The Knowledge Deficit

Idea In Short

Organizations frequently underestimate the depth of their knowledge deficits in information management, spanning strategy, technology, and operations. Misconceptions about systems, processes, and regulations, such as FOI or EDRMS functionality, lead to costly inefficiencies and risks. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive approach—strategic alignment, technical integration, process mapping, and strong change management. By developing critical thinking and fostering a culture that values information, organizations can transform fragmented practices into cohesive, knowledge-driven management systems.

In the realm of information Technology [IT] implementations, a recurring theme emerges: a profound knowledge deficit that permeates organizations at various levels. This deficit, spanning strategic, technical, and operational domains, often undermines the very essence of effective information Management.

Through numerous consultations and implementations, a pattern of misconceptions and knowledge gaps becomes apparent. These gaps are not confined to a single stakeholder group but extend across users, managers, IT staff, and senior executives alike. The journey from "unconscious incompetence" to informed decision-making is crucial for successful implementation, yet it remains a significant challenge.

Consider the paradox:

> in an era dominated by discussions of "Big Data", there exists a startling lack of understanding about fundamental information management principles. This deficit manifests in various ways, from strategic oversights to technical misunderstandings and process inefficiencies.

One striking example involves organizations making tactical decisions based on erroneous assumptions about Freedom of Information [FOI] searches. As one consultant notes:

> I have had two clients who made tactical decisions about their preferred information repositories based on the erroneous assumption that Freedom of Information [FOI] searches would be able to find drafts and revisions stored in an EDRMS, but not those stored in shared drives

Such misconceptions not only reflect a lack of understanding about EDRMS functionality but also demonstrate ignorance of FOI regulations.

This knowledge deficit typically manifests in several key areas:

1. **Strategic Deficits:** Often, information management strategies are relegated to the domain of records management experts or IT specialists, with little involvement from the broader executive team. However, effective information management should align closely with corporate strategy, focusing on retaining corporate knowledge, improving productivity, and reducing risk
2. **Technical Deficits:** Many organizations lack a coherent systems architecture or strategic deployment of technology. This results in a proliferation of disconnected databases and ad hoc software solutions that fail to support the organization's strategic needs comprehensively
3. **Systems Functionality Deficits:** Decision-makers, including executives and system administrators, often lack a deep understanding of EDRMS functionality. This knowledge gap leads to poor policy and process decisions that hinder effective information asset management

4. **Process Deficits:** A common observation is the absence of clearly mapped business processes. As one expert points out:

> It's a bit hard to integrate system functionality into a process to improve productivity and reduce risk when we don't even know what the process is." This deficit extends to Record and Information Management [RIM] teams, who often lack the skills to map and optimize these processes.

5. **People-Related Challenges:** The human factor in information management implementations is frequently underestimated. From IT departments clinging to outdated systems to users resistant to change, the spectrum of human-related challenges is broad and complex.

The impact of these knowledge deficits is far-reaching. Even a single deficit can lead to substandard information management practices. Multiple deficits compound the problem, resulting in wasted time, delayed decision-making, uninformed choices, and unnecessary risks to people, assets, and organizational reputation.

Addressing these deficits requires a multi-dimensional approach. Organizations must prioritize the development of comprehensive information management strategies that align with their overall business objectives. This involves creating not just technical architecture documents but also information architecture frameworks and robust information security management systems.

Technical teams need to adopt a more strategic approach to system deployment, considering the organization's holistic needs rather than implementing piecemeal solutions. This includes a more nuanced understanding of recordkeeping requirements and how various business systems can contribute to an integrated recordkeeping approach.

Improving systems functionality knowledge is crucial. As one observer notes:

> Where are the vendors who educate people in how they may use the functionality to suit their culture and processes and their needs balanced against their limitations?

Both vendors and internal teams need to focus on understanding and effectively communicating the strengths and limitations of their systems.

Process mapping and optimization should become a priority. RIM teams, in particular, need to develop these skills to drive the adoption of better information management practices and systems effectively.

Finally, organizations must recognize and address the human element in information

management implementations. This involves comprehensive change management strategies, targeted training programs, and efforts to build a culture that values effective information management.

The journey to effective information management is complex and multi-dimensional. It requires a concerted effort to address knowledge deficits across all levels of the organization. As one expert advises:

> Consider whether your critical thinking is up to scratch before you embark on your next RIM implementation, or you might find yourself back where you started

By acknowledging and actively working to close these knowledge gaps, organizations can move towards more effective, efficient, and risk-aware information management practices.

Summary

A pervasive lack of understanding undermines effective information management across many organizations. Strategic, technical, and process-related knowledge gaps—often coupled with misconceptions about system capabilities—result in poor decisions and wasted resources. Overcoming this requires aligning information management with business goals, improving technical awareness, and mapping core processes. Building human capability through training, communication, and culture change is also essential. Addressing these deficits holistically enables informed decision-making and sustainable, integrated information governance.