



In need of document management competencies

Throughout the world, all enterprises, whether large or small, in public or private, have one thing in common: each produces documents, which are carriers of data or information. Documents are the natural by-product of the activities of an enterprise. They are a unique resource bringing with them an enormous responsibility. However, they contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of business functions.

In view of the tremendous growth in technologies, many of us believed it would result in a paperless office/society (or is it paper-less office/society?). I am sure you would agree that this is not the case, whatever your interpretation of the concept was. The advent of technology has brought with it piles of electronic documents that need to be managed appropriately, using the same principles that were used in managing the paper documents. While the concept document management has been around for a number of years, many enterprises, some quite large, still do not have a viable document management programme. Others have allowed their programmes to become dormant.

How many qualified information professionals can confidently say, that after qualifying they are able to develop an effective document management programme in an enterprise? My guess is that very few are able to confidently give a positive answer. If this is true, what is the reason for this? Is the curriculum not covering the basic aspects of document management or is it a case of us information professionals failing to apply the basics we have been taught wider than the traditional library institutions? I believe the answer lies in firstly understanding what knowledge, skills and abilities are required when managing documents. Secondly, the academics need to continuously review the information management curricula and develop appropriate curricula and courses to meet business requirements.

What is a document?

Every organization has some form of documents, for example correspondence, procedures, reports, electronic mail, cheques and drawings. Documents comprise coherent documents of information meaningful to their relevant users (Wiggins 2000:1). In other words, practically any information created or communicated within the enterprise, except undocumented conversations, forms a document.

Why document management?

From simple office memos to complicated technical manuals, an effective document management programme can organize your business information and control the development of and access to those documents. Having a document management programme would contribute to:

- Process and product consistency
- Improved quality work

- Improved productivity
- Enhanced customer service
- Effective and efficient transfer of knowledge.

A good document management programme will ensure that documents are accessible, secure and are always accurate and up-to-date. Most of all, a document management programme should address the document life cycle and document configuration management and control.

Document life cycle support

Documents typically have a life cycle. Some authors mention four stages (Diamond 1995:2) of the life cycle while others outline five major stages. Whatever stages are put forth, a document's life cycle includes the following steps:

- Creation
- Editing
- Review
- Publishing
- Distribution
- Archiving.

As a document/information professional you must be able to assist the subject matter experts in formatting the developed document, edit, review and proofread documents while managing the document's life cycle.

Document configuration management and control

To develop a document and address each step of its life cycle is only part of a good document management system. Document configuration management and control form the other part, which is the infrastructure in which the system operates. Document configuration management and control ensures:

- Identification and classification of critical documents that have to be managed
- Controlled access and security
- Effective revision tracking and control
- Accurate and up-to-date documents.

Knowledge, skills and abilities for document management

Information management and document management are interrelated fields; as a result one would find that document management is part of the information management department or function. An advantage of grouping document management with information management is that the document management function gains direct access to strong technical support. Whether or not document management is part of information management or information systems, the two areas must work closely together to ensure both the smooth implementation of computerized document management systems and the inclusion of electronic documents in the overall document management programme.

Skills for managing documents/records

A major study undertaken in the 1980s, funded by the United States Department of Education, examined the educational needs of the information science field as well as those for other information workers and professionals (Pemberton, 1996:64). The study assumed

that in professional education for information work, the educational needs of practitioners should be patterned after, or based on, the competencies required in the field. Though virtually unknown to the document management community, a fifteen-page segment of the study did identify competencies needed as reported by seasoned practitioners. Competencies include knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Based on experience in the field of document management and competencies outlined by authors such as Dearstyne (1999), one can confirm the following to be the core competencies for document management specialists:

- Knowledge of the business in which you are operating in, its processes, workflows and accountabilities within the business
- Knowledge of the legal and regulatory reasons for managing documents, such as *Promotion of Access to Information Act* and *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and others
- Knowledge of international standards that impact document management such as, ISO standards for Safety 18001, Environmental 14001, Quality 9001 and Records management 15489
- Knowledge of methods for incorporating document management requirements into the design of business applications, work processes and management function
- Knowledge of evaluation techniques for measuring the effectiveness of the document management infrastructure of the organization
- Knowledge of the configuration management
- Ability to analyse and conceptualize
- Ability to communicate complex ideas and concepts to diverse audiences
- Ability to work well with colleagues in the information technology, management and any other individuals with interest in document management in the organization
- Ability to serve as an advisor or coach to raise awareness of the importance and relevance of documents as a source of information for decision making and delivery of outputs.

The skills required are:

- Designing (basic) – databases and Web
- Organizing and planning
- Computer literacy
- Technical writing and presentation
- Written and oral communication
- Information retrieval and indexing
- Filing and archiving
- Publishing – Web or other form.

It is quite clear that information professionals must be knowledgeable, as should anyone in the corporate environment, about management functions and activities. The focus of the knowledge and related skills is, and will continue to be, on the intellectual and practical knowledge that make us information professionals in the first place. It is not enough to have the knowledge; one must also be able to apply the knowledge.

The question is why is this not fully addressed by the academics? If documents are carriers of information, then it is time academics gave the management of documents the attention it deserves and examined the curricula to address in-depth document life cycle management, document configuration management and related ISO standards.

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