Agility & Stability

A guide to information management
and business agility

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Always **more.**

We always offer you **more.**

Agility challenges and solutions in information management

In a perpetually evolving marketplace, being able to rapidly adapt to change is crucial to success.

An agile organisation is one that can take swift and meaningful action in response to sudden developments, whether that be to control cost overruns on a fast-moving construction project, re-tool a production line according to an unexpected change in market demand, or rapidly reallocate human resources between worksites.

Information management has an important role to play in both an organisation's ability to detect changes as soon as they happen — and its ability to respond effectively in order to maintain productivity and profitability.

A key aspect of agility is stability. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it is the "combination of speed, flexibility; a dynamic

model in a stable frame that actually gives you true agility," says Wouter Aghina, a principal at McKinsey & Company.[1] A solid information management solution can both help organisations achieve this foundation of stability, as well as directly enhance agility.

Firstly, one of the greatest obstacles to agility in any organisation is an inability to quickly and effectively reallocate human resources. According to Training magazine, "as competitive advantage shifts inexorably from the resources a company owns to its ability to mobilise talent, HR is poised to become the critical driver of company success."[2] Information management solutions can affect how well human resources are used. When information assets are well organised and easily accessible, significantly less work hours are spent on tasks outside of employees' core competencies. While these organisational challenges are more often encountered by businesses dealing with paper archives, digital businesses can also face them if systems are poorly optimised. "IT is grafted onto existing working practices and so replaces or perhaps enhances current systems," notes a 2015 study by the CJC.

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1. http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-keys-to-organizational-agility
2. https://trainingmag.com/redesigning-hr-agility

"This approach tends to be costly, difficult, and, in the end, often delivers 'mess for less', that is, it replaces today's inefficient, paper-based processes with IT-based systems. It does not fundamentally change the underlying processes and procedures."[3] In the case of both paper-based and digital workflows, a lack of stable information management can reduce the bandwidth work units have to allocate to sudden developments.

Another barrier to agility is confusion amongst employees regarding where to find information. This problem is especially prevalent in larger organisations, where a lack of transparency about information custody and work unit responsibilities can cause critical data to become siloed in different departments — delaying the sharing of new information and subsequently decreasing responsiveness. Michael Dinh, an executive for Colonial First State, is clear about this difficulty:

"In big financial organisations, it can often be challenging to track down what you need quickly. It's a natural part of working with large systems. You know the information exists, but sourcing it takes time."

Interoperability is also an area of constant focus for organisations striving to maintain agility. A single, stable, centralised system that allows all work units to access data and collaborate simultaneously supports flexibility and responsiveness by eliminating delays associated with the inability of different computer systems to communicate properly and compatibility issues associated with switching between different digital formats.

The final information management challenge for agile organisations is the speed and stability of document logistics. For those paper-reliant businesses with worksites located a long distance from each other, reliable file transport is vital. While most information management companies are capable of delivering information assets the next day, those that can act faster lend their clients a competitive advantage.

The best information management partners emphasise efficiency and simplicity. They can help move cumbersome archives to an off-site location, where they are indexed in intuitive and responsive ICT systems. This frees up staff to get on with more productive, revenue-generating tasks, and helps give them the flexibility to respond to change more rapidly. Better indexing also makes searching faster and more accurate, and can be rolled out across an entire organisation using existing filing references. This means no time is lost in retraining staff, while data is centralised.

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3. CJC, Online Dispute Resolution for Low Value Civil Claims – Online Dispute Resolution Advisory Group (Report, CJC, 2015) p. 4.

In addition, centralisation assists in creating unambiguous information custody that eliminates delays associated with staff having to track down individuals with the right expertise.

By effectively diversifying data access, all staff are able operate more effectively and efficiently. A strong information management partner can also help to enhance interoperability by making off-site files available in a wide range of formats. Paper files can be scanned on demand and transmitted electronically within just a few hours, while digital archives can be accessed in over 250 native file formats instantly. This means no time-consuming conversions, no delays in transmitting files to other work units, and better agility overall.

Physical relocation is more reliable with a good information management partner, too. The best companies deliver documents to a wide range of national locations twice per day as standard. They also carry documents using an unbroken chain of custody, which means they maintain their own in-house fleet of vehicles, use barcode information asset tracking, and avoid outsourcing to contractors. While there are important security benefits to a secure chain of custody, there are also advantages for agility. When handovers are kept to a minimum, less time is spent coordinating between contractors and then dealing with the logistics of multiple levels of custody.

