Integrating Records Management (RM) and Information Technology (IT)

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Why integrate RM and IT?

Records Managers are continually exploring ways to integrate their services with those offered by Information Technology-related professions to capitalize on the advantages of providing customers a total solution to managing their records and information. In this day and age, where technology abounds, there often exists a fear on the part of records management that this integration will result in a loss of identity and the focus of one’s own mission – a fear that records management may become subordinated to the fast-paced technology fields. We need to remember there is strength in numbers and it benefits RM, IT, AND the customer when we can bring together the unique offerings we each possess to reach synergy for the benefit of our corporations. We, as Records Managers, need to continually strive to move “outside the records management box”, network, expand our knowledge, and influence the IT disciplines to incorporate the concept of “management” into their customer solutions.

What is unique about RM vs. IT?

Both Records Management and Information Technology (or IS, or MIS, or CIO, etc. - whatever the acronym used in your environment) talk about “life cycle”. However, RM and IT have different perceptions of the stages of the life cycle, in particular about where it “ends”.

To Records Management, the stages are creation/receipt (with thought put into this phase to determine how long the information needs to be kept to serve business needs and meet requirements); use and distribution (where standardized file structures organize the information); maintenance and storage; and a final stage of retention and disposition (where the need for retaining the information any longer is reviewed and final disposition authorized). Destruction of outdated information (including electronic records), leaves space and allows for easy access/retrieval of the more valuable records needed to conduct business in a timely manner.

To Information Technology, the life cycle consists of building applications, getting customers set up to use the software, and then turning it over to the customer. IT is interested in the customer’s ability to create, use, distribute, and store to their hearts content. Storage is seen as “cheap” without the recognition that the information being stored may no longer be useful or valuable. IT rarely concerns itself with the future problem of finding the right information buried among tons and tons of un-organized and un-weeded data. These problems end up being the customer’s headache to deal with as they are able.

The biggest difference between RM and IT seems to be that Records Management personnel remain continually involved with the “management” process throughout the records life cycle. RM is very concerned with the mortgage for the future of the system and the storage, access and retrieval of the information over time. IT personnel can develop, turn the application over to the customer, and walk away until the next application needs to be designed or the next customer problem needs to be
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resolved. Careful planning for the retention and disposition phase of the life cycle and the involvement with the customer’s long-term management of the information is not a prime concern or management mandate.

What we’ve done.

At Sandia, Records Management was a part of the Sandia CIO (or IT) organization when it was formed - we were “booted” out of it shortly thereafter. In the beginning the priority of the CIO was to “wire the buildings” – get everyone “hooked up” and “hooked together”. Obviously, we in Records Management were not going to contribute much to this mission and the CIO did not have time to think about anything else – such as managing the information that was going to flow through all of those lines. So, we became part of another organization and continued developing and implementing our Records Management Program activities. Now we are back with the CIO and welcomed, in fact. The CIO has new priorities (with the completion of the wiring efforts) which include competitive knowledge and shared information. Our big challenge now is to educate them in records management principles and demonstrate how we can work together for total solutions, standardized mainly through web access, rather than independent customer responses from IT and RM.

Brought interested partners together:

Sandia’s Recorded Information Management Department is the corporate policy making group for Records Management. We consult with customers and offer guidance concerning their information and records management needs. We advise folks on the continued need to maintain both the retrievability and readability of records, regardless of the media on which they are stored. We try to be the catalyst to bring together all the elements they need to consider in managing their information by suggesting partners (i.e. IT developers, the legal department, records management, etc.) who might best help them with a total solution. Since our company does not yet have an enterprise solution for information and records management, everyone has been in the habit of looking at their specific problem and developing their own unique solution. We try to steer our customers to look at “model” working systems already in place to see if the same concept will work for them rather than encouraging them to spend a lot of time and dollars re-inventing an identical or similar solution. By encouraging IT and RM to work together with the customer we can bring a smarter, cost-effective, integrated solution to the problem; hopefully, one that covers all of the loopholes.

Included IT opinions in policy development:

At Sandia we have “Business Rules” that govern and set the boundaries for the performance of our work. These Business Rules are the corporate policies by which Sandia operates. The Business Rule for Information Management states that it is the policy of Sandia Corporation to manage information as a corporate asset by ensuring appropriate protection and dissemination throughout the information life cycle.

In developing the Information Management Business Rules we had representatives from Records Management, the Technical Library, Telecommunications, and all of the IT and web-related groups working together. There was constant word-smithing of every statement and MANY re-writes before the terminology was defined and commonly understood by all the participants in order to pull together a policy workable for everyone. The teamwork required to accomplish this task helped us all
understand each other better and cross-educate each other on related but differing information management concepts.

