated version being available on the Super searchers web site at
<<http://www.infotoday.com/supersearchers>>.

The books in this series are inspirational, and this is no exception. It shows just how diverse, interesting and challenging information work can be. Information professionals are encouraged to step beyond their traditional roles of information provision and develop their skills and expertise to offer value added services, develop their analytical skills, share in decision support, decision making and the development of strategic priorities in business.

From an academic perspective this book will be a valuable addition to a student's reading list. Theories are shown to have practical value in practice by practitioners. This book offers an insight into the working CI environment.

This is another practical book from CyberAge and a great read.

FreePint Forthcoming Articles

- Forestry
- Health and Safety
- Freedom of Information
- Business Information in the Ukraine
- Websites and Web Hosts
- Occupational Safety and Health Information
- Visual Representation of Information

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact
<penny@freepint.com> or sign up for the Author Update at <<http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>>.

FREE PINT

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FEATURE ARTICLE

"Quality and Comparative International Statistics"

By Michelle Romero



Michelle Romero is an independent information specialist in Vancouver, B.C. <michellearomero@hotmail.com>.

How many people died as a result of the record-breaking European heat wave last August? How much is invested in research and development in Japan, the US, and China? What is the actual number of Africans infected with AIDS? Chances are, the best sources for those answers will contain data from a major international, intergovernmental agency (IGO). Timely, reliable, and free (or low-cost), the data produced by the United Nations (UN) and its specialized agencies, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and others comprise our stock-in-trade for high quality, internationally comparable data. This also includes country-level data that might otherwise be inaccessible or unavailable altogether.

Just how do they come up with those figures?

But once you've found that relevant table of country data - produced, perhaps, by no less an august body than the UN - do you stop there, confident it contains the "right" numbers? Maybe, in the absence of cautionary footnotes or metadata saying otherwise. But sometimes there's that nagging question: How did they come up with those figures, anyway?

"Some people think that if we've produced it, it must be right. I really worry about it because it is not the case. It's a very fallible system," said Denise Lievesley, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS in a recent telephone interview). Based in Montreal, the UIS is the statistical unit of UNESCO that collects and disseminates worldwide data in the Organization's domains of competence: education, science, culture, and communication.

Surprised to hear data from the major IGOs are not, in fact, gold-plated? You may or may not be, depending on your level of expertise in international statistics. If you're not an expert, here's a look at some of the quality issues behind our quality resources - according to those technical background documents you don't necessarily read on your dash to the data tables, as well as one very helpful statistician.

What is Data Quality?

"For an international organization, the quality of statistics disseminated depends on two dimensions: the quality of national statistics it receives and the quality of its internal processes for collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of data and metadata" (from "Quality Framework for OECD Statistics" <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/7/60/2754159.doc>>). This document, as well as similar documents from the statistical divisions of other IGOs, show the organizations are continuously striving to address the major quality issues affecting their work. These issues include:

- Relevance of data collected, in terms of user needs and organizational (development) goals
- Validity of indicators - they measure what they say they're measuring

- Reliability, both in terms of the quality of the national data provided and IGO processing and modelling
- Ability to be disaggregated, to accurately reflect a phenomenon at country or regional level
- Timeliness - data must be recent, produced on a regular basis, and punctually reported
- Interpretability, including the provision of metadata

Underlying all quality factors is the "fitness of use" principle which, according to the OECD Framework, states "Even if data is accurate, they cannot be said to be of good quality if they are produced too late to be useful, or cannot be easily accessed, or appear to conflict with other data."

Obstacles to Data Quality

Implementing these factors into the global statistical system framework poses challenges both at the international and national level. Nationally, problems include:

- The inability of some countries to provide data due to weak statistical capacity, or crisis such as war or natural disaster
- Poor resources available for statistics gathering, including IT infrastructure
- Lack of qualified statistical staff
- Inconsistent country data provided by different compiling agencies
- Lack of a "culture of openness" about data, including a potential reluctance to report unflattering numbers
- Potential for political manipulation of data

Some of these issues seem obvious when considering the problems of developing nations, but political pressure is a feature of every national landscape. Since statistics show just

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how investment - appealing or development-worthy one country looks in comparison to others - by highlighting the performance of its development programs, identifying areas of need for foreign aid, or attracting business investment - it's not surprising the numbers are often politically influenced.

