Building Dynamic RIM Programs in Digital Enterprises

Possessing traditional recordkeeping knowledge and skills is important for any records and information management (RIM) professional, but the digital revolution is also requiring them to be more creative, innovative, and nimble. In this article, the author describes the need for such agility and offers suggestions to RIM leaders for fostering innovation and empowering employees.

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Records and information management (RIM) programs find themselves at the center of an information revolution that is unsettling and seems unending. There is a pattern of continued increase in the volume and variety of digital information being created and delivered through a growing array of channels and devices, particularly mobile devices. Enterprises are making more use of digital information for connecting and collaborating, including via social media.

Recognizing the Impact of Big Data

These large volumes and variety of information have resulted in "big data" and the analytics tools used to extract and distill useful information from it being in vogue these days.

The concept of big data "is revolutionary and holds transformational possibilities for almost every business," writes Tom Davenport in *Big Data at Work*. It is particularly important for "customer-facing products and services" but also coming into vogue in government, education, and other settings. "The basic tenet is that the world – and the data that describes it – are in a constant state of change and flux," he writes, "and those organizations that can recognize and react quickly have the upper hand."

Ginni Rometty, the CEO of IBM, says data has become the basis for competitive advantage. In her 2014 CIO Leadership Exchange presentation "The New CIO Leadership Agenda, she writes "Exponentially increasing in volume, variety, and velocity, data is … fueling vast economic growth and societal progress. It promises to be for the 21st century what steam power was for the 18th, electricity for the 19th, and hydrocarbons for the 20th."

According to "Strategic Principles for Competing in the Digital Age," from management firm McKinsey's May 2014 issue of *McKinsey Quarterly*, "Staggering amounts of infor-

mation are accessible as never before – from proprietary big data to new public sources of open data. Analytical and processing capabilities have made similar leaps with algorithms scattering intelligence across digital networks, themselves often lodged in the cloud. Smart mobile devices make that information and computing power accessible to users around the world."

Indeed, most analysts agree that companies that pursue analytics and digital initiatives tend to outdistance their competitors in terms of effective decision making, market expansion, and financial performance. Companies that make intensive, creative use of digital information and data are beginning to call themselves "digital enterprises." (See sidebar "The Digital Enterprise.")

The growing importance of digitally powered enterprises should open new possibilities for RIM programs. To capitalize on this high-stakes development, though, RIM programs need to re-examine their capacities and strategies.

Developing Skills for the Digital Revolution

The digital phenomenon and its attendant changes suggest the need to develop a broad set of knowledge and skills to guide our information programs forward. Exhibiting professional expertise in RIM will continue to be essential, but not sufficient, to ensure success. Information professionals need a broader and deeper array of skills in leadership and program development.

Transformational Skills

Professional development initiatives for chief information officers (CIOs) who emphasize leadership and program transformational skills rather than technical information skills constitute one useful model, not only for CIOs but also for information program leaders.

The Digital Enterprise

Leaders in business are very interested in "digital enterprises" – organizations that make intensive use of data on customers, products, and services to achieve a competitive advantage. Here are recent reports that may be of interest because of their implications for RIM:

- Bain & Company, *Big Data: The Organizational Challenge.* 2013. *www.bain.com/offices/italy/en_us/Images/BAIN_BRIEF_Big_Data_The_organizational_challenge.pdf*

- Gartner, *Taming the Digital Dragon: The 2014 CIO Agenda.* *www.gartner.com/imagesrv/cio/pdf/cio_agenda_insights2014.pdf*

- EY (formerly Ernst & Young) *The DNA of the CIO,* 2014. *www.ey.com/GL/en/ Services/Advisory/The-DNA-of-the-CIO)*

- IBM Institute for Business Value, *A New Era Begins: Redesigning the IT Organization for a Period of Exponential Change.* 2013. *www-935.ibm.com/services/multimedia/A_new_era_begins_Avril_2013.pdf*

- A.T.Kearney, *Beyond Big: The Analytically Powered Organization.* 2014. *www.atkearney.com/paper/-/asset_publisher/dVxv4Hz2h8bS/content/ beyond-big-the-analytically-powered-organization/10192*

- McKinsey, *The Digital Tipping Point: McKinsey Global Survey Results.* 2014. *www.mckinsey.com/insights/business_technology/the_digital_tipping_point_mckinsey_global_survey_results*

- World Economic Forum, *The Global Information Technology Report 2014.* *www.weforum.org/reports/global-information-technology-report-2014*

The fall 2014 CIO Institute at the Haas School of Business, University of California at Berkeley, for instance, featured such presentations as "CIO as Strategist"; "Transformational Leadership: The CIO's New Role"; "Innovation: Strategy and Tactics"; and "Power, Influence and Communication."

