



DAMA UK Newsletter Spring 2008

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Information or Data?

Keith Gordon - DAMA UK



I have been involved in Data Management for fifteen years and throughout that time the question of the difference between information and data has constantly been raising its head. Most recently, it came up as a question posed to the expert panel at the end of the Data Governance Conference held in London last month.

The glib answer is that information is data in context, and in the past I have used that answer many times myself. But the problem with that answer is that it is too glib, and really invites the questioner to probe deeper. And if you are in presentation mode and the questioner in your audience is considerably senior to you your fumbling for an answer is really very embarrassing.

For many people it would appear that there is no difference between information and data.

Journalists will often use the two words interchangeably. An article in one national newspaper a few months back used 'data' in the headline and 'information' in the body of the article to describe the same concept. My guess is that this happened because 'data' takes up less room in a headline than 'information' and headline space was at a premium.

In the UK we have the Information Commissioner's Office. On its website it says that "The Information Commissioner's Office is the UK's independent authority set up to promote access to official information and to protect personal information". Its vehicle for promoting access to official information is the Freedom of Information Act, yet its vehicle for protecting personal information is the Data Protection Act. Is the ICO using information and data as synonyms?

When I was going through the early stages of developing the ideas for my own book with the British Computer Society, my first proposed title was "Principles of Data Management". Very rapidly I was asked if I would be prepared to change that to "Principles of Information Management". Now I fully understand where this was coming from. When speaking to people outside of the IT/IS community you will retain their attention longer if you talk about information instead of data. 'Data is technical stuff that is best left to technical people, business people are only interested in information' is the thought process (but that is a thought process with which I fundamentally disagree, but that is another issue). In the case of the book, there was a perception that a book about information and its management would sell better than a book about data and its management. I was not prepared to give up the notion that the book was about the management of data, but I recognised the need to get information into the title. So, that is how we got to "Principles of Data Management: Facilitating Information Sharing"; not a snappy title, but an accurate one.

I have already said that I am not happy with the answer that is normally used - 'information is data in context'. I am not happy with it for two reasons. Firstly, it is too glib and too imprecise; it doesn't fully answer the question. Secondly, it strikes me that it is looking at the issue from the wrong direction.

Let us look at the imprecision issue. What exactly does 'in context' mean? If I have a HOLDING table in a database with four columns, StoreCode, ProductCode, Date and Quantity, and one row in that table has the values "S36", "WGC2748", "2008-03-04", "27", do I have information or data? It looks as if I know the fact that on 4 March 2008, the store with the store code S36 held 27 of the product with the product code WGC2748. Some people would say that is definitely useful information, despite the fact that it is something we call data stored in a database. So then, should we be changing our terminology and calling these collections of data information bases instead of databases? This is almost certainly a step too far, yet the individual data values are definitely in context when they are stored in that table. Or, does this data only become information once it is presented to an end user on a form on a screen, or on paper as part of a report?

Now the direction issue. Assume that we go along with the idea that information is data in context. This looks to me very much as if it is the IT/IS technical community, the custodians of the data, generously putting that data in context and giving it to the business people who need it as information. In other words, the technical tail is wagging the business dog. But where did that data come from in the first place. It may have been bought in (a set of names and addresses bought for marketing purposes, for instance) but it probably came from some business process that generates data, such as the reading of a barcode at an electronic point of sale terminal or an end-user entering the results of a stocktake into a personal computer hooked up to the company network.

So, what we need is a precise definition that distinguishes between information and data but that starts from the point of the view of what the business is interested in, and that is information.

Such a definition exists in international standards. It is in ISO/IEC 2382-1:1993 *Information Technology - Vocabulary - Part 1: Fundamental Terms*, which defines data as:

"a re-interpretable representation of information in a formalised manner suitable for communication, interpretation or processing."

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Figure 1, which is derived from a similar figure in the standard, demonstrates this.

