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Developing an Information Asset Register for effective data governance

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By Alan D. Duncan



A significant aspect of effective Data Governance is about orchestrating the exchange of information between multiple parties; to facilitate (and arbitrate) a robust, repeatable approach to delivering content in context, in support of more effective and efficient business outcomes. But how do you do this if you don't know what data you've got, what state it's in, or who is responsible for it?

For over 10 years now, I've been advocating the idea of maintaining an Information Asset Register, as part of an enterprise-wide approach to managing Information as an Asset. (this factsheet from the UK National Archives is a useful working definition of the term).

This approach goes beyond the systems and applications auditing process that takes place within IT departments. Rather, the **Information Asset Register is about building up and maintaining a complete, reliable inventory of data holdings within the organisation, the different contexts within which the information is (or could be) used, and identification of the various interested parties – if you will, it's an index of “what's what, where's where and who's who”**.

The Register is then used as a tool for enabling more explicit and productive discussions about data between respective creator, collector and consumer parties.

Crucially, by acting as a catalyst for discussion between information stakeholders, this approach **encourages more collaboration across functional boundaries, establishes points of contact for more proactive information sharing and breaks down any existing protectionism within information silos** (an approach that a Public Sector colleague of mine refers to as “POIM” – as in “P*ss Off, It's Mine...”).

It can be seen that this is therefore not a project - maintaining and publishing the Information Asset Register quickly becomes a key ongoing service provided by the Data Governance function. This requires some incremental level of investment in your Data Governance capability, if only to provide the resources and skills needed to enable the proactive brokering and facilitation of a data-oriented discussion. (Some organisations will require higher levels of investment if basic Information Management practices and capabilities are not yet in place).

The approach isn't widespread yet, but some progressive government organisations have been taking the lead (notably the UK National Archives, Australian Commonwealth National Archives and Queensland Government CIO Office). One challenge as I see it is that these organisations are taking an approach that is driven out of compliance and records-keeping

requirements, rather than seeing **Information Asset Management as a value-adding opportunity**. I'd argue that if the **drivers were based on business improvement and outcome benefits** (rather than "meet the basic minimum"), organisations adopting an Information Asset Management approach would start to see **real transformational change**, almost by stealth. (See also my prior post on the concept of Information as a Service.)

Anyway, the Information Asset Register is certainly an approach that I'm adopting within my Data

Governance role at UNSW – time will tell whether it proves to be successful!

Some specific online resources that you may find useful to help get you started:

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner - Information Principles

UK Office of Government Commerce White Paper on Digital Assets

SAS Institute White Paper on Information Assets

Teradata White Paper on Information as an Asset

Submitted by: Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council