*Information Management: Best Practices – Volume 1*. Edited by Bob Boiko and Erik M. Hartman. Netherlands: Erik Hartman Communicatie, 2010.

Information management is a discipline that governs accountability for the systems and processes within an organization responsible for the creation, storage, distribution, and use of institutional information. Information management encompasses web content management, digital asset management, records management, collaboration, enterprise search, eDiscovery, and many other topics. Information management is, however, much more than technology. It also involves people, processes, and content, all of which must be addressed for projects to prosper.

*Information Management: Best Practices – Volume 1*, edited by Bob Boiko and Erik M. Hartman, understands this Daedalean interaction of factors. The book compiles 19 case studies based on real-life experiences with organizations such as Microsoft, the World Bank, the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative, and Harvard Business School to explore how people from a variety of backgrounds manage information. Information management is undergoing the social process of professionalization, in which an occupation transforms itself into a profession of integrity and competency. In Boiko’s Foreword, he writes, “Every profession has to start somewhere. Before aerospace engineers called themselves that, they were still doing aerospace engineering” (p. 5). The same is true for information managers, and the book is “focused on showing who we are by describing exactly what we do” (p. 5).

In the introduction, the editors note, “The field of information management is currently fractured and incoherent….We believe that behind the seeming differences…there is a deeper unity that will eventually define a strong and clear foundation for all of them” (p. 15). The editors continue, “These best practices are designed to help professionals overcome their information management challenges. They bring complex models down to earth, with practical guidance on tough problems” (p. 16). The book offers pragmatic direction on everyday problems facing information managers as they balance the complementary skill sets of management prowess and technical aptitude. The essays fall into general themes: information is communication, information has value, information has audiences, information has a lifecycle, and information has structure.

Martin White, Managing Director of Intranet Focus Ltd., in “Gathering Information Requirements,” uses semi-structured ethnographic interview techniques developed by sociologists and anthropologists to discover user information needs. He recognizes that the searching techniques of his interviewees are divided into four levels of competency, including looking for known items, exploratory research with poorly defined queries, parametric searching through hierarchical information structures, and expert-level searching. The purpose of the interview process “is to highlight the complexities of how people go about finding information in an organization….The ethnographic approach outlined here is an attempt to get close to this complexity in a more structured way than just a general interview” (p. 302).

In “Managing Content—An Intelligent Content Strategy,” Ann Rockley, President of the Rockley Group, an organization that develops content management strategies, details her experience working with a medical device company that wanted to distribute marketing content and regulatory information through multiple channels in over 40 languages. She observes, “Intelligent content is structurally rich and semantically aware, and is therefore automatically discoverable, reusable, reconfigurable, and adaptable” (p. 270). With this in mind, she describes how she led the company through requirement development; information architecture design; the adoption of Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA), an open content standard that promotes consistent creation, sharing, and recycling of content; the deployment of a reuse strategy; and solution implementation.

Independent consultant Graham Oakes, in “Creating Clear Governance,” writes, “Organizations fail to manage information well for a variety of reasons—lack of skills, insufficient resources, unclear objectives, inconsistent processes, etc. However, many of these reasons stem from one root cause: different groups within the organization make conflicting decisions about what to prioritize, which standards to apply, which processes and tools to use, and so on” (p. 202). He then offers a step-by-step model for defining a governance framework using information management and change management skills. He warns against six common pitfalls of governance initiatives and concludes that governance, when well defined, allows organizations to focus on decisions, not the decision-making process.

Bill Yock, Associate Vice Provost in the Office of Information Management, University of Washington, further explores governance in action in “Governing Data Management.” He discusses the concept of constitutional democracy in data management, using a policy document as a “constitution” with principles, definitions, and responsibilities to serve as a rule of law for data management. Decisions are made based on the following stakeholders: Data Trustees acting as the executive branch, Data Custodians operating as the judicial branch, and a Data Management Committee serving as a legislative branch. With this perspective, research, alumni and development, services and resources, financial resources, human resources, and academic information are maintained with a “consistent, repeatable, and sustainable approach to governance” (p. 306).

 In “Coordinating Enterprise Information Management Investments,” Joe Gollner, Director of Gnostyx Research and Chief Solutions Architect for Stilo International, recounts his work with organizing the complex technical documentation of the Canadian Department of National Defence (DND). Added to this already complex problem is that the military mandates bilingualism in English and French. Additionally, two previous initiatives to implement content management and publishing systems had failed. Gollner provides steps, key actions, and lessons he learned while discerning a solution. He offers a succinct definition of his profession when he states, “Information management must be understood as a service that is actively pursued, customer-focused and operationally relevant and not as a musty collection of standards, policies and earnest declarations” (p. 126).

*Information Management: Best Practices – Volume 1* is suggested reading for those who have a known information management challenge that needs to be resolved because the essays are action-based, not theoretical explorations about the management of information. Using “best practices” in the title may be confusing to readers looking for inclusive [techniques](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/technique.html) that have consistently shown [results](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/result.html) superior to those achieved with other [means](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/mean.html). No method, of course, is ideal for everyone or in every situation, and no practice remains best for long as people discover improved [ways](http://www.investorwords.com/14021/way.html) of doing things. Rather, the book uses case studies as examples to explore successful procedures in a specific context that may or may not be applicable to other situations. As diverse as the case studies are, the underlying lesson of the volume is that technological solutions do not so much contribute to the success of a project as much as effective management, especially change management, on organizational and individual levels.

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