

Why your business needs a Data Management team



» When asked to identify the key resources in their business, most managers will readily name 'money', 'people', 'buildings' and 'equipment' as their key resources. These are the resources that senior business managers spend most time managing and in most businesses there is a clear investment into the management of these tangible resources. But there is a key resource missing from that list: 'information'. No business can function without information. The only resource available to senior management is information; all important decisions are based on this.

But information is a resource that is used in every aspect of a business: it supports the day to day operational tasks and activities, it enables the routine administration and management of the business and it supports strategic decision-making and future planning.

Despite its importance, in most organisations information is not managed as a key business resource. Where an attempt is made to manage information, the responsibility is often given to the specialist Information Technology or Information Systems department; managing information is seen as something very technical requiring special skills beyond the grasp of the layman.

But the management of information is important at every level in the business. Information must be managed so that it is of high quality. The information must be up-to-date, complete, and sufficiently accurate for the purpose it is required. It must be unambiguously understood, consistent and available when and where it is required.

In this modern, automated age, information is derived from data stored in the databases at the heart of

information technology systems. To have high-quality information we need data that is accurate, correct, consistent, complete, up-to-date and whose meaning is unambiguous. Only with high-quality data can we guarantee the quality of the information used by the business.

Unfortunately in many organizations there are some major, yet unrecognised or misunderstood, data problems. These problems are generally caused by the proliferation of duplicate and often inconsistent occurrences of data and the misinterpretation of the data that result from a lack of a cohesive, enterprise-wide regime for the management of data.

The situation is made worse because these days most information technology systems are independently designed and developed to support individual business areas or specific business processes. This results in duplicate data with the consequent likelihood of inconsistency. Even where there is the understanding that it would be advantageous for information to be shared between these separate systems, this is often impossible without there being the possibility of misinterpretation or misunderstanding of shared information.

The solution is to put in place a dedicated enterprise-wide Data Management function to provide a corporate service for the control and co-ordination of the definitions and usage of data that is both reliable and relevant to the whole enterprise. The practitioners providing this service need technical skills and knowledge but also need to be seen as part of the business and not a purely Information Technology asset. ■

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