Cooperation in Information Management

An examination of the role of the records manager in today's information control environment. The author draws upon the comments of practitioners to raise important questions about this role, present, and future.

By DONALD F. EVANS, CRM

The title "Information Manager" is usually applied in large corporations to the manager of systems analysis and programming for computer operations. This Information Manager has a large staff of systems personnel working under his control. This manager does not normally have the "Total Information System" of a corporation under his domain, likewise, neither does a Records Manager usually control it in total in most corporations.

Business today is undergoing dramatic changes in its quest for fingertip information and as a result, systems and programming has never had so much work. In addition to a large staff of systems analysts and programmers, there is also a number of planning departments at various levels. It is not unusual for corporations with 8,000 employees or more to have 100 systems analysts and programers plus 50 to 75 planners.

Some articles say that the Records Manager must control and be department head of these information systems and planning groups. There are few companies with the Records Manager having total control over systems, planning, and the complete information system. The Information Manager, the Records Manager and Computer Manager should work together for the common good of the corporation. There is sufficient room and need in large corporations for all three managers.

Much has occurred in the technology field in recent years. The center of activity is the computer with data/word processing, micrographics, facsimile transmission, video, and other advances centering around the computer. Computerized indexing to records center storage, microfilm, active records, litigation support, and other cataloging of information require good systems and computer support.

Robert F. Williams, President, Cohasset Associates Inc., has challenged the Records Manager to be knowledgeable in the data aspects of records management. His timely concern was for the Records Manager to acquire the necessary capabilities that both data and document records require.

Size of Organization

Smaller companies or institutions usually have a more family like atmosphere with broader scopes of responsibility for a manager. The smallness of operation may not demand in-house equipment. This could be true of micrographics, large computers, and other technology.

The medium size institutions may have a combination of in-house equipment plus some work contracted on the outside.

The larger organizations will probably do most of their work in-house with complete micrographics development, data/word processing, and computer operations.

The small, medium, and large size company or institution does dictate the levels of management needed and the cooperation required.

It is important to keep organization size in mind. One prescription for a records, systems, or computer manager does not fit all sizes of corporations.

It is also essential to remember that not only the size of an organization but also the type of industry or institution will dictate the type of records management responsibilities needed.

The articles written and speeches given to records managers that say you must have micrographics, forms control, correspondence control, systems development, word processing, and all other information sources under your domain has aroused alarm and concern in records management circles. Some of these articles and speeches are given for a number of reasons.

- Some repeat what has impressed them in conferences and seminars.

- Some may neglect to point out the impact of political struggles within organizations.

- Some do not recognize or stress the size of a business or organization and the type of business.

- Some infer that records managers have been in control of these programs all along, which may not be true in all cases.

It is generally recognized that a management umbrella for information control is needed. The title of Vice President of Information Management, Information Manager, or some other may be used to describe the responsibility for managing information. In large corporations, there may be room for the Records Manager, Systems Manager, Computer Manager, Planning Manager, Word Processing Manager, Information Resources Manager, and other managers of newer technology. These efforts, however, need to be coordinated rather than each one splintering off in its own direction.

Viewpoints Expressed

John Porter, CRM, Manager, Records Management, IBM, wrote an article titled "The Changing World of Information Management." The subtitle was "People in Records Management Have to Decide What Their Role Will Be?"[2] The title and subtitle of the article express very capably the changes in Information Management and the role of the Records Manager in this changing environment. He also points out some of the records transmission problems involved for corporations which cross international boundaries. There are restrictions for the flow of information into and out of countries and there are privacy laws that affect the retention of data elements.

Woodruff E. Benson, CRM, Sun Company Inc., wrote,[3] "Records Management personnel have a real opportunity to take part in this new office planning. In fact if we don't there may not be a place for us in the new office. We might be swallowed by the information managers." His challenge to records managers in this same article was, "To grasp this opportunity, the records profession will have to adapt to the new office and records environment, understand and use the minicomputer, learn the potential of word processing and keep abreast of the latest technology such as electronic filing and explore and exploit the total systems that are coming to the fore."

Col. Leonard S. Lee, CRM, in his article "Information Management at the Crossroads – Part II the Technology" says,[4] "Thus far it has been micrographics and electronics. In the future, video discs, lasers, holography, charged coupled devices, bubble memories, fiber optics, and others still under wraps in research laboratories will make their appearance. Technology is a moving train that seldom stands still or backtracks."