Ultimately, the faster an information management solution is capable of transmitting data, the more seamless it makes information sharing, and the more efficiently it allows staff to work — the more agility benefits it will confer.

Agility is only one of many considerations for organisations looking for a better information management solution. Read on to discover other challenges — and how a good information management partner can help overcome them. Digitisation

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Other important considerations in information management

: Digitisation

While some sectors remain heavily reliant on paper, others such as government agencies are under tremendous pressure to digitise. While this can dramatically improve the efficiency of information flows, it can also create challenges. Instituting a new digital information management system may be simple, but many organisations also need to consider how decades worth of archives can be efficiently converted into a digital format. This is further complicated by a lack of clarity about the contents of existing archives and whether they need to be digitised in the first place, a lack of auditing and indexing resources, and the danger of leaving non-digital business partners behind.

The best information management companies can help organisations assess how advantageous transitioning to digital will be, then set up a plan to implement a more appropriate information workflow

— from an entirely digital solution to a hybrid of digital and paper. Existing paper archives can be rapidly scanned and made accessible digitally, with any un-scanned hard copies remaining available for on-demand scanning and rapid electronic delivery. Better indexation can also be integrated with the digitisation process, using OCR, ICR or manual data entry to capture identifying information in documents and build a comprehensive catalogue.

: Privacy

In recent years, privacy has become vitally important across all industry sectors, but especially so for those dealing with large amount of personal data. After numerous high-profile data breaches in government agencies, a guarantee of privacy-conscious information management is crucial for restoring and maintaining public trust. In healthcare, the necessity is two-fold. Patient files need to be kept safe for the sake of patients themselves, but also in order to deter cyber attacks that can cripple ICT systems and hamper the ability of medical staff to save lives. In the legal sector, duty of confidentiality has always put privacy front of mind, but with hackers now targeting law firms with increasing frequency, privacy-consciousness is now be a powerful point of difference.

Engaging a reputable information management partner can make a huge difference in how an organisation is perceived in terms of its ability to keep private data safe. The best information management companies centralise data off-site under 24-hour surveillance, have their staff sign confidentiality agreements, and employ systems that delete local digital content from viewing devices as soon as the file is closed. An organisation outsourcing its information management can use assurances like these as influential selling points to increase client confidence and stand out from rivals.

: Accuracy

Because data accuracy largely depends on the quality of input, information management solutions have an important role to play in minimising the chance of incorrect entries. This is an especially pertinent area of concern in the healthcare and legal sectors, where lives and livelihoods can often hinge on a single stroke of a pen. While paper-based workflows remain indispensible for many organisations, they are the single biggest contributor to accuracy issues. There are two main reasons for this: handwritten instructions being misunderstood, and errors entering the information during subsequent electronic data entry.

Accessibility also affects accuracy. When data is not updated in real-time, there is an increased chance that parts of an organisation will work from obsolete data.

Along with providing better indexing and cataloguing, one of the main way that information management providers can help enhance the accuracy of data is through digitisation. A number of rigorous studies recommend entirely replacing written and verbal information flows with ICT-centric ones in order to minimise the chance of errors. In healthcare institutions, doctors using mobile devices are able to input medication orders more clearly, while nurses are less likely to misread them. Where paper workflows are largely retained, having a centralised file repository and multi-user retrieval interface can ensure that all parties have the same access to the most accurate and up-to-date data.

: Customisation

Every business is different. And that means that every information management solution needs to be different too. The cookie-cutter archiving and indexing systems provided by some information management companies can leave organisations dealing with workflow interruptions or even paying for services they don't need. A financial services company wanting to put their in-house files in storage, for example, may find it difficult to find a provider who can simultaneously audit those files for compliance purposes and then digitise them using existing in-house indexing conventions. Or a construction company with paper-based workflows may find itself using a provider with a digital focus that cannot efficiently transfer important hard copies between different worksites.

Engaging a high-quality customised information management partner means not having to compromise. The best solutions will mesh seamlessly with existing processes, employing indexing and retrieval systems that use an organisation's internal filing references and native terminology to limit the learning curve for staff.

Storage can be customised for hard copy or digitisation — or a combination of both — with the option to audit archives as they are stored and set up destruction schedules at the same time.