"Data has many different purposes. One of the purposes is accountability; and accountability is a double-edged sword," said Lievesley. "Countries can be very pleased or proud of the fact that they've made achievements, but sometimes they don't want to own up to the [lack] of achievement. We have problems in terms of getting data of integrity from some countries, and I'm not just talking about weaker countries. Data can be politically manipulated even from developed countries."

International-level problems include:

- International classifications to which national organisations are unable to conform
- Selection of indicators without sufficient regard to measurability
- Overburdening countries with multiple and duplicate demands for data

Though IGO statisticians seek to work in a co-operative, mutually beneficial fashion with national statistical offices, the relationship requires a balance of goals and priorities. IGOs must respect the individual agendas of national statistical offices in their own data collection, perhaps providing assistance where appropriate and feasible. In addition, IGOs must try to improve the global measures that contribute to accurate, data-driven policy making at local, national, and international levels.

International Comparability

Comparability of country data is one dimension of data quality, yet it's a distinct concept with its own complications. In a perfect world, national statistical offices would collect and report their data using standard classifications and methodologies, enabling easy comparison. Yet this is a long way off, and, for some subject domains, an impossible or even undesirable goal.

Such a comparability problem plagues trade statistics, a domain already well defined by international guidelines. An OECD Statistics Brief ("Trade in Goods and Services: Statistical Trends and Measurement Challenges" Oct 2001 No.1 <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/55/11/2539563.pdf>>) highlights the problem of statistical mismatch between one country's exports and the corresponding value of the destination country's imports ("Asymmetry"). Disparities in the "mirror statistics" result from reporting countries using:

- Differently defined trade systems, which include or exclude different categories of goods and transactions
- Differing cargo valuation equations
- Differing attributions of re-export or re-import between countries
- Differing foreign exchange rates, etc.

Considering other factors such as e-commerce and new forms of the delivery of goods and services, the challenges to statisticians are only increasing, even as new tools to improve

harmonization, such as the "Manual on Statistics and International Trade in Services", are introduced.

A comparability problem involving primary school education highlights the difficulty of achieving comparability in domains involving the measurement of social structures which are country-specific:

"Across different countries, primary education might be four years in one country and nine or 10 years in another country," said Lievesley. "...We have an international classification of education that says that primary education is of the order of six years. ... But what do you do if you're looking at, say, what children have learned by the age of eight or the age of nine? In a country like China or Norway, children start school at the age of seven. How do you compare that with a country where children start school at the age of five? It may be that over the whole of the education system countries achieve the same, but they're not necessarily achieving the same at any one stage."

Certain subject areas, such as culture, will always be difficult to categorize, and perhaps we should not try to, according to Lievesley. "Is a museum in the United States the same as a museum in Somalia? Does it make sense to talk about going to a musical event if you live in a rural part of China than if you live in Montreal? It's just incredibly difficult to collect data across societies that are very different from one another. And sometimes I think the expectations of what statistics can do are unrealistic."

Use Different Indicators to Cross-Validate

What does this mean for data seekers working in the information field?

"I think it's really important to alert users to the fact that we're aware that there are deficiencies in the data, that you don't use one indicator at a time, but that you use different indicators to cross-validate and triangulate data from different sources," said Lievesley.

It's important to interpret data in the context of country-specific circumstances, she said, noting also that national statisticians must work to improve their documentation of government policy changes that affect data interpretation. Users should seek out metadata, returning to the originating agency in the many cases where it is lost in the publication process.

Lievesley said field experts, either in a subject area or country specialization, play a critical role in improving data quality by providing feedback to IGOs regarding data and metadata. Such feedback is welcome, because it is difficult to thoroughly judge the quality of data coming from more than 200 countries and covering such a wide range of subjects.

International data from IGOs are produced with the best available expertise. But their quality is best defined in terms of compromise - not total accuracy.