Future Responsibilities in Records Management

It is very probable that the Records Manager will need to share responsibilities with other information sources in order to maintain controls on information. It seems feasible for the manager of records, systems, computer services, accounting functions and others to participate in varying degrees in information management. One alternative is for committees to function and each member of the committee to cooperate to establish retention schedules on data in the form of paper, disc, computer tape, fiche, film and other formats so that duplicates can be eliminated. The committee approach can bridge difficult problems that cross department boundaries.

It is possible that records management will be upgraded in many businesses and institutions if cooperative efforts are launched. Who is more qualified for input in committees than the Records Manager because of his or her varied background?

The basic product of an office is "information" and requires the vehicle to get this information quickly to the user.

The managing of information must be unbiased, must be an "educator" to the user, and must be a developer of information flow.

New Technology Brings Change

This is a new era of change and it will affect the records and information managers. Responsibilities will be shared and cooperation must take place to control information and retention. Information Resources Management may surface to control information. If done properly, it will embody cooperation from records management, computer services, micrographics, word processing, and the department or departments that create many of the records for a corporation or institution. Information resources management should probably be the independent department responsible for establishing controls and managing all sources of information.

Some records managers may disagree with this position, however, it is a workable solution to controlling all information. Many in records management have fought an uphill and sometimes losing battle in the area of new technology. Programs have been designed and installed by systems people who have not always understood records management principles. Some of the programs were successful while others failed because the records manager was neither included nor asked for input. It is unfortunate that records managers are many times labeled as controllers of inactive paper documents only, whereas, most record managers have a vast knowledge of the other media of information.

In large organizations, where systems programmers and computer operations have clout, it is easy for programs to be initiated without considering the total records program. Now with the information resources functions for controlling new systems and new technology uses, some cohesiveness can be achieved if the records manager and others are included as an integral part of the whole system. If systems and computer operations are left unchecked, then wasted effort and unnecessary systems will be installed.

Some recent articles regarding organizational bureaucracies, transitions to new information systems, confederation of associations are seeing many of the problems with suggestions in solving them. **Jack Hawley-Widmar**, Information Consultant, comments,[5] "The purpose of all information specialists is to ensure that up-to-date, accurate information in a satisfactory format is available to the user when needed. The information is simple, efficient, and cost effective. It is the job of all records managers, working with other more narrowly specialized information workers, to design and recommend systems using the records management tools best suited to the needs of those systems.

"I want to encourage information managers to work towards the end of compartmentalization in the information field. By this, I mean the phenomenon that computer specialists recommend computer solutions to every problem, microfilm specialists recommend microfilm solutions to every problem, and so on. Each information management tool is there to be used in areas where it is most efficient."

Bonnie Canning, Divisional Vice President for Kappa Systems Inc./ Micronet, says,[6] "In the past, certain positions – data processing manager, word processing supervisor, reprographics manager, corporate librarian, director of administration, and records manager – have been distinct and well-defined positions. However, as components in the information system continue to overlap traditional organizational boundaries, this is becoming less and less true.

"As organizations enter the 'Age of Information,' questions begin to emerge about redefining who is the individual responsible for policies, procedures, and procurement. Which person or division in your company is best suited to determine purchase and use of equipment that will be shared by many users for many purposes?

"As organizations begin to interface new technologies (i.e., WP, DP, optical

character scanning, computer-generated graphics, computer-output-microfilm (COM), and computer-based files and indices), it is evident that many key decisions fall outside the traditional role responsibilities. Current office systems and technologies demand a rethinking of internal organizational structures."

With new technology, certain issues arise such as validity of information, backup before dumping certain information, access to the information, privacy of certain information, personal information, security of physical equipment, integrity and authenticity of information, and the responsibility for information flowing through the system. New technology brings with it jurisdictional disputes. The benefits of new technology should bring improved productivity, better use of personnel, cost controls, and an improved environment due to better use of human resources.

The challenge is clear – cooperation is essential among all managers in order to have an effective information system.

What Is the Answer?

There is no canned answer or canned package available to solve these problems. However, the responsible individual must have top management support for a successful total information program to be effective. This person must have the capacity to unite and weave all sources of information managers within a large organization to a common goal in the control of information.

Robert E. Diamond, Publication Manager for *Information & Records Management Magazine* stated it well in his Publisher's Memo by writing, "The point is that there is an evolutionary process underway and the role is finding the right person for the challenge in each organization. No one seems to be winning the position by default.

