

## Book review

### Selling Information Governance to the Business (Sunil Soares)

It seems that the concept of „Information Governance“ (IG) is becoming a hype as it has the promising potential to integrate and align several disciplines in the field of enterprise information management which are usually managed separately without a holistic view or a steering responsibility. However the market for IG is still immature<sup>1</sup> but a lot of international events ranging from document and records management, eDiscovery / eDisclosure and legal topics have discovered the new buzzword and attract participants under this new umbrella term. Two years ago I wrote on my blog: “Information Governance is becoming a new generic term and notion to describe all corporate activities concerning information management compliance (IMC). However the challenge lies in the art of a consistent integration and consolidation of all related disciplines. This is tough and depends on each corporate culture and priorities of roadmaps. (...)”The whole must be more than the sum of its parts.”<sup>2</sup> This rule especially applies for IG because a sheer compilation or rebranding of information management disciplines would be a misconception of the term<sup>3</sup>.

In the meantime some significant progress has been realized in a lot of companies. This development to practice is reflected in the new book of Sunil Soares<sup>4</sup>, Director of Data Governance within IBM Software. Soares has worked with several clients across multiple industries including banking, insurance, life sciences, retail, telecommunications, manufacturing, healthcare and government. His ground breaking book about **how IG can be setup in any organization** is a must. It’s an ideal mixture of use cases from practice and generic approaches from theory. The objective of the book is to provide a representative sample, rather than an exhaustive list of best practices to sell the value of information governance within an organization.

The author gathered a broad range of knowledgeable advisors and contributors, roughly more than 40 experts from different domain areas, mainly from IBM. Soares had already published an earlier book<sup>5</sup> about „Data Governance“ (14 steps program). It seems logic that information governance which follows a business asset orientation can only build on a sound data management and infrastructure. Remember Nicholas Carr who 2004 wrote the thought-provoking sentence: „IT doesn’t matter“<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, good information governance is a business requirement and it can only work when plumbing (infrastructure) is no more an issue according to the water tap analogy; technology must become as robust as power supply to serve as a foundation of good IG. Everybody knows that this will not happen in the near future.

#### Structure of the book

Chapter one provides an introduction to information governance. It starts with a historic reminiscence of Columbus’ problem to obtain support for his quest to gain funding for his plan to go to East India by sailing westward. The example simply shows that poor information governance is not new and that organizations have been struggling with it for hundreds of years. Most of the assumptions and calculations of Columbus were wrong but due to the competitive edge of the Spanish monarchs he got the funding and started his expedition. Today we are lucky to know much more about all internal and external parameters to lead

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<sup>1</sup> B. Murphy blog: <http://ediscoveryjournal.com/2011/08/information-governance-still-an-immature-market/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://jhagmann.twoday.net/stories/6210480/>

<sup>3</sup> Implicitly other authors have already thought in the sense of information governance; e.g. Randy Kahn, Information Nation (2004 1<sup>st</sup> ed.) integrates at least 10 core disciplines to manage information compliance (IT plays a major role either but clearly linked to the goal of compliance).

<sup>4</sup> Sunil Soares: Selling Information Governance to the Business: Best Practices by Industry and Job Function. MCPress 2011, ISBN 978-1-58347-368-9 (50.-\$) - <http://www.mc-store.com/5125.html>  
Also available as eBook for Kindle (26 Euros): <http://www.amazon.de/gp/product/B0069YN2D8>

<sup>5</sup> [http://blogs.gartner.com/andrew\\_white/2010/10/29/ibm-data-governance-unified-process/](http://blogs.gartner.com/andrew_white/2010/10/29/ibm-data-governance-unified-process/)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nicholasqcarr.com/doesitmatter.html>

and navigate an organization through all the cliffs and imponderabilities of information management albeit technology or content. The challenge is huge enough; an extended definition and description of information governance is given at this stage<sup>7</sup>.