We continue to work with the IT organizations to help us write the chapter on electronic records to be included in the Records Management Manual which we maintain as guidance on all areas of records and information management for Sandia. In addition we have worked closely with the both legal and the e-mail folks from IT to set some controls on the handling of e-mail.

**Conducted required RM Training:**

This year we received approval for required Records Management Training for all employees and contractors (approximately 7600 people). Sandia has a series of 6-7 training courses which management has established as essential for everyone to attend (many times to their annoyance!). The required training covers such topics as ES&H, Computer Security, general Security, Ethics, EEO/AA, and now Records Management Training. Completing the training is a part of the individual’s performance evaluation. The Records Management training we offer includes: general information about what is a record and what is not a record; a discussion of electronic records and the need to protect and migrate them for future access/retrieval; a list of the services we offer such as files assistance, consulting, training, inactive records storage, retention schedule use, forms management; the review and approval of publications and information going outside the company; who to contact for assistance; and a “hot” topic for the year. The “hot topic for this year is electronic records and the handling of e-mail. We have many questions, particularly from the IT-related organizations, when we bring up information migration and the mortgage costs, long-term document storage, e-mail as a communication system, not a record-keeping system, etc. We have had an opportunity to clarify and provide more detailed explanations to questioners and the training sessions have elicited numerous phone calls and requests for assistance or further discussion. Our training has provided access to customers who might not have previously given records management a thought.

**Been generally rather pushy (in a nice way):**

Whenever we hear of opportunities to become involved or collaborate in meetings where information management activities/issues are being discussed, we request to be included. We can raise records management issues about the need for information organization, the value of metadata, long-term storage/access problems, migration, retention and disposition, etc. And, as the expertise in our department is becoming recognized, we get invited more and more often to participate up front in information systems planning sessions. This participation brings together IT and RM at the beginning of the project rather than the end.

(We are also good at bribing people with chocolate!)

**What we’re currently doing.**

**Providing entre to IT services for our customers:**

Customer Service in the primary mission of the section of the CIO (IT) to which we belong. One of our RM goals is to bridge the interaction between the highly technical IT groups and the customer in order to help our internal customers receive an understandable, more integrated solution in answer to
their needs. As we try to enlighten RM customers about existing technological solutions, we refer business to the IT group - a good thing. We can then work together to have records management built into the solution. In working with IT to resolve a problem we increase our knowledge as well as theirs and both IT and RM gain from the mutual support and integration of the technology infrastructure with the human infrastructure.

Moving the population to the "paperless" office:

As our population moves toward the so-called "paperless" office, it is doing so with records management principles in mind. We assist the customer in selecting the correct media for their business needs whether those needs be electronic databases, CD-ROM, microfilm, or another media. The solution is fitted to the needs - everything is not automatically imaged and made electronic. Whatever the chosen media type, we encourage organization of the information in the beginning, the use of indexing and metadata for ease of future access/retrieval and a link to the retention schedule.

Formalizing the mortgage concept:

Formalizing the mortgage concept is a major issue when working with IT groups. Just as you don't purchase a house and never invest in upkeep, repairs and re-modeling, you can't install an information system and not plan for upgrades, migration, and maintenance. Buy-in for the future support of information systems to meet access/retrieval needs as well as record retention and disposition schedule requirements must be obtained. (Thoughts about future migration problems and the costs involved with them are too frequently ignored.) If records are a recognized company asset, their life cycle management needs to be addressed with IT and resolved to ensure the information that was worth creating is available when needed.

Initiating a poster program:

Sandia is managed and operated for the Department of Energy by Lockheed-Martin. Lockheed-Martin has developed a series of very nice posters concerning the handling of sensitive information. They were very happy to share these posters with us. The colorful posters stress the value of information and the importance of protecting information properly. Every couple of months we do a mass mailing of one of the posters to each of the departments at Sandia and ask the department to display the poster. The effort has been well received. At this time of heightened awareness in our environment concerning the handling of classified and sensitive information, these posters are a timely tool to reinforce the message.

Bringing in a speaker/panel for NRIMW

Each year for the past 5 years or more our Records Management Department has sponsored an activity for National Records and Information Management Week (NRIMW). We have always tried to bring in a speaker who would discuss issues around electronic records in order to attract IT personnel to attend and ask questions. Past topics have included subjects such as managing electronic records, recovering "deleted" records, legal issues with electronic records, etc. This year we are sponsoring a joint event with the Technical Library on a topic of great interest to both our groups - long-term electronic records storage/maintenance. National Library Week (NLW) is the week before NRIMW and, since both Records Management and the Technical Library report to the CIO, we decided to work together on this year's event. We have invited a prominent speaker from the library world, Richard Hulser, Worldwide Content Management Product Marketing Manager, IBM Corporation, to provide a
keynote speech on issues in knowledge management, information futures, and corporate information. Following this presentation will be a panel discussion, “Information: The Competitive Advantage”. Our panel will be made up of prominent Sandia directors, managers, and CIO representatives. The panel will be introduced by the Executive Vice President of Sandia to ensure her presence in hearing the issues and comments. Each Panelists will contribute a short (5-10 minute) presentation on their current vision of information needs in their particular organization, how they view the information future at Sandia for competitive concerns, how and why they view information as a strategic asset, and how information adds value at Sandia. By bringing invited experts and recognized department heads to the podium to speak on issues they see as critical to the company’s success, we hope to share our IT and RM concerns and possible solutions.