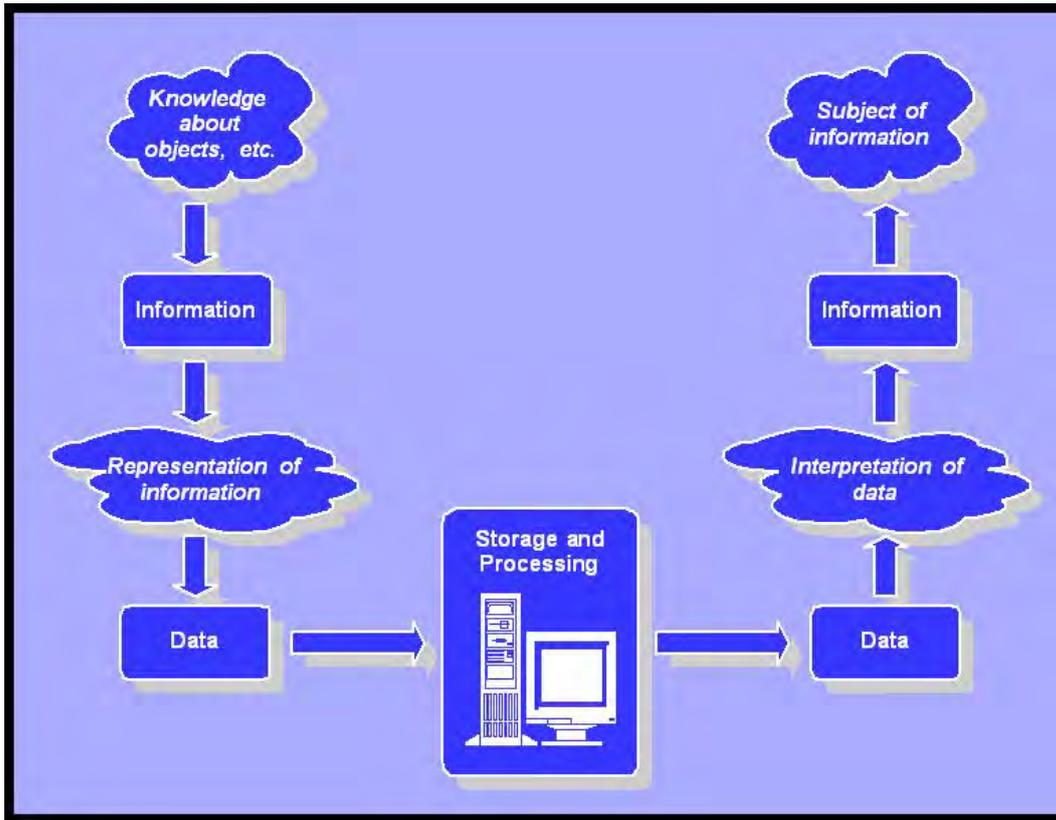


Figure 1: The relationship between information and data

The business knows something that it needs to have stored, communicated or processed. This is information. As this is put into a form where it is suitable for storing, communicating and processing (for example, it is input into a computer) it becomes data. The store codes and product codes become character strings. The date of the stocktake is in whatever date format the particular software package uses. The quantity held becomes an integer. We have gone down the left hand side of Figure 1.

After it has been stored, communicated or processed it is still in the same or similar formats. It is still data. Only once it has been put back into a form where the business can use it does it become information again. This is going up the right hand side of Figure 1.

The trick, and this is where we data managers come in, is to ensure that the translation used when going up the right hand side matches the translation used when going down the left hand side, so that the information that comes out of the system is a true representation of the information that was put into the system. And for this we need comparable metadata.

So, I like this ISO/IEC definition of data. It provides a precise distinction between information and data whilst starting from the business perspective with information. It is now my preferred approach when asked to distinguish between information and data.

But, can we find a similar distinction between data management and information management? I will look at that in the next newsletter.

New Members

**DAMA UK extend a warm welcome
the
following new members**

**Corporate
FTI Consulting**

**Individual
University of Westminster**

CBT Working Group

The group were very pleased with the feedback received following the working group sessions on Organisation, People and Technology in September and we wish to repeat our thanks to the speakers.

The questionnaire was issued however there has been minimal response and the group is revisiting the viability of this as an input mechanism .

The group is currently reviewing direction and plans for 2008.

If you would like more information please contact
Sue.Russell@damauk.org.

DAMA UK

'Data Management meets Education'

8 April 2008

Cardiff University

Four speakers including presentations from ISEB and the Universities of Cardiff and Westminster

Please click [here](#) to register - more information will shortly be available on the DAMA UK website - click on events!

DAMA UK Events

05 June 2008

**Data Protection - are you breaking the law?
Touchbase Centre
Heathrow**

21 October 2008

**'New ideas for database'
A Joint BCS/DAMA UK Event
BCS, Southampton Street London**

**2 November 2008
DAMA UK host the
European 3 in 1
Conference
At the
Victoria Park Plaza
London**

**December 2008
Date, Venue & Topic TBC**



If you have a article or information that may be of interest to DAMA UK members and readers, please send it, with graphics to sue.russell@damauk.org, for approval by the DAMA UK committee.

Deadline for the next issue is 15 May 2008.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Upcoming Conferences and Events 2008

Master Data Management Summit Europe 2008

21-23 April 2008, London

Europe's largest Summit dedicated specifically to MDM, CDI and Data Governance Solutions

MDM SUMMIT Europe 2008 is the premier European event, attracting speakers and delegates from around the world. Please join us as we engage practitioners from leading companies and thought leaders in the field, to reveal strategies for successfully delivering this mission-critical and game-changing infrastructure. This is **Europe's largest gathering of MDM professionals** where we all look forward to sharing new insights whilst learning from the broad network of European IT professionals who are committed to excellence in Master Data Management.