EY (formerly Ernst & Young), in its report "The DNA of the CIO," notes that CIOs "will need to pay less attention to the underlying technologies they love while focusing more on developing their abilities as leaders, managers, and influencers" and demonstrate how they add value to the company. The report explains that key attributes for the CIO role will include:

- Leadership skills
- Communication and influencing skills
- Analytical approach and organizational skills
- Project and change management skills
- Technological skills and know-how on IT trends
- Knowledge on design and execution of business strategy
- Financial management skills
- Deeper insight into the industry or key geographical markets for your business

Preparing future RIM professionals is also essential. Of course, a thorough understanding of the fundamentals and principles of RIM is necessary, but the professionals of tomorrow need more than that to succeed in the turbulent environment they will be entering.

For example, the nation's leading information schools, often called "I schools," are placing increasing

emphasis in three areas of instruction: 1) leadership – developing a vision, inspiring staff and stakeholders to buy into it, and transforming programs to keep them resilient; 2) communication – skill at explaining the program's services and fully comprehending what its customers desire and need; and 3) implementation – practica and internships that introduce students to how programs are actually administered, as well as practical, effective approaches to carrying out their work.

In this vein, Syracuse University's master of science in information management is designed to prepare professionals who are adept at:

- Increasing the productivity and creativity of knowledge workers, managers, and executives who work with information resources
- Evaluating, planning, and deploying the effective use of information and communications technologies within organizations
- Developing corporate and government policies to maximize the benefits resulting from the widespread use of these technologies
- Improving the strategic use and management of information resources in business, government, and non-profit organizations

"Leadership" is a theme that runs through progressive educational programs for both seasoned information program executives and emerging professionals. Barbara A. Trautlein, in *Change Intelligence*, describes several leadership styles for contemporary enterprises. Blending three styles – what Trautlein calls the *champion,* the *visionary,* and the *executor* – would be particularly appropriate for RIM program leaders.

Champions, according to Trautlein, excel at rallying people around major change goals; they are seen as charismatic and enlightening.

Visionaries are change-oriented, big-picture leaders who are eager to move on to new initiatives.

Trautlein's *executors* are leaders who emphasize thoughtful analysis and planning, but expect rapid, efficient execution of those plans.

New Ways of Thinking

RIM programs need to maintain their principles and standards but also must change with the times. Recent studies in innovation suggest that enterprise program leaders need to consider reframing their views of the future from *predictive* (asking "what will happen?") to *prospective* (asking "what *can* or *should* happen?" and "what should I do about it?").

Table 1, from *Thinking in New Boxes* by Luc de Brabandere and Alan Ivy, compares the two styles of thought.

Creativity

Building on that approach, RIM programs should consider developing or strengthening two capacities. The first is *creativity,* essentially deriving new ideas, concepts, or approaches. This requires:

	Predictive Thinking	Prospective Thinking
Mindset	Forecasting, "We expect…"	Preparing, "But what if…"
Goal	Reduce or even discard uncertainty, fight ambiguity	Live with uncertainty, embrace ambiguity, plan for set of contingencies
Level of uncertainty	Average	High
Method	Extrapolating from present and past	Open, imaginative
Approach	Categorical, assumes continuity	Global, systemic, anticipates disruptive events
Information inputs	Quantitative, objective, known	Qualitative (whether quantifiable or not), subjective, known or unknown
Relationships	Static, stable structures	Dynamic, evolving structures
Technique	Established quantitative models (economics, mathematics, data)	Developing scenarios using qualitative approaches (often building on megatrends)
Evaluation methods	Numbers	Criteria
Attitude toward the future	Positive or reactive (the future will be)	Proactive and creative (we create or shape the future)
Way of thinking	Generally deduction	Greater use of induction

Table 1: "Two Styles of Thinking." Source: *Thinking in New Boxes: A New Paradigm for Business Creativity*

Hiring people with varying backgrounds to create a diverse workforce and encourage curiosity, learning, and development.

Encouraging staff members to be professionally active in organizations such as ARMA International, keep up with the literature, attend conferences, and follow innovative practices and leading-edge programs.

Read More About Creativity and Innovation

A number of recent books, some cited in the article, may be of interest to RIM leaders:

- Catmull, Ed. *Creativity Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*. New York: Random House, 2014.

- Davenport, Thomas H. *Big Data at Work: Dispelling the Myths, Uncovering the Opportunities*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2014.

- de Brabandere, Luc and Alan Ivy. *Thinking in New Boxes: A New Paradigm for Business Creativity.* New York: Random House, 2013.

- Hill, Linda A., et al. *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation.* Boston: Harvard University Press, 2014.

- Kelley, Tom and David Kelley. *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All.* New York: Crown Business, 2013.

- Schmidt, Eric and Jared Cohen. *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Businesses.* New York: Knopf, 2013.

- Trautlein, Barbara A. C*hange Intelligence: Using the Power of CQ to Lead Change That Sticks.* Austin: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2013.

Establishing in employee work plans the expectation that new ideas are part of the job.