Good information management companies provide a range of retrieval choices also, including on-site pick-up, rapid dispatch in their own fleet of GPS-tracked vehicles, and even urgent scanning and electronic transmission of physically stored documents.
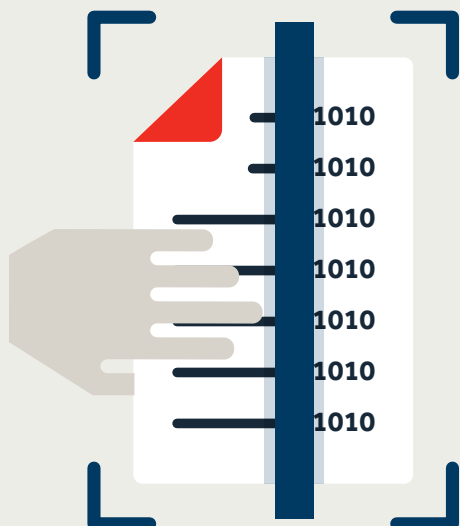
Environment

While not intuitively connected to the idea of environment, information management solutions nonetheless have an important role to play in the physical experience that staff and clients have in the workplace. In sectors such as healthcare, where physical space is generally at a premium, poorly optimised information management can cause or exacerbate space-related problems. Keeping large archives in-house doesn't just take up space that would be better put to use for staff or clients. Studies have shown that poor use of space can increase employee churn because it makes tasks more difficult to perform and implies that the organisation lacks respect for its staff.

Moving information off-site with a professional information management partner frees up much-needed floor space for core business activities.

Even a partial removal of old files can make information easier to locate, with the potential for a resulting increase in operational efficiency.

When relocating documents, good information management companies will even offer an integrated solution that combines off-site file storage with a range of other services, including dismantling and removal of old shelving, cleaning, renovation, and full FF&E, to refit the old space for a new purpose — from staff offices to patient wards to meeting rooms.

:Hard copy

Even in our era of always-on connectivity and versatile electronic devices, paper still plays an important role in many industry sectors. Lawyers, for example, still require wet signatures on contracts, while in construction paper remains the most efficient way to visualise and collaborate on project designs. For paper-based businesses, many information management providers can place a lot of emphasis on digitisation and electronic information retrieval, but do not provide sufficient support for paper workflows. The biggest issues that paper-based businesses deal with are the challenges of organising hard copies efficiently, sharing information quickly, and ensuring documents are archived appropriately for compliance purposes.

The best-equipped information management providers support a complete range of hard copy indexing, storage and retrieval needs. They can provide fast, secure transport and archiving solutions for paper documents that span the entire nation, with client-anonymous indexing solutions that make retrieval quick and easy through intuitive ICT systems. They also use an unbroken chain of custody to transfer documents twice daily as standard, and even faster through scan-on-demand technology that can electronically deliver images of paper archives anywhere in the world in a matter of hours. Top-quality information management providers also handle secure destruction of paper documents, both according to pre-arranged schedules and on demand.

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The Grace Advantage

With over 50 years in the business, Grace is uniquely qualified to deliver excellence in information management.

Grace provides solutions for a full range of information management requirements, from storage and indexing to retrieval and destruction. Here are the advantages your organisation will enjoy with Grace:

: Expert consultants to assess the precise needs of your business and tailor solutions that address your specific information management challenges.

: The speed, convenience and security of 26 information management centres across the country – more than any other provider.

: Many facilities are protected by state-of-the-art safety systems, including sprinklers and fire doors – all linked directly to the local fire brigade. Plus, electronic intruder detection with back-to-base alarms.

: Complete and customisable cataloguing, indexing and sentencing solutions for projects of any size, right across the country – with information management software that gives you total control.

: A scanning and digitisation process to make searching and retrieval as fast as possible. Digital files are audited to ensure 100% accuracy, and can be delivered in any electronic format.

: Fast and flexible retrieval, with the capacity to deliver documents twice per day as standard, urgent scan-on-demand services that respond within just 3 hours, and the option to personally retrieve information on site.

: The only secure chain of custody in the industry that spans the entire country. With GPS-tracked vehicles and police-checked staff, your documents never leave Grace's sight. Their client-anonymous indexing system also ensures your confidentiality at all times.

: Real-time tracking of your documents, from anywhere in the world.

: Secure destruction of documents, either on schedule or on demand, under a strict authorisation process – protecting against both accidental data loss and unnecessary storage terms.

: Innovative solutions that recruit Grace's commercial and fine-art removals expertise to cater to a wide variety of unique business requirements.

Contact Grace today to find out how their specialised information management solutions and integrated services can help you. Visit www.grace.com.au/contact-us for your nearest office.

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