Part 1: The first part deals with best practices by industry. It is covering the application of IG principles from 10 different industries including banking and financial markets, insurance, healthcare, telecom etc. (chapters 2-11)

Part 2: The second part treats the application of IG principles within critical job functions such as sales and marketing, finance, IT operations, information security and privacy including a use case how to implement a sound DLP strategy as the last line of defense (chapter 15). Chapter 17 is about legal and compliance and mainly relates to the requirements of a records management program (rebranded as „information lifecycle governance“) and eDiscovery management. It outlines the „Information Governance Reference Model“ (IGRM) of IBM including how to conduct a maturity assessment against key information lifecycle governance processes.(chapters 12-20)

Part 3: The third part deals with horizontal topics of cross-industry best practices and tools like roles and responsibilities, metadata, master data, metrics including business cases and software tools and applications supporting IG. These themes appear consistently within IG programs across job functions, industries and geographies. (chapters 21-26)

For all three main parts an index of all the case studies helps to navigate through these use cases. In addition after each chapter a short summary is stressing out the significant business benefits derived from the respective case.

#### Target audience

The book is written for a business audience in non-technical language. Therefore a broad range of people should be interested: C-level managers as well as risk officers, data managers, information professionals like business intelligence / analytics managers or data mining specialists, but also supply chain officers, marketing managers etc.

#### Appendix

Beside of the profiles of the advisors and contributors, the appendix contains a good glossary, a list of used acronyms and an excellent index which also helps to navigate well in the book. Another big advantage is the availability of the book as eBook (Kindle) – footnote 4.

#### Some critical aspects

Some of the use cases seem rather simplistic and would hardly need a unified governance roof; for example it would be clear to every data manager that poor data quality of master data leads to bad results and distortions and needs strong remediation efforts (e.g. use case 1.2, page 5). Therefore when doing the split between the high level of a unified governance ambition and "simple recipes" the impression is given that IG implementation is easily viable; of course it's not, it's a highly complex orchestration of different stakeholders and IG program elements which needs years to be implemented step by step.

In the metrics section a credible "information economics" approach is missing which would retake an old requirement from the knowledge management community of the 90-ies: including intangible values and non-financial performance measures (information and knowledge) in the balance sheets<sup>8</sup>. Such a requirement is indicated at the beginning of the

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<sup>7</sup> „IG is the formulation of policy to optimize, secure, and leverage information as an enterprise asset by aligning the objectives of multiple functions.“

<sup>8</sup> Several accounting organizations have been working on proposals to treat "intellectual capital" as an enterprise asset (e.g. Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (CICA) - earlier reflections: <http://www.cica.ca/research-and-guidance/documents/it-advisory-committee/item12050.pdf> (2005) - latest contribution with the International Integrated Reporting Committee (IIRC): <http://www.cica.ca/research-and-guidance/mda-and-business-reporting/other-performance-reporting---publications/item54532.pdf> (2011))

book (chapter 1)<sup>9</sup> but not followed by an underpinning strategy considering a corresponding implementation of this requirement.

## Conclusion

The major challenge of implementing any information governance program is explaining the value to the business. In fact, "information governance will not succeed unless the business understands it, buys into it and supports it." (citation from the cover text). This requirement may create a business paradox. There is a long-runner in the history of the relationship between IT and business economics<sup>10</sup> suggesting that the business only buys-in to larger information projects when the value of these assets can be demonstrated („show me the value“). Thus the most important part of IG would be the metrics to show and prove the value of an optimized governance and management of the corporate asset called information. However this remains a hurdle as long as you hear the usual argument: „If you can't bill it, you can kill it“. Intangible assets like „intellectual property“ or „knowledge“ of core processes and intelligence are not just numbers and data. Turning information and knowledge into dollars is a complex process with a strong human link (talent and experience). Today's technology power and the consumerization of IT may be promising to master information all by itself, but this will not happen. The book of Sunil Soares shows the way of the human side of information.

Jürg Hagmann (March 2012)

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<sup>9</sup> "Traditional accounting rules do not allow companies to treat information as a financial asset on their balance sheets unless it is purchased from external sources. Despite this conservative accounting treatment, organizations now recognize that they should treat information as an asset."

<sup>10</sup> e.g. see the work of the IT economist Paul Strassmann: <http://www.strassmann.com/>; see also the productivity paradox of IT (Baily, Solow etc.): <http://ccs.mit.edu/papers/CCSWP130/ccswp130.html>