

Preface

This book is about how organizations can deliver systems smart enough to cope with the modern world. Doing so requires a focus on decision making and on automating and managing those decisions. Most organizations struggle with dumb systems and think that they face a difficult choice—between esoteric “artificial intelligence” straight from the lab and mindless systems where all the intelligence comes down to “peopleware.” In most systems today, people do all the intellectual heavy-lifting, and computers are used only to store and move information. Flipping that around is completely feasible: Have people do what they do best, and let computers do the hard work. Organizations can apply proven technology in a new way to get the systems they need.

If you’re interested in how to make your organization function more effectively by improving the behavior of your information systems, this book is for you. You might be a manager, wondering what’s possible with your systems, or an IT professional looking for a framework for thinking about these aspects of information systems. Perhaps you know something about data mining, predictive analytics, optimization, or business rules and are looking for better ways to apply these concepts. You might be in an organization that has never attempted this kind of work or one struggling with getting these technologies out of pilot projects into the mainstream.

We have tried to move gradually from a nontechnical to a moderately technical point of view. The initial chapters are designed for any business reader; the later chapters are aimed at readers who are more technical. None of the chapters requires a detailed understanding of or experience with the technologies described. Plenty of books describe the component technologies; this book is about how, and why, they fit together. The real case studies scattered through the book and, in the more technical sections, the real architecture diagrams are meant to be illustrative rather than comprehensive. Similarly, several sections of the book discuss SmartEnough Logistics, an imaginary company that illustrates some key points in the book.

A companion Web site is available at www.smartenoughsystems.com. This companion site is designed to be a useful ongoing resource to support the book and those using the concepts described in it. The site has an enterprise decision management wiki that supports errata, links, additional materials, and more for the subjects covered in the book. The wiki is open to anyone who registers to participate. News and updates are available through the site’s blog, and additional information is available to help you learn more about the subjects covered—everything from webinars and podcasts to training and books.