The 3rd Annual MDM Summit Europe 2008 is Europe's premier event dedicated specifically to MDM, CDI and Data Governance. Discover:

- How to dramatically increase your company's ROI on existing CRM initiatives, as well as deploy competitive differentiating technologies to dramatically increase customer service levels, reduce operational costs and increase marketing effectiveness
- What are MDM, CDI, and Data Governance? What is driving business interest in these solutions?
- What are the better architectures and vendors? How do these solutions differ from data warehouse and CRM initiatives?
- How will the market and technologies evolve? Who will be the leading vendors?
- How does an IT organisation get started? How does IT sell MDM to the business? How to establish a Data Governance programme?
- What are the most successful best practices for creating a "single customer view"? How to decide to build, buy, or extend an MDM solution

**Please note that
DAMA UK members
are entitled to a 10%
discount -
when registering,
please make it known
that you are a DAMA
UK member.**

**Please register with
IRM UK only.**

DAMA UK MEMBERSHIP FEES

March is already upon us which means that we are coming to the end of the 2007/2008 membership year. At the Annual General Meeting it was agreed that membership fees will remain the same for 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009; individual membership at £25 and corporate membership at £165.00. DAMA UK is not VAT registered.

Just to remind you of the benefits of membership - you are entitled to attend any DAMA UK event free of charge (at least 4 per year) and can get discounts on many external UK based events. Corporate members can send up to 8 members to a DAMA UK event subject to availability and can also get discounts on some international events for up to 5 members. Individual memberships are not transferable.

All members receive regular newsletters, information and news and are welcome to contact DAMA UK with for specific information or enquiries, we will endeavour to assist ourselves or pass on to an appropriate specialist.

If you have specialist knowledge and would like to be one of those who can help the membership occasionally, please contact Sue with your details. Renewal invoices will be sent shortly, prompt payment would be much appreciated and please note we moved to new offices in July 07, details are below. To avoid lost cheques could all members please ensure that your accounts department have the new contact details. We look forward to meeting you all at this years events and if you have any queries regarding membership, please contact Sue by email or telephone.

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Loyalty Management Group (LMG) is the world's leading operator of multi-company loyalty programmes. The group owns and operates the Nectar brand, the UK's largest coalition loyalty programme.

LMG's goal is to keep Nectar as the leading loyalty card scheme in the UK and one of the country's top brands by maintaining the trust of collectors and partners.

In 2007, LMG conducted a multi-million pound re-brand and card renewal exercise and mailed 10 million new cards to Active Nectar Collectors. Nectar would have been seriously undermined if collector data lacked integrity since this would lead to a loss of faith with collectors and partners.

Find out how LMG implemented data quality process to maintain collector data integrity on tens of millions of Nectar collectors and further enabled them to save around £150k in production and mailing costs on one of the largest recard mailings in Europe.

Click [here](#) to access papers



Enabling More Effective Business Service Management (BSM) with ASG's MetaCMDB™

As IT becomes a more business-aligned position, it must seek out new ways of working that support more effective operations, service creation, and service delivery. These include technologies, processes, and a culture that supports higher levels of accountability, as well as more dynamic responsiveness to business needs.

As long standing members of DAMA, ASG would like to share the latest research on configuration management database (CMDB) technology.

Now Available! The Latest Research on CMDB and BSM – Complimentary Webcast Replay

ASG hosted an incredibly valuable webcast in December 2007 which featured Forrester Research Senior Analyst J.P. Garbani. During the webcast, Garbani presented the latest trends on applied CMDB technology. With his unique understanding of the changing position of CMDB and BSM, Garbani shared his thoughts on technology and innovations in IT management software and operations.

In addition, this webcast offers:

- Your chance to learn how a MetaCMDB can meet, and exceed, the business and technical requirements of your enterprise
- Your chance to get information on the top issues when evaluating CMDB technologies
- Your chance to discover how you can fuse your company's IT and business goals today

Webcast-on-Demand Today! - <http://www.asg.com/go/DAMA>

Watch the replay now to receive your complimentary MetaCMDB white paper (authored by independent analyst EMA). This white paper looks at two of the most fundamental and conflicted concepts surrounding these requirements: BSM and the CMDB system; focusing on CMDB requirements as they support a BSM strategy, and highlighting ASG's offerings in that context.

If you would like to know more about ASG please contact Jeanne Lack, ASG Marketing Manager - Northern Europe on jeanne.lack@asg.com