Facilitating discussions in staff meetings and other venues where individuals offer new ideas that are discussed in a collegial, spirited, and positive way to make them sharper and stronger.

Engaging customers systematically to probe their changing needs and expectations, and at the same time providing information about the RIM program's capacities and limitations.

Monitoring RIM and other models of creativity and innovation to identify new concepts that hold promise for potential application in your program.

Instituting a systematic process for weighing new approaches that identifies those with the most promise.

Innovation

The second capacity is *innovation,* which implies putting the best creative ideas to work. Successful innovation requires a nimble, opportunistic approach with a quick exploration of needs and the development of effective, though not necessarily perfect, solutions. Too much assessment is likely to bottle up or sidetrack creative ideas.

Launching a *good* idea in a timely fashion is almost always better than delaying the launch of a *near-perfect* one that takes so long in development that its opportunity for results has passed. An approach should be deemed "good enough" if, after discussion and analysis, it seems feasible, likely to add value, and well suited to a problem, challenge, or opportunity.

The general idea is to try something to see if it works. One strategy is to conduct fast, small-scale, iterative projects to test the application of new ideas and to learn in the process. The solutions don't have to be perfect; you can adapt and adjust as you go along.

Leaders can encourage creativity and foster innovation, but what really counts is what the team does.

Staff members need to take a concept from proposal to implementation. Ed Catmull, drawing on his experiences in Pixar animation and Disney animation, notes in *Creativity Inc.* that it's most important to assemble a team that interacts well:

> Getting the team right is the necessary precursor to getting the ideas right. It is easy to say you want talented people, and you do, but the way those people interact with one another is the real key. Even the smartest people can form an ineffective team if they are mismatched. That means it is better to focus on how the team is performing, not on the talents of the individuals within it. A good team is made up of people who complement each other.

Catmull asserts that if you give a brilliant idea to a mediocre team, the team is likely to fail with it. But, if you give a mediocre idea to a great team, the team will find a way to make it work.

Sometimes, of course, things don't work out as expected. Catmull believes that for greatness to emerge, "there must be phases of not-so-greatness" as people experiment and gain confidence.

Catmull's book offers these additional suggestions to help foster creativity and innovation:

When looking to hire new people, give their potential to grow more weight than their current skill level.

Encourage, welcome, expect, and reward ideas from unexpected sources. Inspiration can come from anywhere. As a manager, you may need to coax ideas out of staff members, particularly people who are modest or reticent by nature.

Keep reminding people that "failure isn't a necessary evil. In fact, it isn't evil at all. It is a necessary consequence of doing something new."

The people ultimately responsi-

ble for implementing a plan must be empowered to make decisions when things go wrong, even before getting approval. Finding and fixing problems is everybody's job.

Putting Strategies to Work for RIM Programs

There are many ways to implement the strategies we've discussed:

Align RIM principles with digital enterprise priorities. The RIM program's strategic plan should include goals that clearly dovetail with enterprise goals of identifying and using data for competitive advantage, new product development, customer expansion, and so on.

Be sure CIOs and executives really understand key RIM concepts, such as the Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles® and information governance. These and other concepts and standards, which define our professional practices, fit well with the recognition of the importance of information, but they need to be understood by the key stakeholders and integrated with the broader information management strategies. Once they understand such concepts as custodial responsibility for information, legal admissibility, discovery, and devel-

oping approved retention/disposition schedules, these key stakeholders will appreciate their importance.

Find new ways to have in-depth dialogs with customers. Many discussions with customers focus on reviewing the status quo – for example, how well existing training is going or how well the schedules are being implemented. Conducting deeper discussions with customers might turn up ways to better explain the RIM program or open new paths for expanded services, such as providing advice for managing unstructured data or for managing information created on mobile devices and embodied in social media.

Find new ways to encourage staff creativity. Sometimes staff members have terrific ideas for revised or new approaches but have difficulty articulating them or lack the confidence to do so. There are easy ways to address this. For one, include an objective in the individual's work plan that the employee will suggest improved or new approaches where appropriate. Additionally, provide informal coaching that fosters creativity and innovation. In staff meetings discuss such concepts as "big data" and "digital enterprises" and their implications

for the RIM program and profession. Finally, support participation in professional associations.

Identify opportunities for small, iterative projects. The methodology summarized in this article is relatively easy to apply. It may seem unfamiliar or even a bit risky to programs that are accustomed to cautious management, gradual change, and implementing large projects based on detailed planning. But trying small-scale, low-risk initiatives to address particular issues or to test the waters can yield heartening results and build confidence in the methodology.

Meeting the Challenge

The digital revolution is here and is here to stay. It's up to the organizations to rise to the many challenges and to seize the many opportunities that big data and analytics present. Successful digital enterprises will be those that combine the fundamental best practices in RIM with leaders and teams that are creative, innovative, and not afraid to "fail small" so they can win big. **END**

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