

Moving Information Management Forwards

Step by step through the minefield

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Originally published by



The following article was originally published as part of the Freeform Dynamics advisory column on CIO Online. This is focused on the business impact of development in the technology industry. Original articles can be accessed at www.cio.co.uk.

Locating and accessing information required to run the business when it is spread across multiple systems has long been recognised as a problem. It's something that has been coming through in Freeform Dynamics surveys for years, and a recent study^[1] based on the interview of 123 senior finance and operations managers across Western Europe was no exception:

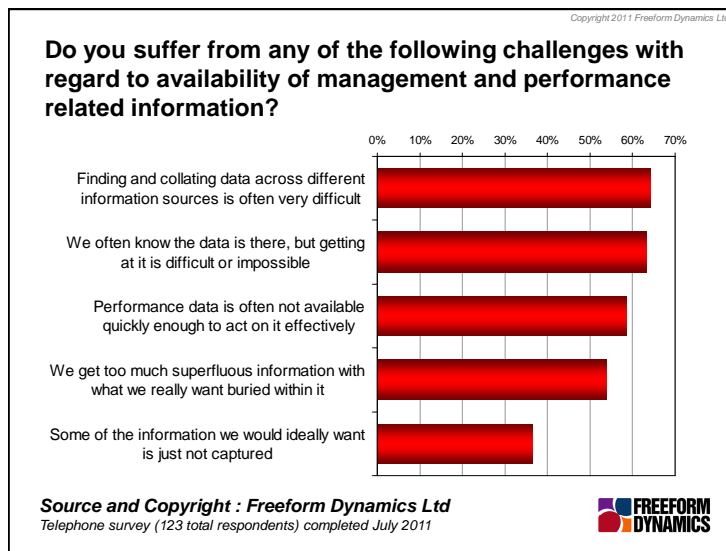


Figure 1

While this kind of picture never comes as a surprise, it does beg the question of why things don't seem to be getting any better, especially when other research^[2] highlights the importance of information access to business productivity:

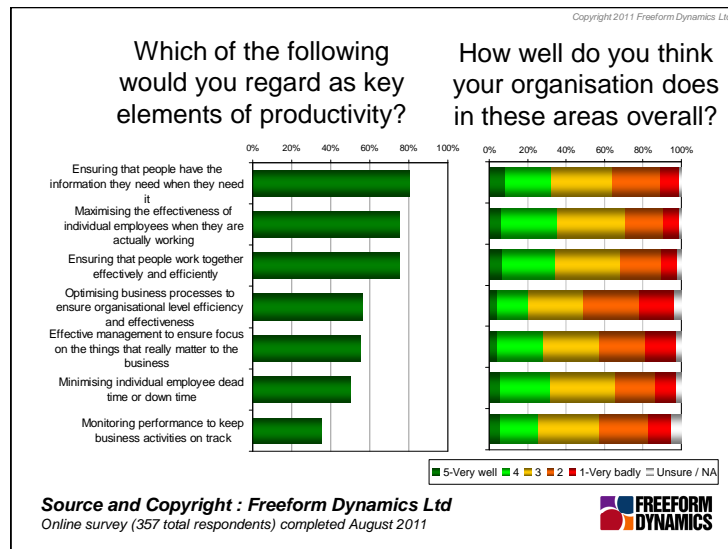


Figure 2

So what's going on?

Well lack of progress is not because of a shortage of technology. Today, for example, solutions to help aggregate, consolidate, and federate data are now sufficiently mature for mainstream usage, as are technologies that enable distributed search and the creation and management virtual storage pools.

The reality is that in most organisations the majority of the information management challenges are rooted in matters of 'policy' and 'ownership'.

One of the fundamental factors here is history. The tendency has been for each department or function across the business to manage its own information, isolated from everyone else's. The result is considerable volumes of data held in separate systems that often store the same, similar or related information in different ways and are not easy to get working together.

More significant than the physical fragmentation and disjoints, however, is the local ownership mentality that often accompanies the silo approach. The psychology of, "It's my system and my data", is reflected in a parochial approach to budgeting and funding. We then, too, often see either political resistance or general apathy on the part of local business managers when it comes to higher level improvement programmes that look to pull things together across organisational boundaries.

It's for these kinds of reasons that CIOs cannot fix the perennial problems of information access unilaterally. With a view across the business and its information assets, however, they are in a unique position to educate, encourage and facilitate progress.

In order to get things moving in the right direction there are a number of practical steps the CIO needs to take. As the problems of data and information management span multiple business units the first, absolutely essential step, is to bring the problem to the attention on the board. Once the board recognises the challenges, it then becomes possible to highlight collateral advantages that become available as the problems are removed, not least the unlocking of additional value from data already held across the business and smoothing the speedy creation of new, interdepartmental business processes as they are required.

After this, the next steps will revolve around getting line of business managers to understand the problems from an enterprise perspective rather than at a departmental level. Getting management buy in across the company is necessary as once understanding is raised the CIO will have to push forwards with getting cross-departmental information governance requirements defined and management processes identified.

The establishment of cross-business data governance can be expected to take time and considerable effort as matters of law, business need and internal politics will all be in play. Progress

cannot be made without business managers working out the ownership details and, more importantly, the processes by which different data sources holding similar information sets can be reconciled.

The creation of a programme office charged with defining an enterprise wide approach to data and information management can be an effective tactic. Beyond governance, its task will be to consider the “architectural” options available and how they can be implemented as business driven investment opportunities arise. In this way, whenever budget is available to develop data and information management systems, solutions can be implemented that deliver against the immediate needs of the project, whilst simultaneously helping develop the overall information management capabilities in line with the grand design.

Things will only get better if someone, almost certainly the CIO, grasps the nettle. But it is important to recognise that there is no technological magic bullet that can improve everything overnight. The scale of the problem in many organisations is simply too big to tackle at once. Attempting to boil the ocean with an enterprise information re-engineering exercise is not the way to go! Instead it’s about understanding and acknowledging the problem, setting the direction, creating the right environment to change things and then driving improvements incrementally in line with ongoing business requirements.

Ultimately, getting information management working more effectively across the business will benefit the bottom line and, given the nature of the technology solutions likely to be involved, also holds the potential to help the CIO reduce operational costs and help the business as a whole minimise risk. Win – Win all around.

[1] **The Business Information Illusion** <http://www.freeformdynamics.com/fullarticle.asp?aid=1386>

[2] **End User Productivity Revisited** <http://www.freeformdynamics.com/fullarticle.asp?aid=1367>

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