Information technology, in particular the Internet and the web, have introduced a new society where people can share information freely, anywhere, at anytime, across the globe. Information networks have become an essential element of our lives and the global economy. With widespread use of the Internet, it becomes clear that skills required are not merely how to use computers or how to get information, but rather how to solve problems and how to create values with the help of others through information networks. Therefore, the term information literacy means more than so-called computer literacy.

What is information literacy? How does it differ from other forms of literacy? First, traditionally, literacy simply means the fundamental ability to read, write and calculate. Second, computer literacy covers PC operation, email and so forth, all of which are focused on how to use the computer and computer tools. And third, information literacy means computer literacy plus the ability as shown here.

It mainly focuses on how to make decisions, create values or solve problems. Among these, the ability to collaborate with others through networks is most important. In short, information literacy is the ability to solve problems, taking advantage of information technology and networks. Information literacy is not a new concept, rather a traditional one in terms of problem-solving. However, attention should be paid to the greater impact of information technology.

The graph shows a typical hierarchy of education in the spectrum of literacy education expected, details for which may differ from country to country and from school to school. Information literacy education may start in parallel with computer literacy education, providing that appropriate portions of computer education are given. At the other level, the content of corporate education and general public education may be different, depending on motivations and goals.
In the private sector, to cope with big challenges in the information age, organizations are rushing to reform business processes based on information technologies and networking. This also needs drastic change of working style of people, and improvement of individual's business ability, i.e. more information-centric, and more information literate. To get the job done quickly, effectively and creatively, people need to communicate and collaborate with each other through the networks, often beyond the boundaries of time, location and organizations. This working style should also be applied to executives and managers. Without their improvement and leadership, the final goal cannot be achieved.

To that end, it is necessary to make information literacy education mandatory. This might be already done in some countries, but not as yet in Japan. Some advanced organizations have already developed information literacy education, while other organizations have not. However, schemes and content of information literacy education are not yet well established, and therefore such issues will be left open for discussion today.

What can be done to improve information literacy in educational institutions? In the public sector certain action and investments are needed. Suggestions are:

- To develop information networks for the public sector.
- To reform government processes by applying information technology.
- To provide more electronic information services to citizens and the private sector.
- To make more investment in information literacy education.

A possible role for the private sector is a strong support for the development of an information infrastructure of the educational institutions and facilities. Success of this scenario largely depends on the ability to provide information networks at low cost. Finally we should carefully pay attention to providing equal opportunities to both the weak and the strong in terms of the benefits they can enjoy.

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**Visions of our Century: The Unimaginable**

Computers in the future may… perhaps only weigh 1.5 tons

*Popular Mechanics, 1949*

I think there is a world market, for maybe five computers.

*Thomas Watson, Chairman of IBM, 1943*

There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.

*Ken Olson, president and chairman of Digital Equipment Corp., 1977*

640K ought to be enough for anybody.

*Bill Gates, 1981*

This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.

*Western Union, 1876*

Radio has no future.

*Lord Kelvin, President of Royal Society, 1897*

(Television) won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.

*Darryl F. Zanuck, Head of 20th Century Fox, 1946*

Everything that can be invented has been invented”.

*Charles H. Duell, Commissioner, U.S. Office of Patents, 1899*

(Man will never reach the moon) regardless of all future scientific advances.

*Lee de Forest, Father of radio, 1967*

Source: "Newsweek" January 27, 1997