

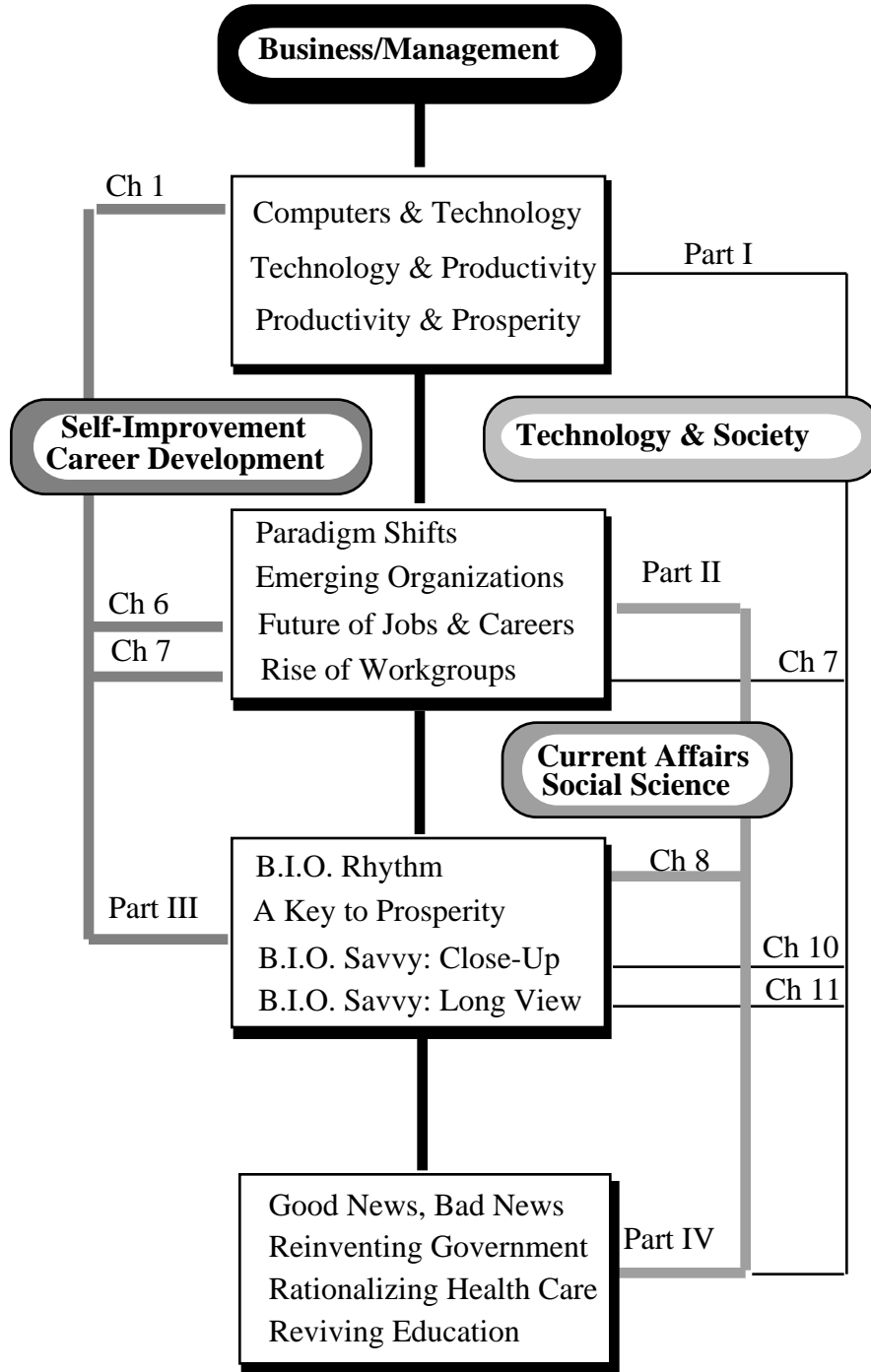
## *Introduction*

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As we witness historical events live on television, and feel the pulse of the nation in virtually instantaneous opinion polls, there is little question that we have entered the Information Age. Knowledge capital and intellectual resources have become at least as important as their physical counterparts in the creation of economic value and the distribution of wealth. By ever expanding the access to information, technology is liberating the customer from the mass market, and the power of knowledge from the traditional gatekeepers. What does it all mean? Are we going to be better off? Judging from the global economic outlook as we approach a new millennium, the answer is not obvious. In this book, we take a common sense approach to sorting things out. Our point of view is that of someone who looks forward to an enjoyable life through rewarding work and meaningful social interactions.

While the book is addressed to a broad audience, its linear—line by line—format makes it impossible to customize the content to individual reader's interests and needs. To maximize its value, several tracks are suggested. The cover-to-cover track is for those with a stake in the future development of business in general, and management in particular. A self-improvement or career-development track is for those concerned with jobs and careers, and how to prepare for the workplace of tomorrow. Observers of the impact of technology on society can follow a third track. A fourth can be used as a nontechnical chronicle of current developments in social and economic affairs. A guide to these tracks is diagramed on the following page.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



## THE MOVEMENTS

While the four parts of the book follow a logical progression, each part can also be read on its own. In Part I, we take up a few most often asked questions regarding how we might work and live in the future. Do we all need to program computers to do well? Is there more to information technology than computers? Does this technology really improve our productivity? Does increased productivity automatically lead to prosperity for the work force? In the absence of clear-cut answers, several myths have taken hold. I shall attempt to debunk them so that we can focus on the real issues.

Much of the confusion is due to rapid changes that are taking place around us. We know that. But what are the two most significant changes that are reshaping the world of business? Why are they upsetting the status quo? In Part II, I will point out that even the status quo may not be well understood. There is much talk about our moving from an Industrial Age into an Information Age. It turned out that what happened between the two can be used to explain much of our predicament. With this knowledge, we can envision the next stages in the evolution of business enterprises. We will gain insight into the future of jobs and careers. What do employee loyalty and job security mean in the new age? What are going to be the building blocks for the economy? What are the new job opportunities? What are the scenarios for a prosperous society?

There is no denying that information technology is here to stay. However, what you see is often not what you get. Do fax machines and desktop publishing really change the way people work? Why is home banking so slow to catch on while ATMs flourish? Why do retailers get sup-

pliers to manage their inventory? I show a way to explain these and other recent developments in the world of business. It is not a theory. It is not a prescription. It is an observation that there is a winning mind-set. I call it B.I.O. Rhythm. The initials stand for Business Information and Operations. The rhythm is a continually improving balance of technology and work. After explaining why it is the key to prosperity at all levels of a business enterprise, I discuss how we might get hold of it. Essentially, we need to cultivate an awareness of how things get done, and how technology can help. From this perspective, we take a close-up look at many contemporary technological issues. This is followed by a longer view of several topics with farther-reaching impacts. Many of the buzzwords may already sound familiar. What you can expect to get out of Part III is a way to make good sense out of them. The subtitle of the book: Creating value with technology—from mailrooms to boardrooms, is obviously put there to catch your attention. By the end of this third part, I can leave you to imagine what the future mailrooms and boardrooms will be like.

In Part IV, we look beyond business to see whether our insight can throw some light on other pressing social issues: government, health care, and education. The main problem, as we may find it somewhat shocking to discover, is that none of these sectors has entered the Information Age. Why? In any case, we see that the logical extension of B.I.O. Rhythm from a business mind-set to a social culture can show the way to a better society. However, we also get to recognize how formidable the obstacles are. And what they really are. The challenge is ours. Each of us must become part of a solution. My own humble bid is to share some hopes with you in the following pages.