

Much of what we can do about practice involves informal networking. Apart from the blog, where we have posted some 'how can I?' queries with some success, the committee and ex-members cover a large range of experience. So if you get a problem in our area it may be worth asking us as well as colleagues in your own sector.

Finally it may be worth saying that we try to play our part in what CILIP is doing through its policy and management structures. There seems to be a loyal and relatively large number of people still interested in what we

do. Our membership has, in common with most of the other SIGs, fallen over the last few years, but latest figures still put us in the top 10 for membership numbers. We would like to keep it that way and we certainly think that the issues for cataloguers and allied trades will not diminish with the rise of the internet etc. Indeed they are likely to become more complex. If you are a member, drop us a line about what we ought to be doing. If you are not a member look at the blog and keep in touch and do consider joining us!

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Current Topics

Information Matters: Government's Strategy to Build Capability in Managing its Knowledge and Information Assets

Abstract: This article by Katie Woolf, formerly of the Government Knowledge and Information Network, looks at the new UK Government strategy for knowledge and information (KIM). Led by the Knowledge Council, the strategy sets out the principles and actions government must take to develop the capability it needs to manage corporate knowledge and information as the key business assets they are. It discusses how the strategy will be achieved through a departmental delivery model, the relationship of the strategy with the Information Assurance agenda post data loss scandals, and the need for senior leader engagement to be the driving force to building a culture that values KIM.

Keywords: knowledge management; government policy; information management

Introduction

Information is a crucial business asset and, like any business asset, it must be managed. When it is managed badly, it can cost money and potentially damage corporate reputation. A report last year by Cap Gemini showed almost two-thirds of managers believed poor information management was hurting productivity and that it was

currently costing the UK public sector £21 billion in lost effectiveness.¹ Knowledge is also an asset that is vital to an organisation's performance. Good information management needs to be partnered with good knowledge management. If it is not, the value of information as an asset is undermined, and cost effective, efficient service delivery is compromised. The commercial sector is waking up to the idea that knowledge and information are assets. The UK government is now beginning to think

the same and has produced its first strategy on knowledge and information management to support this.² Led by the Knowledge Council,³ the strategy *Information Matters* provides an overall framework of principles and actions needed to help embed a stronger knowledge and information culture in government organisations. Importantly, it highlights how essential leadership and governance is raising the core skills of everyone working with information and the professionalism of those charged with managing it for organisations.

The knowledge and information agenda in government

Information Matters was published at the end of 2008. It sets out the key strategic actions needed to build capability in how government manages its knowledge and information, by:

- Improving the way departments manage information as a valuable asset, ensuring it is protected, made accessible where appropriate and used effectively to inform decision-making.
- Building a culture that shares knowledge more effectively and builds capability in the handling of information of all kinds.
- Delivering this through developing the professionalism of knowledge and information management and through supporting governance, processes and technology.

Its publication followed a number of high profile reports and reviews on the loss of personal and sensitive data by government departments, namely the Hannigan review⁴ into the handling of personal data, the Walport/ Thomas review⁵ into data sharing, the Burton report⁶ into the loss of MOD personal data, and the Poynter review⁷ into the loss of personal data held by HMRC.

The requirements and findings of these reviews have really focused senior minds in government on managing information risk – and they will for some time to come. A clear programme of work is underway to overcome risks and departments are working hard to rebuild public confidence in their processes and abilities to manage vast quantities of sensitive data. Astutely the Hannigan review took great care not to focus exclusively on issues of risk, security and technical solutions. It also looked at culture and the need for Board engagement. It rightly assigns ownership to information assets to improve accountability. It also stresses the need for fostering a culture that properly values, protects and uses data, both in the planning and delivery of public services from the top down and the need to raise the capability of those involved in the management of and access to personal data.⁸

This was reinforced by Keiran Poynter, the former PWC Chairman who led the HMRC review, who reported.

“Technological measures risk creating a false sense of security. Most breaches are the result of quite mundane physical factors, and that they are essentially caused by process failures and/or people simply not knowing what to do. Organisations can have all of the policies and processes they like, but if their culture and value management systems and scrutiny are not joined up in a clear governance framework this lack of integration lends itself to data security issues”.⁹

This is the challenge. Culture is not something that happens by following rules and ticking boxes. It comes from a growing understanding and awareness of the value corporate knowledge and information has in delivering an organisation’s services and then looking at the skills, processes and technology that is needed to support this and the importance of leadership to make it happen.

Partners supporting the wider government policy on information

The Knowledge Council is working hard to link up with others who are involved in Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) activities, such as the Central Sponsor for Information Assurance, the Chief Information Officers Council and the Chief Technology Officers Council. The strategy and delivery plan is designed to help government departments develop the frameworks and tools to raise capabilities in KIM but does not seek to duplicate or address the specifics of existing projects. So, with respect to the procedures that followed the Hannigan review, the strategy supports accounting officers in managing information risk and in meeting the actions set out in the report to improve data security.¹⁰

Government policy for handling of information now has compatible and mutually supportive messages for both the Information Assurance and the KIM agendas. Going forward we now have the framework, on the one hand to safeguard the information that needs to be protected and processes in place to make it accessible if appropriate; and on the other, agreed standards and best practice to share non –personal information that can be used effectively across government to support policy making, inform decision making and be re-used by the public for value added products.¹¹

Moving into Delivery

Information Matters is a high level strategic overview to raise awareness amongst our senior leaders and board members of the benefits of getting it right, be they for public good in terms of better services for citizens, economic advantage, through the greater re-use of the public sector’s information, or through greater efficiency by sharing knowledge, working collaboratively to save time

and resources and learning from the successes and failure of previous experience by capturing this information and making it available.

