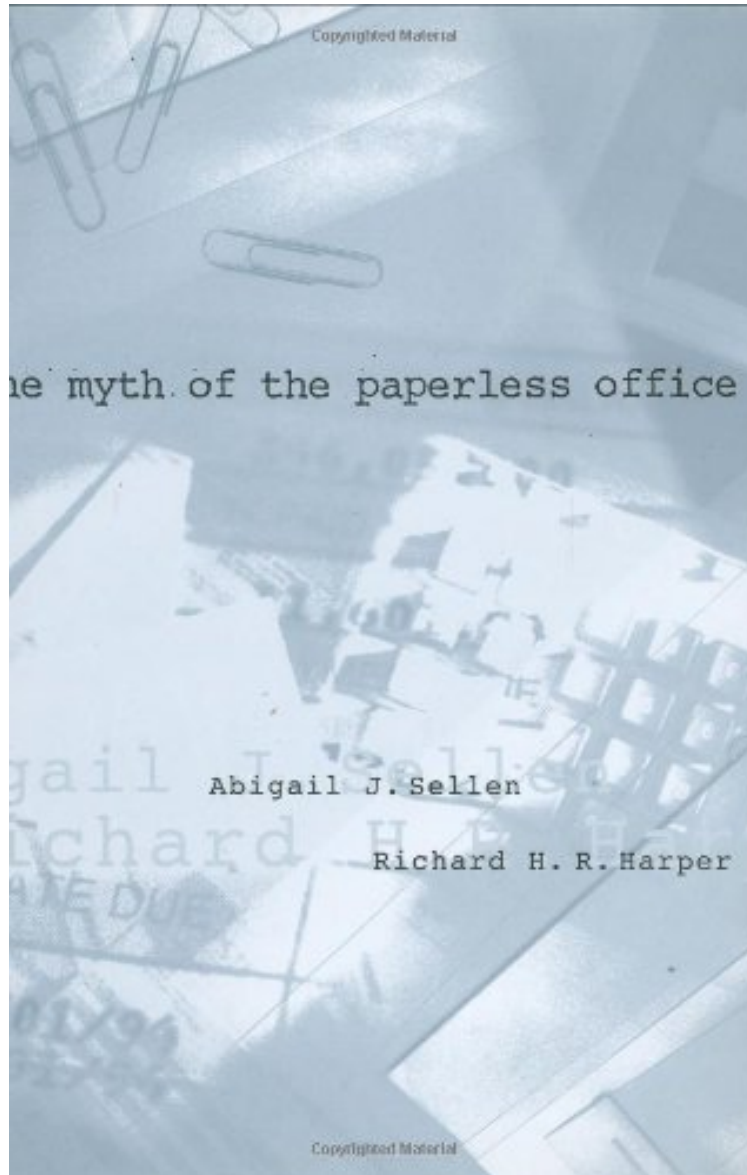


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## The Myth of the Paperless Office (MIT Press)

*Abigail J. Sellen, Richard H. R. Harper*

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**Abigail J. Sellen, Richard H. R. Harper : The Myth of the Paperless Office (MIT Press)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Myth of the Paperless Office (MIT Press):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A terrific analysis of the opportunities and limitations associated with paperless initiatives and business processes.By Rafael MoscatelThis bold and insightful analysis by two Microsoft employees into the psychological and practical reasons why certain business processes continue to rely on paper remains relevant even a decade after its publication. The book is especially helpful for records and information

governance consultants more intent on providing their clients with a true understanding of the nature of their processes than selling them software solutions driven by buzz phrases including "The Paperless Office." Companies should certainly move toward imaging and digitization when feasible but the best solutions always require a sophisticated approach to rebuilding processes that recognize both opportunities, limitations and human nature. 14 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but outdated By Robert Dubose What a difference 8 years makes. In 2002 it looked as though the authors were correct: the paperless office had been a myth. Technology had increased paper usage rather than decreased it. Many office workers still preferred to read and work on paper rather than screens. But about the time this book was published, the "myth" started to become true. Per-capita paper usage in offices started to decline. In my experience, most office workers have switched from paper-reading to screen-reading in the last six years. And they have switched to screens for many of the tasks that the authors argued are better suited to paper reading. The difference is new technology. For instance, the authors argue that knowledge workers prefer to review, work, and collaborate on paper documents. As a lawyer, I found that argument to be true in 2002 when text-based programs did not include useful tools for collaboration. But developments since 2002 in programs such as MS Word and Adobe Acrobat have made it much easier to do tasks such as collaborative editing on a screen instead of paper. Sellen and Harper's argument does remain relevant and thought-provoking in one important respect. They explain the unique functionalities of paper to argue why paper is better for certain tasks. In the last 8 years, some technologies have been started to compete with the functionalities of paper. But some tasks remains more useful than screens for some tasks. Sellen and Harper's arguments at least give us the analytical tools to think about whether certain tasks are better suited to paper or computers today. This book was ground breaking in 2002. As a lover of paper, books, and libraries, I wish Sellen and Harper had been right. I would be interested to see an updated edition that addresses the usage of paper today. But as technology has advanced, the argument of the current edition has become outdated. 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. I don't love it, but you might. By Mandi I read this in an archival history course. It would probably be most interesting to you if you: a) really love paper/ are a records manager or b) are interested in late twentieth-century corporate office trends. The greatest thing about it, to me, was that it was written clearly and concisely. Their major points are clearly presented in the introduction. What follows in the bulk of the book elaborates on these.

Over the past thirty years, many people have proclaimed the imminent arrival of the paperless office. Yet even the World Wide Web, which allows almost any computer to read and display another computer's documents, has increased the amount of printing done. The use of e-mail in an organization causes an average 40 percent increase in paper consumption. In *The Myth of the Paperless Office*, Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper use the study of paper as a way to understand the work that people do and the reasons they do it the way they do. Using the tools of ethnography and cognitive psychology, they look at paper use from the level of the individual up to that of organizational culture. Central to Sellen and Harper's investigation is the concept of "affordances" -- the activities that an object allows, or affords. The physical properties of paper (its being thin, light, porous, opaque, and flexible) afford the human actions of grasping, carrying, folding, writing, and so on. The concept of affordance allows them to compare the affordances of paper with those of existing digital devices. They can then ask what kinds of devices or systems would make new kinds of activities possible or better support current activities. The authors argue that paper will continue to play an important role in office life. Rather than pursue the ideal of the paperless office, we should work toward a future in which paper and electronic document tools work in concert and organizational processes make optimal use of both.

"If you wish to read anything at all on office management, read this book." Guardian UK "The authors approach their subject with academic rigour, observing real organisations to find out how people like to work." Financial Times "The case for paper is made most eloquently in *The Myth of the Paperless Office*...." Malcolm Gladwell *The New Yorker* About the Author Abigail J. Sellen is a cognitive psychologist at Hewlett-Packard Laboratories in Bristol, UK.