Challenges Facing the Public Sector

An Infrastructure for 21st Century Government

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Governmental organizations worldwide are facing several challenges as administrative, executive, and judicial bodies continue to evolve into an electronic work environment. Pushed by paperwork-reduction mandates, requirements to handle increased workloads with fewer personnel, and the rapid adoption of electronic communication channels by taxpayers and citizens, government agencies are on the forefront of adopting new approaches to electronic information management.

Many agencies worldwide are stepping back and looking at the way in which electronic transactions, documents, and records are being captured, managed, secured, and preserved.

Three Big Trends

Three significant trends are converging and are causing public-sector organizations to look carefully at their information management infrastructure: a widely anticipated knowledge worker turnover due to retirements; an acceleration of e-government initiatives; and a move toward an enterprise architecture that the key issues facing government at all levels and across jurisdictions. These three pressures are causing program owners, as well as IT and IM management, to assess how agencies need to be equipped beyond the tenure of its creator.

Several studies have been done over the last few years that look at the demographics of government knowledge workers, particularly at the United States federal and state levels. A recurring theme of a generational shift is common among these analyses: At the highest risk, as the wave of retirements hits over the next decade, is the loss of senior project and technical managers. The Clinger-Cohen Study of Federal IT Staff, done in 2003, noted that 76% of the surveyed managers were over the age of 40, with the majority aged 45-50. Only 5% were under 30 years old. Similar studies looking at California and Texas state employees identified similar patterns, with the number of retirement-eligible knowledge workers rising exponentially in the last couple of years. Organizations that have recognized this impending turnover are asking questions about the preservation of institutional memory and the recordkeeping practices that must form the foundation of a knowledge management infrastructure.

The electronic knowledge assets that reside in e-mail repositories, on users’ desktops, and on network servers are often poorly captured during periods of staff turnover or agency reorganization. Many government departments still have not established consistent programs for the capture, management, and disposition of e-mail and other forms of electronic communication. The ability to separate junk, spam, and duplicates from items having long-term business, legal, or historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators.

Agencies that will successfully ride out the impending retirement wave are those who have recognized the risk of not capturing the processes and information. Once the risk has been identified and articulated, technology can be leveraged to build structured workflows and implement electronic document/record/e-mail capture processes in order to protect the ongoing business of government.

Managing the Electronic Age

E-government, or government on-line initiatives, have been underway for several years. Agencies at federal, state/provincial and municipal levels have been offering an increasing range of services available to businesses and residents through Web sites and citizen portals. Electronic communication between citizen and government is also increasing: the ability to submit applications, forms or to ask routine questions through e-mail. The rapid adoption of e-mail for both personal and business use by constituents is pushing government departments to review their approaches to the collection, management, and preservation of this new form of communication and correspondence.

Government departments must ensure that internal processes that were developed in order to manage the flow of paper-based correspondence, contracts or application submissions can be applied to the management of the same information when it arrives in electronic format. Management of e-mail information requests needs to be viewed in the context of its subject matter and business and historical importance, not managed based on arbitrary storage capacity rules imposed by IT administrators. A shift in how electronic correspondence and other forms of public communication are perceived needs to occur in many agencies, as the electronic work environment overtakes the traditional paper processes.

Legislation is also pushing the public sector to move into an electronic information dissemination model. The US Federal Government 1996 amendments to the Freedom of Information Act obligates agencies to proactively publish frequently requested records to an electronic reading

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capacity of such technology solutions needs to be made, and the system must lend itself to effective record capture.

Conversely, the mobile field worker needs to have the same level of access to corporate records repositories and intranets/portals as the deskbound colleague. The ability to search for the correct versions of forms, templates and be able to instantly submit field reports and other objects (such as digital photographs) to a centralized, easily accessed repository is a fundamental requirement when building an effective mobile platform. Being notified of new workflow tasks, updates to key documents, and the ability to view data collected by peers across geographic districts are all essential to making full and effective use of wireless systems and smart hand-held devices.

Several jurisdictions are also expanding forms of personal privacy legislation to cover electronic records held by government agencies. HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, US) and PIPEDA (Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, Canada) are two of the more well-known privacy bills. HIPAA outlines specific rights for the protection of personal medical and health records, while PIPEDA is intended to encourage electronic commerce by granting rights to be able to protect and request personal information held by both public- and private-sector organizations. An increasing number of state and provincial governments have also passed or drafted privacy laws for their jurisdictions. This form of legislation places increased burden on government and private-sector organizations to ensure that electronic records, including e-mail, are not forwarded, published or disclosed inappropriately where specific forms of personal data are found in the record. The ability to restrict access to particular employees, and the ability to mark such records as containing sensitive data, are critical requirements of building an information management infrastructure to help streamline these new compliance mandates.

The third pressure facing governments is the constant battle to develop operational efficiencies in the face of budget and program cutbacks. At both federal and state/provincial levels, increasing attention is being paid to "enterprise architecture" or "shared services" models of technology infrastructure. Establishing common network platforms, operating systems, e-mail systems and information management platforms is an ongoing goal for many jurisdictions. The Canadian Federal RDIMS initiative was among the first large-scale programs, looking to establish a common document/records management platform to manage office format, image and e-mail items. Since the late 1990s, the Canadian government has led the way in establishing a set of shared best practices, deployment strategies and requirements definitions which are shared across the various ministries and departments. Several provincial jurisdictions have recently followed suit, as have state governments in Australia.

Government's Advantages

Cost efficiencies can be easily realized when an agency can focus on supporting, maintaining and troubleshooting a smaller set of technology products. Having skilled resources with similar technical and business process knowledge in sister agencies allows the government staff to develop a deeper level of in-house expertise as well as reusable templates, customizations and training/change management techniques. An enterprise approach to technology platforms also allows a government body to negotiate more favorable support and licensing models with system vendors, leveraging license volume and allowing for greater input into product direction when speaking with a unified voice.

Governments have long been on the forefront of standards development with respect to electronic information management, specifically with respect to records. DoI 5015.2, UK TNA and VERS are three of the more well-known and established government-sponsored standards. Each program has rigorous technical requirements and an established testing program that assures a purchasing agent that the product will meet a specific set of baseline functions for managing electronic data. Ongoing research continues to move these specifications forward as technology evolves. Updates to the TNA in recent years have moved into areas of metadata and interoperability requirements and the US standard is expected to follow suit.

Enterprise content management vendors such as Hummingbird recognize that the compliance culture that permeates the commercial sector today has in fact been present in the public sector for years. Government represents the priorities and interests of the citizens within its borders. Transparency, privacy protection and information management mandates have been front-and-center in the government sector for many years. Agencies that move smoothly into an online model of citizen service are those who are now looking at building IM practices into their technology framework. Those organizations will be in the best position to meet the challenges of the retirement wave, the move to electronic services, and will achieve the highest value for the tax dollars spent.

Hummingbird Ltd. is a global enterprise software company employing 1,300 people in nearly 40 offices around the world. Hummingbird Enterprise creates a 360° view of content with products that are both modular and interoperable, including document and records management, portal and knowledge management, business intelligence and data integration. Please visit www.hummingbird.com.