Why Information Governance?

Barclay T. Blair, President

The ViaLumina Executive Brief series on Information Governance provides business leaders with a grounding in the fundamentals of IG and how it should affect business, legal, and IT strategy.

What is Information Governance?

Information Governance (IG) is a new approach to managing information. It builds upon and adapts disciplines like records management and retention, archiving, business analytics, and IT governance to create an integrated model for harnessing and controlling enterprise information. The ultimate purpose of IG is to help organizations maximize the value of information while minimizing its risks and costs.

Although IG is built upon a foundation of existing disciplines, it is an evolutionary model that requires organizations to make real changes. Ingrained habits must be broken (e.g., information hoarding, treating information as a personal vs. corporate asset); new corporate governance structures built (e.g., real C-level accountability); and new technologies implemented and outdated IT practices curbed (e.g., using backup tape as archives).

Why is Information Governance Important?

IG is based on two key tenets. **One**: an organization cannot not achieve or sustain long-term success without managing and harnessing its information effectively. Information mismanagement destroys business value, slows organizations down, creates unnecessary risk, and is - simply - unsustainable. **Two**: existing approaches to information management are broken. A new approach is needed. How are existing approaches broken? Here are some examples.

- **Records management**. Some key assumptions of traditional records management are simply untenable in today's organizations (e.g., that the difference between a "record" and a "non-record" is absolute; record volume is low enough that employee classification will take minimal time; and that centralized "command and control" is possible).

- **Keep everything forever**. Buying more, bigger, and cheaper storage devices is not a sustainable way to solve the incredible and unstoppable growth of content in today's organizations.

- **Complexity**. Existing approaches to managing unstructured (i.e., spreadsheets, word processing documents) and structured (i.e., databases) are often too simplistic for the complexity of our information environment. Today "records" exist in multiple parts on multiple systems in multiple geographic locations that we may or may not directly control.

- **Corporate governance**. Existing governance structures are largely ineffective for information management. Most organizations - to their serious detriment - cannot clearly identify whether it is the CIO, the General Counsel, line of business VPs, or some other person who ultimately "owns" this problem. And, that *is* the problem.

- **Reliance on employees**. Most information management programs suffer from mutually exclusive goals: we want employees to spend less time finding and using information, but we want them to spend more time helping us classify and manage information. The result is not practical or sustainable.

- **Poor use of technology**. Technology enabled this problem. It's also part of the solution. Contemporary technology that helps us understand the nature and value of content with minimal human intervention is part of the solution. So are intelligent archiving and content management solutions that enable capture, retention and disposition of information according to a well-planned lifecycle. These solutions need to scale across both structured and unstructured information systems.

Taking Action

IG is an evolutionary process. Here are some of the most useful places to start when building - or improving – your IG program.

- **Do you really have a program?** Every large organization has some kind of records and information management program. Unfortunately, many of these programs were created in an era where content was both created and managed centrally (think "steno" pools and file rooms). Executives are too easily satisfied on this issue when they look at an org chart and see a records management department (usually comprised of 1 person). Is this really helping - and not actually harming - your organization?

- **Whither corporate governance?** Many executives mistakenly assume that the person on the management team with "Information" in his or her title is taking care of the information management problem. However, while most CIOs view infrastructure (software, hardware, cables) as their problem, they consider the information flowing through that infrastructure to be someone else's problem (i.e., usually the people who created the information). On the flip side, most group managers say that they do not have the authority, knowledge, or money to control what happens in IT. Information management falls into this divide, to your detriment. The corporate governance side of IG is critical.

- **Do you have the right tools**? Successful IG programs exert the right amount of control over the information environment without stifling collaboration and creativity. Some areas of your business need more control than others. Control may mean strict and detailed retention and disposition capabilities, or it may just mean basic access controls that facilitate customer interactions. You need flexible enterprise content management tools that enable employees to perform at their best while maintaining the right level of control and governance.

> Information mismanagement destroys business value, slows organizations down, creates unnecessary risk, and is, simply unsustainable.