What we’re plotting.

Use new Thoughtweb tool:

The CIO organization at Sandia is experimenting with a new knowledge management-type tool called Thoughtweb. This product allows links to be made between performance, goals, and objectives as well as to related documents and e-mail. This information-sharing application can also serve as an on-line collaboration tool. Thoughtweb is the beginning of a studied movement into the world of competitive information and knowledge management.

Meet with project managers and influential corporate leaders:

The manager of our Records Management Department is planning to meet with various project and program managers, directors, and other influential leaders to interview them and chat about how they are doing in the struggle to control the vast amounts of information at hand, their information management needs, what problems they see coming, etc. With the information gathered from these conversations, we will sit down in our records management organization and analyze where we need to provide better help, what we are doing right, and where we should exert more effort to coordinate with the IT departments. We will then select the precious few areas that will bring the most value and concentrate our activities on these.

Integrate required training:

We previously mentioned the required training all Sandians need to complete each year and the annoyance they feel at having to do so. Most people feel the training takes precious time away from doing “real work”. In order to help alleviate some of this resentment, there is an effort to consolidate and reduce the number of required training sessions. A prime candidate for integration with other training courses is our Records Management course. This first year of its initiation as a required course we deliberately planned to have face-to-face records management training in order to emphasize its importance and bring about recognition of the word RECORDS by all employees and contractors. We are now working on combining, or integrating, the terminology and principles of records management into already existing web-based training in related areas. By working with each of the groups responsible for these training modules and concentrating on the few basic RM principles we want to keep in the forefront of people’s minds as they use the computer systems and follow security requirements, we can eliminate having a specific RM course. For example, if employees pay proper attention to security issues in their use of the computer they will be handling the records with the
proper level of sensitivity. If they are creating, distributing, maintaining and destroying their classified information properly, these are records and they are automatically handling records appropriately.

We will continue the established training for New Hires, Managers, and Secretaries, providing basic guidance, showing them where on the web to obtain additional information/help with their records and providing insight to the concerns they might need to address when working with the IT organizations. Additional classes addressing current issues will be established as needed. Technology changes so quickly and, even though the basic principles of records management remain the same, the application of these principles needs to be constantly discussed and worked out.

**Strengthen outreach to customers via liaison program:**

In our Records Management Program we hope to strengthen our outreach and education programs by establishing a Records Management Liaison Program. We will work with designated liaisons throughout the laboratories who will be trained to serve as the first contact for records management assistance within their center. The liaisons will be able to provide knowledgeable guidance to their departments and in turn alert us to the current hot issues we should address in policy, training and guidance. Monthly meetings with the liaisons to discuss concerns and solutions will involve IT or other expertise as necessary.

**Bottom line**

IT services are seen as desirable by nearly everyone struggling to address information management problems – everyone wants the latest, greatest “resolution” to their information needs. Today, more than ever, technology is billed as the answer to every problem. The competitive business environment recognizes that the technology and capabilities for doing business electronically need to be up-to-date and working. While IT may not be funded as generously as in the past, the customers needs and desires are there and customers have been trained to want more and more, faster and faster.

Records Management, on the other hand, is required in our environment (as a government contractor, most of our records are considered government records and subject to the records management program requirements of the National Archives and Records Administration and the Department of Energy). However, customers do not always perceive the desirability of good records and information management. To many, it seems an added burden, something that MUST be done in response to a requirement, rather than the common sense way to handle daily business practices and provide organized solutions to using, finding, and maintaining information.

By bringing the desired and required together, Records Management and Information Technology can present well-rounded, value-added (and compliant) solutions. The need for customers to have accurate, organized information available when they want it becomes (gradually, and in a well-thought out fashion) the reason for technical enhancements and electronic solutions. Policies become integrated, working together, instead of conflicting with each other. RM adds “management” to the enabling tools of IT.

Together we can make things happen for the good of all and become indispensably interwoven in people’s minds. By developing a mutual understanding and a mutual trust between our two groups (IT and RM) we can feed each other for the good of the customer and the corporation. Partnering is the key to winning solutions.