"What is most important is that the emerging Information Manager have access to top management or be a member of the top management team; that he or she understands what kind of information is needed and in what form and frequency, and that this person be able to inspire and direct all of the managers of the various information processing disciplines to work in concert to achieve the organizational goals."[7]

It involves more, however, than just being able to direct and inspire managers. This person must have a broad background in the management of

information, must understand the value of information and its use in the total organization. This individual must have knowledge of user requirements, retention practices, litigation support, tax requirements (internal and external), audit trails, vital records protection, forms, and their uses and other fundamentals and principles of records management. This person must have a basic understanding of computer operations, word processing, micro-graphics and the other technologies relating to information and records practices.

The criteria just given describes the responsibilities and broad background of a records manager, in many of the corporations and organizations of today. To dilute that type of background can dilute the type of formal program required by management for managing information. Many records managers have not been permitted the authority to install a comprehensive information program. In large corporations of today with all the new technologies, the records manager is sometimes overlooked. This is probably due to new systems entering by way of computer systems.

Many records managers have now achieved the designation of CRM (Certified Records Manager). This certification began in 1975 and requires, in addition to experience, that they pass a six-part examination covering:

1. Management principles and program organization,
2. Records generation and control,
3. Active records retrieval,
4. Records disposition and protection,
5. Technology of records management – micrographics, data processing, word processing, and
6. Case studies – practical applications of records management knowledge.

Preparing for these exams enriches the background of an individual in technology and records management.

The Records Manager must not be by-passed as an equal team member among other information related managers if he or she is not assigned the position of Information Manager or Information

Resources Manager.

The key ingredient must be total cooperation among all those involved in information management.

Dr. Mark Langemo, CRM, Professor of

The benefits of new technology should bring improved productivity, better use of personnel, cost controls, and an improved environment due to better use of human resources.

Records Management in the College of Business and Public Administration at the University of North Dakota, in writing of a needed team effort, asked, "Who Will Be the 'Information Manager'?"[8]

He states, "In reality, within many organizations, the individual with the greatest opportunity to become an organization-wide Information Manager will be a person who: (1) is strong and determined, (2) has the most comprehensive background for managing all aspects of information, (3) has the most comprehensive knowledge of the organization, (4) has an appropriate academic education, (5) acts and reacts like a top manager or executive, and (6) who wants and is willing to work for the on-going success of the organization.

"Today's RECORDS MANAGER should be the person who best understands the informational needs of the organization – and therefore be most qualified to become a comprehensive INFORMATION MANAGER. Records managers have, for years, worked with information and records from creation through maintenance to disposition. Records managers have often assumed more broad responsibilities including a wider scope of activities than many managers in the 'tool' areas within their organizations. The strong base as a records manager, and the contacts with persons at all levels within the organization, suggest that tomorrow's Information Managers be today's Records Managers – but with more opportunities than ever before to positively affect work accomplishment and success of an organization.

"The challenge of today's Records Managers clearly is to...use the knowledge of your organization that you have...and your work experience background...and your records management education...and your work at all levels...and your determination...to be an Information

Manager, build on your base as a Records Manager, and build Information Management as you have built Records Management."

Conclusion

When records management programs were being installed in the 1950s, those who were involved in records programs found themselves creating individual programs within their companies, institutions, and organizations. Two records management associations were formed in those days. The American Records Management Association and the Association of Records Executives and Administrators. It took many years for these two groups to merge into one and become known as the Association of Records Managers and Administrators Inc.

Records Managers gathered at round table discussions and assisted one another in solving problems. Records programs were installed to bring about cost savings, controls, retention practices, and updating records programs with new technology. Most of them had no training. They shared and cooperated unselfishly.

Today there are associations and technologies that need to be merged under Information Resources Management. The challenge is facing us. With associations there must be discussion and negotiation with a true desire to merge. In business, cooperation among all the various information managers is essential in order to achieve an effective controlled records and information management program.

Cooperative efforts will bring better controls in managing information, cost controls in technology, and smoother performance internally.

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Evans has received the Emmett J. Leahy Award, ARMA Records Manager of the Year Award, ARMA Regional Records Manager Award, ARMA Chicago Chapter Member of the Year Award, and the ARMA Honorary Award of Merit and the ICRM Award of Merit.

He has also spoken at numerous conferences, seminars, and chapter meetings, and has had articles published in trade journals and magazines.