It is now the responsibility of KIM leaders and KIM professionals to make those benefits increasingly apparent and easily understood across government. Every organisation that succeeds in KIM has a senior advocate. Leadership is critical in building the knowledge and information culture so that we shift the strategy into reality.

Information Matters is essentially the blueprint for the future. Delivering it and embedding its principles and actions into everyday working practices and organisational culture across the civil service presents the challenge. At a time when resources are scarce there is not a central fund to deliver the strategy. The Knowledge Council will achieve progress by aligning with departments' existing priorities to meet actions needed.

There are already a number of important initiatives going ahead in government and it is the responsibility of the Knowledge Council to harness these initiatives and exploit their usefulness to the whole of government and, indeed, share with the wider communities and businesses that rely on information to deliver their corporate functions so, where a department needs to do a particular KIM activity to meet its business objectives, it will lead on that particular area for the whole of government.

For example, take the initiative 'Developing a Collaborative Culture' from the Delivery Plan. Four central government departments are exploring exactly what these issues are and how they can be addressed by analysing the practices and tools they have in their organisations. The project group will draw on the expertise of colleagues to deliver the most effective tools, infrastructure and culture, applicable to all of government, that support better collaborative working.

Another key deliverable is building capability of those working in KIM in government. The Knowledge Council has recently produced the Government Professional KIM Skills Framework,¹² which describes in detail the specialist attributes that characterise KIM practitioners and set them apart from other corporate functions. The framework is specifically focused on the specialist skills required for roles within the KIM function. Its aim is to provide a common language across government with which to articulate and define government KIM professional skills and to support the career development of KIM practitioners. The framework will support the continuous professional development of KIM professionals to meet the challenges head on of new formats, legislative reform, new working practices and indeed just the sheer volume of digital information being created.

The professionalism programme is strengthened by an online community of government KIM professionals, built to support knowledge sharing and facilitate networks between them. The community site allows members to contribute, comment and collaborate on projects across departmental boundaries. It is also a forum for the

community to ask questions, offer solutions and share expertise, experience and ideas.

Other actions include 'What To Keep' an initiative led by The National Archives aimed at challenging the current mindset on identifying, even before the point of creation, what information to keep to support business activities and fulfil corporate obligations. Mitigating risk by putting in place guidance and frameworks to ensure business critical digital information remains accessible in the medium to long term; horizon scanning, to build an evidence base to inform KIM strategies in the future and looking at the feasibility of collaborative procurement of information resources. The Delivery Plan is available on the Government Knowledge and Information Management Network website <http://gkimn.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.

Putting knowledge and information on the corporate map

To make real changes the lead and driving force will have to come from senior leaders and have Board support. Government has recognised HR, Finance and IT as functions necessary to deliver the business of government. Information is as vital. It underpins everything we do. Without it civil servants simply cannot function - from policy makers in Whitehall to frontline staff delivering services directly to the citizen. However, information management is still not on the agenda at Board level. This lack of board-level engagement with information management is the single biggest challenge government faces in managing its information effectively. If government cannot exploit the opportunity of the assets it holds it is failing. This is also reflected in knowledge sharing. A recent report by the National Audit Office *Helping Government Learn* concluded that until learning and knowledge sharing becomes discussed at Board level and embedded within working practices departments will continue to have 'avoidable waste, inefficient practices and ineffective services.'¹³

Conclusion

Knowledge and information management is going to be a major issue in government agendas for years to come, and it needs to be. To start realising knowledge and information as the core assets they are it should not be a box ticking exercise, nor just about rules or technology. If we see information as an asset, we can see huge opportunities in managing it well, in addition to the more obvious risks of managing it poorly. These opportunities are not just financial, although the financial costs are non-trivial and particularly within the current economic climate, any opportunities for financial gains have become even more

relevant and important. They are also about creating wider citizen engagement and new services beyond traditional public sector boundaries.

But Boards need to change their approach if they are going to do so. They need to move away from the notion that IT will solve their problems. IT neither makes the finances balance, nor the people work harder; it just helps to support solutions and make life work more effectively. The real challenge is for Boards to add information management to their agenda, and

think of it in the way they think of HR or Finance. The business rules and tools that are used for these disciplines work on the management of information and will effectively expose the underlying challenges of capability, processes and culture which Boards know how to tackle. The challenge for government is to demystify knowledge and information management and make it mainstream, as the private sector has, and in doing so support the public sector in being more accountable, efficient and effective.

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Biography

Katie Woolf was Advocacy Manager for the Government Knowledge and Information Management Network (GKIMN). GKIMN is the secretariat for the Knowledge Council and the KIM Function in government. She has built and managed the first cross government collaboration tool for government KIM professionals to support knowledge sharing, collaboration on projects and expertise exchange. Working at the Historical Manuscripts Commission and The National Archives for 13 years she has worked on all aspects of the information lifecycle from policy for the creation of digital records to the long term preservation of paper and digital records.