

No Captain at the Helm: Information Governance's Leadership Problem


3/9/2015 by [Linda G. Sharp](#) | [JD Supra Perspectives](#)

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IN-HOUSE PERSPECTIVE

Effective information governance is about taking information — your most important business asset — and looking at ways to better leverage it in a manner that streamlines the business processes, and reduces costs and risk.

When you think about an information governance initiative, you think about an enterprise-wide solution and strategy. To be fully successful, it takes buy-in from legal, records, compliance, information security, IT and the business units. Pick a department: everyone gets involved. It is commonplace for each business unit to provide a body or two on the committee to ensure that their interests are being met. With everyone represented, the logic follows that everyone's specific needs will be met. Right?

Unfortunately, therein lies part of the problem.

Most information governance initiatives are made up of a committee of individuals representing each unit. Representation on the committee is rooted in the best of intentions, but it doesn't necessarily facilitate the process of actually getting things done. The true dynamic that has arisen typically

consists of sprawling committees of individuals that already have a full-time job with little to no time to make committee meetings, much less make things happen.

Additionally, there is often no single person whose sole job it is to oversee the initiative. As a result, many of these

initiatives are dragging on for years with nominal benefit to the organization. Everyone is on deck to ensure they're not forgotten, but rarely is a dedicated captain at the helm.



To understand who should be the “face” of information governance, we have to understand the nature of information governance itself. Effective information governance is about taking information — your most important business asset — and looking at ways to better leverage it in a manner that streamlines the business processes, and reduces costs and risk. Data is such a critical asset within an organization that we are starting to see the creation of a new position that is dedicated to such initiatives. These individuals are the ones to corral the various business units, define their business needs, identify policies that meet the corporate objectives, and most importantly, get the job done. So, what does this person look like?

Ideally, they're an individual that has an understanding of a little bit of each of the particular organizational needs. We are seeing this individual usually come from the legal, records management, compliance and/or IT departments. The individual needs to understand the legal ramifications of litigation and regulatory requirements, needs to have a vision for implementing records

retention and disposition processes, needs to know the requirements around compliance, and needs to understand how to minimize the IT footprint. Most importantly, these new positions need to focus on the needs of the business teams: information governance that places undue burden on business users is bound to fail. Without an efficient business process, none of us would have jobs. They need to look at the work flow processes, predict how changes will affect the teams' abilities to carry out their work and most importantly, examine how data created by the business units can be leveraged in the future. These uses may be as simple as helping an employee locate something that was previously created, or it could be more complex – helping management aggregate and distill the meaningful information produced by someone who is not available or no longer with the company.

In many businesses, the ship is afloat without a captain...

More recently, we are seeing business teams start to look towards existing information governance infrastructure in order to conduct analytics on the data that has been maintained. If we are keeping our information in a clean and cohesive fashion, analytics will yield far more reliable results. A painfully common statistics axiom bears repeating: "garbage in, garbage out." Nothing holds truer than in the world of analytics. Major business decisions are being made based on the nature of the business data that is maintained in these data stores. What error rate do we need to use? What deviation do we need to assign to our analysis? Perhaps we can reduce these margins of error if we had better refined data to start with and, thus, render better business decisions.

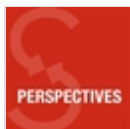
Perhaps it's time to take a good look at your information governance initiative. Does it seem stagnant? Are things moving along in the direction you would expect? Are there many team members, but you really need someone to truly own the initiative? Perhaps it's time to do something a little different. Before you try to ramp up the inertia of an existing information governance initiative,

you need to take a critical look at who should be the "owner" of it. In many businesses, the ship is afloat without a captain.

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