



Information management in business – the new professional

As one of the long serving representatives of the library and information profession I want to share what I see as a possible future for trained library and information professionals in a field that has been totally ignored until now. Many of my former colleagues are working in document, records and knowledge management and doing a fine job at that but they work within the confines of systems and processes that have been designed within a software framework by the IT industry to make sense of what I call "the chaos of information management".

I know of many of these information management experts who instinctively know that what is missing is real order and control but what they work with is always limited to what the IT industry believes is the optimum requirement and any other way of looking at managing precious information in the business is going to be resisted.

The industry is working within the paradigm of the power of the search engine and continues to perpetuate the myth that technology just by using a good taxonomy and appropriate metadata is providing all the information management that the world needs.

When questioned on the required elements needed in their systems to be able to cater in full for the needs of a business and at the same time deal with the wide variety of attitudes, skills and ability and time and other operational considerations, the IT industry will look to the next release or the next operating system. But the emperor is without clothes and nothing on the horizon is ever going to make a great deal of difference to the way that human beings want to manage information and the time they are willing to take to get it right.

It seems strange to be promoting order and control while the world under the control of technology wants to rely on being virtual and being organized in the virtual sense only but there are huge benefits in 'real' organization that are unavailable in any other way. Business owners, managers and inevitably the workers are the losers and the world is missing out absolutely everywhere while nobody notices their loss.



Since the mid nineties I have worked in the main outside of libraries in businesses ranging from government down to the smallest, some owned and operated by a single person.

There were always four questions about business information that everyone ignored but were desperate to have right answers to. Sadly, the answers always showed that the business was at risk, was not as productive as it should be and was found to be losing in every way.

Those questions are simple and anyone would want to be able to say "yes" to every one of the following

- do we know what is there?
- do we know what is that that should not be there?
- do we know what is missing?
- do we know what we need?

And yet all of these questions were a pointer to possible minefields even when a business has invested heavily in the latest information management systems and the latest technology. I have been able to prove that it is always going to be hard to find the right answers to these questions until a business has set about organizing its business information by organizing the computer network or the standalone machine they are using to run the business.

When you are working either as a consultant or a contractor you can't afford to stir the possum. To point out that the information in the business is in a huge mess often went down like a lead balloon. In some cases I faced some fierce opposition from IT personnel who saw me as either a crackpot or a threat. I had to get the message to the right people.

It was nigh on impossible to have other than owners and managers with a stake in the outcomes see that there was a fundamental and critical difference about information management as they knew it and the problems with information content management that was my focus.

It was my job to tell it like I saw it as an information trouble-shooter. I would be called in to find out why something was not working, something was missing or something needed improvement. I couldn't help noticing that computer networks were in a mess and that it affected the whole of the business despite all of the efforts of information management people to create tools for managing and finding information.



It was clear that the chaos impacted on safety, security, resource provision and use, training, compliance and productivity and the systems they had chosen were not working well enough. The information was searchable, sometimes retrievable but mostly unreliable and the staff rarely used the systems. When they did, they used them badly.

Working as a consultant, I took on the task of helping organizations, big and small to design their own networks for their own businesses and to take advantage of this twenty first century management breakthrough. The time to make some fundamental and powerful changes is now. Nobody would have listened a decade ago.

We need a new professional group to do this work but first we need to have the debate about business information organization and the intelligent network as a new management tool and as 21st century best practice.

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