

Information-as-a-thing versus information-as-a-process: the legitimate differences between information resources management and information management

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Introduction

The term information, in itself, is nebulous, that indeed comes in different formats, different operations, having various meanings with many diverse applications. It could be understood in numerous ways depending on the environment, perspective, interpretation and criteria espoused in viewing it. Information resources in the ambit of information resources management cannot achieve anything except people do something with it either by examining, categorizing, or describing it, but in the end, they understood, rebut, alter or do all sorts of manipulation to the dataset or information. Meanwhile, all this interpretation and manipulation constitute the hallmark of information management.

Understanding information as a resource raises the question of what information resources are, in terms of representation and what is informative. It is typical of an individual to first ask someone, who knows what is unknown before seeking alternative sources of information. The information conveyed in information resources also varies in respect to the kind of recorded knowledge such as published information materials, grey literature, correspondence and oral communication that are either internally or externally sourced.

The disparity between how information is being perceived as a thing/commodity/object or a process of knowing, professionals studying, working with and otherwise using information read different meaning to information resource management and information management. Information resources management (IRM) and

information management (IM) are two distinct terms often used interchangeably in the literature as synonyms, but perhaps, they mean different things. It is worthy of investigation to clarify whether these two related terms are in fact synonyms, and if not, what line of demarcation sets them apart, discussion of some underpinning common generalities and issues that compass their misconceptions. This is a significant gap in the literature that needs to be bridged to develop a common ground of what differentiates IRM from IM.

Information as a thing versus information as a process

Information has to do with someone becoming knowledgeable, which reduces ignorance and lessens uncertainty. Ironically, the term information is ambiguous, which is used in different ways and faced with a variety of meanings. A survey into identifying groupings of uses of information indicated definitions that are not wholesomely satisfying; the boundaries between these uses are indistinct and as such could not establish the one correct meaning of information. It is when the principal uses are identified, sorted and characterized, that some progress were made. Using this approach, we identify two principal uses of the word information, thus, information as a thing and information as a process (Kosciejewi, 2017).

An investigation into what is designated or called information runs into immediate disquisition. Information is considered as a thing when used

attributively for objects, such as data sets and documents that are regarded as being informative, as having the quality of communicating information. Information as a thing means it is tangible, recorded and explicit, whereas information is considered a process when someone is informed and what they know changed. In this sense, information is the act of informing, communication of the knowledge or news of some fact or occurrence and the action of telling or fact of being told something. A key characteristic of information as a process is the fact that it impacts knowledge; one cannot measure it in any direct way. Nevertheless, personal knowledge, belief and opinion are subjective that need to be communicated, expressed, described or represented in some physical way, as a signal, text or communication for it to be stored and managed as information resources.

Information as a thing is of special interest concerning IRM because ultimately information systems can deal with information only in this sense, whereas development of rules for drawing inferences from stored information is an area of theoretical and practical interest to IM practice. The distinction between information as a process and IRM is a set of policies, procedures and programs designed to effectively and efficiently manage and control required information resources. It is essentially the management of data, people and facilities that produce needed information resources. It encompasses management of personnel, information technology and other information infrastructure associated with IRM. It is an umbrella term that includes management of computer, integrated software, information access and

information repository. IRM ensures information resources are readily available upon request. IRM means management of document or recorded knowledge in all their forms, that is, management of materiality aspect of information.

IM on the other hand is a logical enhancement of IRM that encompasses the whole spectrum of information resources dissemination and utilization. IM is the integrated management of information need, information resources, information sources, information system, people, process and technology for the better improvement of information services. IM is all about information processing and manipulation to derive a new form or version of information. IM essentially deals with effective utilization of information resources where a premium is placed on the user's information need and eventual utilization of much-needed information. In a nutshell, IM is a keystone of information science and technology that oversees the management of information needs, activities involved in information system design and development, database management, information storage, information access and retrieval system, marketing and distribution of information.

Information resources are multimedia phenomenon that includes texts, numbers, images, graphics, slides, microforms, audio and video recordings. However, IRM revolves around the management of information products, sources, services and systems. Information sources and system are mean-oriented, and information products and services are end-oriented. IRM encompasses the management of all activities that have to do with the management of information sources and systems that produce information resources but exclude the processes involved in using and manipulating the information presented in the information resources. The emphasis is on the resources dimension with no reference to the process dimension. On a contrary, IM focuses on the process dimension in the creation of information resources and their applications. By information process dimension, we mean the information is put into perspective, prospect and context.

IRM makes sense when dealing with the physical surrogate of knowledge. IRM corresponds with information as a thing while IM corresponds with information as a process of informing. IRM is limited to management of information resources, whereas IM includes IRM and also oversees how users are interacting with information systems for decision-making and analytical purposes. The focus of information resource management is on the resources management side, whereas IM focuses on the entire system to ensure information is transformed into actionable knowledge to be applied to achieve a goal. Succinctly, IM ensures the right information gets to the right users at the right time in the right place in a suitable format at the right cost to make the right decision that solves uncertainty.

IRM handles the management of data sets, records and documents that are adjudged an asset and considered worthy of preservation throughout their life cycle, from creation to eventual destruction. IRM is an essential part of IM, but again a secondary interest as a means. IRM has a special interest in information systems producing the information while IM is to rightly inform and impact knowledge. IM ensures what people know changes based on situations and circumstances. The ways people think about the world around are influenced by IM programs in place.

Concluding remarks

IRM is not the same as IM. Instead, information resources form part of a holistic framework or components of IM. Successful IM cannot take place without proper IRM. IM facilitates the processes of transforming information into useful knowledge in the most effective ways to achieve set goals and objectives. Information is important, but knowledge is power. This settles the argument of whether information resource management differs from IM. IM seems superior in that if the information is not used to its best advantage, then effort put in information resource management amounts to a waste of time and resources. Be that as it may, IM allows

for innovative ways of applying the information to societal issues and phenomena.

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FURTHER READING

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