Chapter 16

The Practice of Information Resource Management in Australian Government Organisations

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The concept of Information Resource Management (IRM) was introduced in the mid-1970’s by the United States federal government as part of its attempt to reduce the paperwork burden on the general public. Since then, the concept of IRM has evolved and taken on many meanings and diverse interpretations ranging from technical perspectives to purely “Information Management” perspectives. These diverse interpretations, at least in the Australian context, have held back the successful implementation of IRM in practice. As part of a larger program of research on IRM, a survey of IS/IT executives in some national and state public sector organisations was conducted. The survey revealed a lack of penetration of IRM in Australian public sector organisations, a pattern of mixed success and even a lack of awareness of IRM.

EVOLUTION OF IRM

IRM was first introduced as a concept in the mid-1970’s by the United States federal government in an attempt to reduce the paperwork burden on the general public (Lytle, 1986; Owen, 1989). Although IRM was presented as a planning and control mechanism in the context of records management, the term itself was
used to refer to information in a broader context than paper-based documents. The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1980 established the framework for developing IRM programs in the United States federal government (Trauth, 1989). Subsequently, the Federal Information Resources Management Review Program was established in 1985 to provide policies and procedures for implementing IRM in federal agencies (Miller, 1988). The PRA of 1995 revises the PRA of 1980 as amended by the Paperwork Reduction Reauthorisation Act of 1986.

The concept of IRM has been significantly expanded since the late 1970’s to include:
- the convergence of information technologies and top information executives to manage them (Holmes, 1977).
- the notion of IRM as a mechanism to convert business goals into strategic objectives (Poppel, 1978).
- the notion of information as a valuable corporate resource comparable to capital and labour (Diebold, 1979; Horton, 1979).
- the coupling of the management of the information resource to the overall goals of the organisation (Synnott and Gruber, 1981).
- the management of both information and information technologies (Horton, 1982).
- the function of coordination between the IS department and the user community (Sato and Horiuchi, 1988)
- the integration of the information planning process with the business strategy and the management of the information resource as a shared corporate asset (WAIPC, 1995)

The literature reveals a number of differing perspectives about IRM such as:
- The information perspective
- The data administration perspective
- The technology perspective
- The management perspective
- The organisational perspective
- Combinations of the technology and data perspectives

King and Kraemer (1988) noted that implementation of IRM suffers from ambiguities about what it is supposed to accomplish, the breadth of its intentions and the practical constraints of reform in complex organisations. Trauth (1989) noted that although IRM has taken on a variety of interpretations since its beginnings it has three main goals: to maintain a global view of corporate data, to position the CIO at a high level in the corporate hierarchy, and to integrate both information and information technologies.

Ryan, McClure and Wigand (1994) noted that IRM in the 1990s must deal with a fundamental shift in focus from efficient internal management of paper-