



Information and Records Management Systems and the Impact of Information Culture on the Management of Public Information

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ABSTRACT

The information society and the paperless office are by now two timeworn metaphors of contemporary society, where information is considered as the main asset and vehicle for economic, cultural and political achievements, enhanced by the use of information technology. Though information is considered an important asset not much attention is paid to its management. We currently witness a transformation in the information landscape, traditional modes of communication, work and daily life. This development is also affecting the performance of governments and other public institutions, and thus impacting their interactions with citizens.

The political, administrative and technological challenges have affected information and records management practices and have brought about new requirements on the creation and management of information. Furthermore, increased demand from citizens for efficient service delivery from public sector organizations has had implications for the information that underpins those services. e-Government initiatives are being promoted in many countries. What is central to e-Government is the effective use of information and information communication technologies.

The overall aim of the research was to establish if the two Swedish municipalities and a municipality in Belgium that provided case studies, were meeting with the new demands on information management and if they were embracing a proactive and holistic approach amidst e-Government development. The municipalities that were subjects of this research were engaged in e-Government development. The overall aim was achieved by critically examining the interface between Enterprise Content Management and records management and the role information culture played in the management of public records. The research was pursued using qualitative methods. Case studies were employed because they offer a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being researched.

The research instrumentally used the lens of the Records Continuum Model (RCM) to analyze the information activities of the municipalities. This is because the RCM promotes the management of the entire records' continuum, a proactive approach, combines the management of archives and records and supports the pluralisation (use of records in different contexts and by different stakeholders) of the captured records. It also used Oliver's (2011) framework for assessing information culture. Furthermore, the research highlights the information management challenges that the municipalities are facing as they engage in e-Government development.

The results of the research have revealed that despite e-Government initiatives, the management of information is still a challenge. The municipalities have a strong legal framework that regulates the management of public information and to a certain degree knowledge about how effective information management could be achieved. However, the people issues complicate and minimise leveraging information and the information systems in a manner that would promote the effective creation, use and management of information. This is likely to compromise the e-Government objectives of increased accountability, transparency, efficiency and the municipal employees' competence development. Enterprise Content Management (ECM) was not known in the municipalities. This research has identified the differences between ECM and Records Management and highlighted the overlapping areas between ECM and the information management strategies of the municipalities. It further confirms that information culture is an important component of effective information and records management. Though a lot of investment is being made in information management systems, the people issues need to be equally addressed.

Keywords: Enterprise Content Management, Records Management, E-Government, Organizational Culture and Information Culture.