White paper

Business Information Management in the year 2009: what is our position?

Authors: Machteld Meijer, Independent Expert Consultant at Maise

           Mark Smalley, Principal Consultant with Capgemini

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Introduction

Although the concept of Business Information Management (BIM) dates from the nineteen eighties/nineties, many organizations have only recently become aware of its importance and are actually investing in it. Its implementation is still the subject of much debate. In order to support organizations in this process, the ASL BiSL Foundation organized a session on February 12, 2009, during which experiences were exchanged with the colleagues and interested parties present. This white paper gives the broad outlines of the results of this session, together with expert commentary from a couple of active members of the foundation who were present on that evening.

On February 12, 2009, a thematic meeting was held, titled "Business Information Management, the connecting link!". The program included:

- Opening and introduction (Wim Schimmel, Director VKA)
- Generic e-government provisions and demand management for 1500 government organizations - Herman Holtkamp, Deputy Director GBO.Overheid (Government UO)
- Business information management closer to the business – Henri Huisman (Change Management, vts Politie Nederland)
- Workshop – Introduction by Wim Schimmel - In a number of smaller workshops, with professional leadership you will look at the issues affecting the link between BIM and the business, and the potential solutions.
- Plenary closing

Five workshops discussed in detail the problems within organizations where business information management is operated. The results of these workshops were presented at the end of the session. This white paper provides a summary of the observations and the recommended measures for improving the effectiveness of BIM (business information management[1]), together with comments from some experts.

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[1] Business Information Management comprises the responsibilities of the user organization with respect to achieving and maintaining an optimal provisioning and use of (automated and non-automated) information within the user organization.

In other words: business information administration (that is often implemented by business information administrators), including for example contract management and supplier management, and information management. The BIM domain translates business demands for information into IT requirements, it is the linking pin between business and IT. The domain is entirely covered by BiSL.

Business Information Administration (BIA) is responsible for the operational activities within BIM.

ASL BiSL Foundation   T: +31 (0) 30 2125 000   I: www.aslbislfoundation.org
P.O. Box 1218   F: +31 (0) 30 2125 001   E: info@aslbislfoundation.org
3430 BE Nieuwegein NL   Page 1 of 4   Chamber of Commerce Utrecht and District 08106817

Observations

- Business and BIM do not communicate enough and not enough with one another
- The various roles in the BIM domain (for example, information managers and those involved in user support) do not communicate enough and are not on the same page
- Business and BIM do not speak the same language
- Agreements and expectations between business and BIM are inadequate or unclear
- The responsibility for the information provisioning is not correctly authorized

Recommendations

1. Positioning of BIM in the business

Explanation: BIM is, from an organization perspective, often identified too closely with IT, which means that business interests are not well represented.

Expert comments: In many large companies, the business information management department is positioned close to the IT department. These departments therefore often regard the business as their customer and sometimes even reach SLAs with the business. However the BIM domain is intended to look after the interests of the business and to function as the customer of IT on behalf of the business. Information management is often positioned within the business. As a result, a distance is already created between business information administration and information management. This does not promote mutual communication, while this is so important. As a result of the greater distance from the business, it is harder for the business information administrators to know all the ins and outs of the business processes they support. And if they already knew them beforehand (because they came from business), it is harder to keep their knowledge up to date. If you do not know enough about business interests, it becomes hard to represent them adequately.

2. Finding BIA-ers with business domain knowledge

Explanation: All too often, the position of the Business Information Administrator (BIA-er) is held by somebody with IT experience, therefore on the supply side. Although they understand IT, they cannot adequately experience the world of the users. This is expressed in misunderstandings, less than perfect solutions and little 'thinking along'.

Expert comments: The question is to what extent you can transfer business domain knowledge to an ex-IT-er. Since that is so hard, the business information administration department often tackles tasks that actually belong in the IT domain: application management and IT infrastructure management tasks, such as making suggestions (or more than that) about how certain desired functionality could be built in or on which platform an application should run. It is better to educate someone from the business in the subject of BIM.

3. Developing communicative skills of BIA-ers

Explanation: There are still too many BIA-ers sitting in front of their PCs, while a substantial part of their task lies in communicating with business.

Expert comments: The cause of this can be that the BIA-er comes from IT and sees his work too much from an IT perspective. But it may also be the case that people with the wrong skills find themselves in the BIA spot. For example, the staff member from the customer service department who did understand the business process but could not communicate so well with customers. Will he be able to communicate so well with end users? Here too it is about knowing what your responsibilities are and about looking for people with the

ASL BiSL Foundation
P.O. Box 1218
3430 BE Nieuwegein NL

T: +31 (0) 30 2125 000
F: +31 (0) 30 2125 001
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E: info@aslbislfoundation.org
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right skills to be able to tackle their role within BIM successfully. It is good to know how BiSL fits together. But if you know nothing about the business or if you cannot communicate, advise, analyze or write reports well, you are still not the right person in the right place.

4. Developing business domain-specific skills of BIA-ers

Explanation: BIA-ers have insufficient insight into the tasks that have to be performed and how to do that.

Expert comments: In fact, it is not only business information administrators who have no understanding of what they should do; often nobody who has a role in the provision of information knows what they should be doing. Many people do not even realize that they are performing BIM tasks (in the broad sense). Just say to a contract manager or a CIO or a business architect that he is (also) doing business information management. He will often not acknowledge this because, "business information management is that department that deals with user questions, right?" It is important for business management to recognize who has a role in business information management and to look for solutions together. Do not send the BIA department alone on a BiSL course, but have everyone go together. At least start with a management overview. People often still find themselves in the maturity phase of 'subconsciously incapable'. So awareness is the first area that needs attention. Everyone must be made aware of his own role and responsibilities.

Not many levers are readily available for increasing the business domain specific skills of business information administrators. The arrival of the BIMP examination from EXIN, which examines these skills, is clearly encouraging the creation of such levers.

5. Operational, tactical, and strategic tasks have to be more closely aligned

Explanation: Whenever (often in large organizations) various functions provide an interpretation for parts of BIM, the risk of insufficient alignment is great.

Expert comments: Again, a number of previous reactions come together in this point. How can tasks be aligned?
- If you are aware of the activities that have to be performed in order to provide optimum support for the business processes with good provision of information.
- If you are aware of the cohesion among these activities (BiSL helps with recognizing the relationships among the activities).
- If a good attitude prevails of wanting to listen to each other and providing each other with information (horizontally but, much more so, vertically within the organization).
- If one is able to communicate well.
- If everyone knows enough about the business processes, so that no misunderstandings arise as a result of a lack of knowledge.

In large organizations, alignment will be more difficult than in smaller organizations, you always need the basic skills, BiSL can always help. And not only in large organizations. Even if only two people have a role within BIM. Only the method and the depth at which you apply BiSL differ.

Conclusion
Every organization that needs information should consider how it makes sure that the right information is available at the right times, in other words how it implements BIM. Operational business information administrators only perform some of the required activities. They will have to have good skills for their role. In particular, business process knowledge and communication skills are indispensable. The other BIM activities (at tactical and strategic levels) also have to be recognized and implemented and brought into line with the operational activities.

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One of the main aims of the ASL BiSL Foundation is to professionalize the subject of business information management. This is achieved by providing a framework in which the relevant processes can be related to one another. In addition, the framework serves as a stepping stone for categorizing developed best practices. In addition to the framework, BiSL incorporates a uniform glossary. By using this terminology, the parties involved in business information management can better communicate with one another.