

Ergo Information Management Consulting

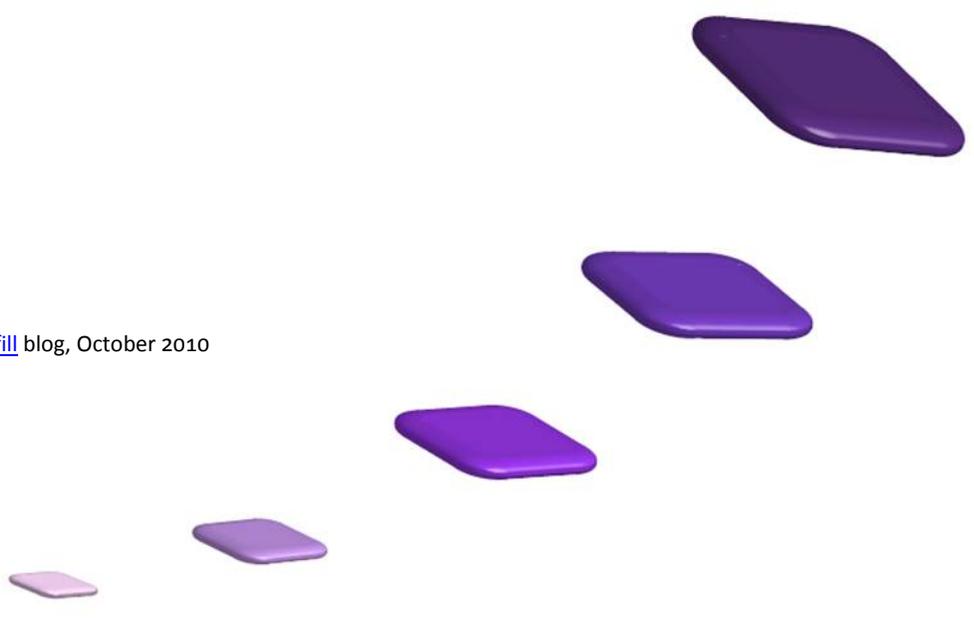
Information Management Strategy: Eight Success Factors

People, Processes and Technologies for a Successful IM
Strategy

Sheila Taylor, CRM

Version 1.1 - September 2013

First published by [AIIM](#) at the [Digital Landfill](#) blog, October 2010





Introduction

The success of any organization's information management (IM) strategy depends on managing three different spheres of concern: people, business processes, and technology. IM strategies often fail because they do not properly address one or more of those areas which are like three legs of a stool: remove one and the whole thing falls over.

The following eight points identify some key considerations for each of these legs. Each point is a distinct, major area of activity within any large-scale IM strategy. Putting sufficient effort into all of these areas will significantly improve your degree of success, but losing focus on even one of them can have a disproportionately large and detrimental impact.

The First Leg: People

Don't underestimate the challenges of changing people's behaviour

Changing people's behaviour is the greatest obstacle to the success of an IM strategy. Behavior changes when there is motivation to do so, and when the barriers to change are removed. If people don't believe that changing will make them more successful or make their lives easier, they won't do it. Even when convinced of the benefits of changing, the transition must be facilitated by removing the obstacles and overcoming the inertia of the status quo.

Consequently, a change management plan is an essential component of an IM strategy, including an ongoing communication program to emphasize the strategy's benefits and demonstrate organizational support. It should also include an easily accessible support program, consisting of training, well-written documentation, and support staff who can answer questions and solve problems quickly.

Don't lose sight of the end user's needs

The people within an organization are both the implementers of an IM strategy and its beneficiaries. Responding clearly and directly to users' existing needs will secure initial enthusiasm and momentum. Anticipating and satisfying their needs during implementation will maintain that momentum. Satisfying existing needs to save time or money, increase convenience, lower risk, etc. need to be communicated as the benefits of your strategy. Satisfying implementation needs is done once users are on board, by providing training, straightforward guidelines, user-friendly technology, and so on.

By thinking through user needs, priorities, benefits and barriers, you will avoid many problems during implementation that could have been prevented. Divide users into functional groups and develop a profile of each group's needs. Use interviews, questionnaires and other fact-finding techniques to develop or validate your assumptions. Although this might seem like a lot of up-front effort, the investment always pays off.



