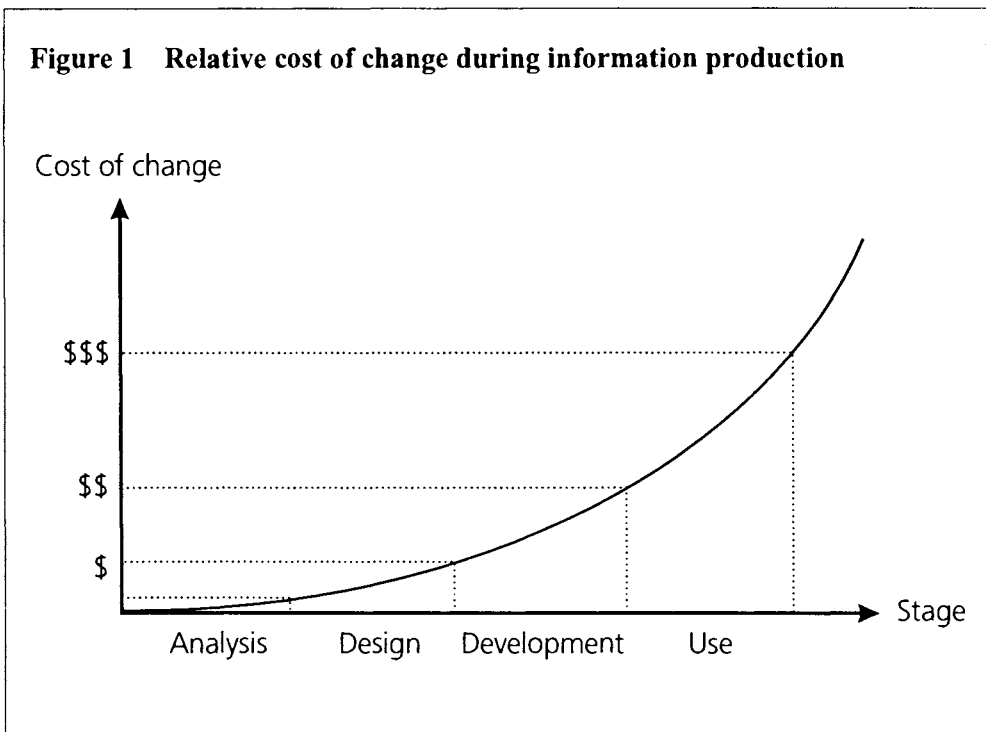


2 WHY IS THE ANALYSIS NECESSARY?

Information needs analysis is an important early stage of the information cycle introduced in Volume 1. The analysis provides an opportunity for methods of collaboration to be established between information providers and users. If it is conducted in a consultative, inclusive manner, numerous benefits are gained as follows:

- **Cost-effectiveness**

The earlier that information needs are identified the easier, and cheaper, they are to build into the information production process (see Figure 1). Changing focus during the design stage of an information product is a frequent cause of delay and cost over-run; changing focus during the development stage costs even more, especially when multiple organisations are involved; and changing focus after information has been delivered to its users is yet more costly. At each stage, consultation with users is essential to make sure that the information will satisfy or exceed expectations.



● Efficiency

The underlying needs of different groups often overlap, enabling substantial efficiencies to be made in information production. For example, an official in a ministry of agriculture may require a map showing the distribution of wild relatives of crops in a specific location. This need differs greatly from that of a forest officer wishing to know the sustainability of logging operations in the same area. However, much of the baseline data required to build the maps (e.g. administrative boundaries, rivers, vegetation and topography) may be the same. Thus, analysis of information needs can save costs by pinpointing areas of overlap and ensuring that attention is paid to the development of frequently used datasets.

● Cooperation

One of the key spin-offs of the analysis is **improved cooperation between information providers and users**. The process of identifying information needs leads to a greater understanding of decision-making processes by the former, and a greater understanding of the practicalities of producing information by the latter. For example, it may come as a surprise to some scientific groups to discover that there are many factors other than content which determine how information impacts on decision-making. Amongst these are timing, clarity, and the method by which the information is delivered (see Volume 3).

Similarly, users are better able to articulate their needs when they understand the challenges faced by researchers, data managers and publishers, many of whom are constrained by lack of human resources and facilities. The analysis process provides a good opportunity for both sides to learn more about each other's working patterns, leading to more confident, cost-effective working partnerships in future. The overall aim is to encourage the view that information is integral to the decision-making process, not an external luxury or threat (see Volume 1).

An indication of the importance of user (information) needs analysis is provided by Richardson (1994), who claims that this step “took 80% of the time of the start-up phase” of the Environmental Resources Information Network (ERIN) information system in Australia, and that “great self-control was needed not to be ‘busy’ purchasing hardware, software, and data until these matters were settled”.