



THE GOVERNANCE OF THINGS - Records Management - The Future of the Profession

Although the records management (RM) profession is facing challenges with an increasing focus on Information Governance, the reality is that its role and function has been in great need for more than 30 years and remains a necessity today.

In regards to the profession, many hold the belief that it is simply imploding on itself. There are parallels with the librarianship and health informatics professions, both of which were under immense pressure to be assimilated into the information technology (IT) profession. Both professions have now gone through a governance-led rebirth and have successfully integrated themselves into the broader discipline of information governance (IG). Many perceive the librarianship industry as having successfully reconstructed much of its processes and services, resulting in an industry that is both required and well respected. It should also be noted that this rebirth has created a new breed of librarians that have profound skills in research and discovery, as well as the governing aspects of these information types.

Explaining What RM Professionals Do

It is interesting that we as RM professionals have

always struggled when it comes to explaining our industry and job responsibilities to peers. I have had people tell me that my job entails a variety of things, including looking after vinyl records to working in finance doing accounts payable. Obviously, we believe in what we do and its importance. However, within our own organisations, especially in IT, many often think they have discovered a new business function, when they suddenly realise there are legislation and regulations that require the IT service to retain a certain type of information for a certain period of time, only to then destroy the information. Once destroyed, one must update the metadata to reflect the destruction. Then the light bulb clicks on and most would realise this is simply retention and disposal.

Core Industry Identity Problem

Our core problem has always been that our industry has always been considered the back office where the filing is done. The majority of what we considered to be our bread and butter is now being completed in an automated system that is much more transitional and transactional. Most importantly, we don't even know that it is being created, let alone



managed. The blame does not fall on IT, as the business is requesting new ways for the creation, collection, management, access, analytics, usage and predictability of information assets.

Considering we are not skilled in these areas, the question that resonates with many is, 'Do we even want to go down that path and compete with IT?' The answer is no.

In the meantime, records are being created everywhere in business systems of engagement. In many organizations, we now have full digital engagement between businesses and their customers. A digital contract that allows for digital signatures has become a common part of the customer relationship management (CRM) process and the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. How do we, as records managers, become part of this? We cannot convince businesses to put this in our records management system as an afterthought, considering the business does not have the time, money or resources to properly do so.

While we have been adapting as RM professionals from managing system of records that have replaced our manual records management process, the world has surged forward to systems of engagement.

Does this mean that if we are not identifying the record (evidence of business) as part of the process, we have lost our role as RM professionals? Unfortunately, most would agree we have already lost our roles. However, that does not mean that we have lost our jobs. In fact, it has given us a huge opportunity. The gap that is now being identified in most organizations is Information Governance (IG) and the strategic aspects of what we do as part of our norm.

As RM professionals, we do not need to manage the information objects as individual items anymore. The information objects and records will be managed by IT as a service in a repository that is also managed and serviced by IT professionals. We must ensure that they,

the service providers, have the right strategies, frameworks, policies, procedures and governance in place to insure that the business is collecting, managing, preserving, using and disposing of the right business information.

RM professionals must do the following:

- Understand from a governance perspective why and what the organization needs to capture and manage in relation to the data, information and records
- Understand from a governance perspective how and when this needs to occur
- Persuade senior executives that it is imperative they adopt a management systems approach to their information assets with an overarching IG strategy and framework
- Understand that our new mandate is to manage information processes, architecture and frameworks
- Coordinate the IG strategy and associated frameworks
- Put in place adequate change management (CM) strategies to ensure the business adopts the IG strategies, frameworks, architectures, policies, procedures and guidelines. Critically the CM strategies need to be embedded into business culture, permanently.

Our roles as records managers and custodians must change. The operational aspects of our jobs must also change. We will never have enough resources, money or time to manually manage every piece of information. However, the functional aspects must not change. In the digital age, records need to be managed holistically across the enterprise, and RM professionals need to participate in multi-disciplinary governance teams that include stakeholders from legal, IT, internal audit, risk and compliance and the business, as a whole.

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