Focus on the pain points

You have two choices when describing the benefits of your IM strategy. The first is to show how you are providing a new benefit. The second is to show how you can solve an existing problem. In general, people respond better to approaches that emphasize the latter method. If you solve the pain points first, people are more receptive to thinking about benefits. The reverse is not true. It's like inviting someone who has a headache to a party – the person may be more inclined to go if you give them an aspirin first.

So what is bothering users or their managers the most? Inability to identify and locate information when needed? Uncertainty about retention periods? Need to safeguard personal information? Ever-increasing, uncontrolled volume of e-mails? Design your IM strategy to focus on pain points like these before moving on to other things.

Secure ongoing senior management support

Senior management must do more than sign off on a strategy or approve the budget. Because leaders in an organization are seen as role models, authority figures and bellwethers for organizational change (not to mention often having direct ability to enforce and reward compliance), having highly visible and ongoing senior management support will smooth over interdepartmental hurdles and conflicts, foster better support and cooperation, and speed adoption.

Merely enrolling a senior management “champion” to help kick off your strategy isn't sufficient. Part of your IM strategy should include dedicated time and effort for keeping both your champion and the senior management team on side, actively engaged and visible to the rest of the organization.

The Second Leg: Processes

Define policies, procedures and business rules

Policies, procedures and rules are the skeleton of every business process. If they aren't carefully thought out, formalized in writing, and kept current, then the execution of an IM strategy quickly loses focus, direction and cohesion as departments interpret and apply the strategy in unpredictable ways.

Policies, procedures and business rules are separate but related documents created as part of your IM strategy. Policies define and assign high-level accountabilities and provide for compliance management. Procedures provide step-by-step instructions for implementing the policies, and are the basis for training and ongoing reference. Business rules provide the “nitty gritty” details for managing content (e.g. metadata, retention rules, access and security controls, etc.) and are contained in separate reference documents cited by the procedures, and/or integrated into information management technologies.



Define and monitor performance

Performance metrics, essential as they are, are often avoided because of the risk of missing committed targets. This attitude is ultimately self-defeating. Although some organizations punish risk takers when they fail, all organizations reward risk takers when they succeed. In setting your goals and metrics, it is important to foster (in yourself and others) the same attitude towards measuring success and failure as airplane pilots have towards measuring altitude: it tells them if they're in the right place and how to correct their course.

Metrics should be measurable and relevant to the IM strategy's overall goals. Choose metrics which are easy to measure and strongly related to the overall business outcome. For example, one metric might be to achieve a 40% reduction in storage volumes within one year through the application of retention rules. Achieving this metric can be translated directly into cost savings on storage equipment, floor space, etc.

The Third Leg: Technology

Plan a pilot and phased roll-out

Unless your organization is very small, a pilot – in a department that is highly motivated and supportive of the strategy – is a good way to work out the kinks before you embark on organization-wide implementation. It is almost always a better approach to plan for a series of ongoing, small, repeatable successes. Successful implementation, even on a small scale, generates excitement and interest, builds momentum, delivers concrete benefits, and validates the overall strategy.

Even within a pilot department, phased implementation can be advantageous. For example, the first phase of an IM strategy may address paper-based information only, followed by electronic information at a later date. Phasing can also occur by work group, business process or other subdivisions. The key is to ensure that the end result of each phase provides measurable benefit and the promise of further benefits by expanding to the next phase.

Plan well into the future

An IM strategy is often a multi-year endeavor consisting of dozens of different projects, each of which needs to be planned and executed successfully. Having a long term view (5+ years) of information management can be difficult to manage, especially when technology changes on a 2-3 year cycle.

However, only reacting to short term requirements without a longer term vision is more like an expensive game of whack-a-mole than a strategy. Long term technology strategies are rarely detailed, but they do set timelines, milestones and key investment decisions over a long term. When creating your IM strategy, plan to review it every



6 months or so to validate the original goals and planned outcomes to ensure they are still the right ones, and to measure overall progress towards those goals.