Chapter 22

Conclusion

Many enterprises in the commercial and business sectors are yet to address the inadequacies in their document and content management environment. Given the vital role that documents play in most business processes, the failure to implement management controls in this area is somewhat enigmatic. One might be forgiven for thinking that this failure is based on some wishful belief that the problem will disappear. However, many enterprises could not even adequately manage their documents in the “good old days,” when mostly physical documents were used to support business processes and “life was easier.” Perhaps some enterprises have the view that the new digitization of document formats will herald the long-awaited utopia of the “paperless office,” and the problem of having to “manage documents” will magically vanish. We do not think so.

There may be a visualization aspect that impacts whether executives are able to discern that they may have a problem. With mismanaged physical document collections, executives have been able to see whether they had a problem, because they could observe collections of documents around offices, and notice volumes of documents waiting to be processed. However, millions of digital documents might be sitting mismanaged on network file systems, where it is difficult for executives to visualize the problem. Unless they care to browse the folder structures or arrange for scripts to detect the extent of document redundancy, inappropriate document naming and versioning, inadequate integrity constraints, and security issues, the disorder can remain hidden until a problem occurs. Then management’s response is reactive rather than proactive.

Furthermore, the digitization of documents (or “putting them up on the intranet or Internet”) does not equate with management of documents. We have always mismanaged documents. Those ancestors with their tortoise shells who were mentioned in earlier chapters, may have had them taken or destroyed by rival tribes. Their preservation technology was not all that satisfactory either. So, the requirement to manage information in containers in whatever form is not some “new problem,” and it is not likely to be brought under control until it is addressed by executive management.
While on the topic of disappearing, we note that management of documents and Web content is not simply addressed by destroying documents without the legitimacy of approved disposal authorities. Those Roman citizens in Chapter 1 were lucky enough to have their leaders destroy their taxation records, which would no doubt be appealing to most citizens. It would virtually guarantee the return of any government looking to mobilize its electorate. On a more serious note, we as a society continue to witness reports of the willful and illegal destruction of documents by executives in some key business and government corporations. The types of actions have a significant impact on the ongoing viability of these organizations, their brands, products, and services, and indeed threaten their survivability.

Executives who turn a blind eye to the management of information as a resource are neglecting their responsibilities to their shareholders and the public. Busy executives may find it difficult to appreciate the scope and complexity of the problem, and quite often fail to realize that mismanaged document environments can have a detrimental impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of business processes. Business process redesign studies need to take into account the limiting effects that mismanaged document environments can have on business process efficiency. The alignment of business process redesign with innovation in practices and systems for managing documents and content might be a convincing way of addressing the problems identified in Chapter 3.

Professionals who practice in the information disciplines generally realize that their enterprises might have a problem with managing documents. However, they do not necessarily have a clear understanding of the problems their enterprises face with digitization of documents. We have heard the statements made that “if we could just get the physical documents managed properly, then we can address the digital documents.” These types of statements tend to come from information disciples who may be uncomfortable with the complexities posed by the vast proliferation of digital documents, and the many different types of formats. Or, from consultants that have expertise in advising on the establishment of regimes for managing physical documents.

It is also difficult for some information professionals to come to terms with concepts such as “virtual documents” or “dynamic assembly of content,” where structured units of information are created on the fly from digital fragments stored in repositories. However, it is incumbent on information disciplines to adopt a comprehensive view of the problem associated with managing documents and Web content files. We hope that this book helps to fill in gaps for those who do not have exposure to digital documents. After all, any suggestion to focus management initiatives on addressing physical documents may raise skepticism, e.g., “how long have organizations had to get their physical document collections in order? They have been dealing with them for the length of their corporate existence. If they haven’t got it right yet, how much more time do they need?”

Problems are likely to become more evident in response to the expectations from a growing community of Internet savvy customers that transact business electronically. These customers want instantaneous access to services and information. They demand the same type of responsiveness from many channels, including call centers, responses to email, letters, and attending over-the-counter service centers. Enterprises will need to have their information assets (including those held as content in document containers) organized to provide the level of customer service that is and will be demanded in a customer service-centric market.
Related Content

Final Considerations
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/final-considerations/117977?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/final-considerations/117977?camid=4v1a)

MIS Research Frontiers: Listening (More) to the Customer
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/mis-research-frontiers/63527?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/mis-research-frontiers/63527?camid=4v1a)

RFID and Labor Management Systems Selection in the Logistics Industry
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/rfid-labor-management-systems-selection/69106?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/rfid-labor-management-systems-selection/69106?camid=4v1a)

Creating Business Value through E-Commerce
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/creating-business-value-through-commerce/7199?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/creating-business-value-through-commerce/7199?camid=4v1a)