

Boston KM Forum Breakfast Meeting Notes – May 6, 2005

With eleven participants the discussion focused on a couple of current activities at local companies, plus the types of tools and incentives that might be employed to insure capture of important document information: author, title, subject, date.

The term metadata (now usually written as one word) may not be the favored choice for business discussions because the audience may not recognize nor respect its meaning. The group discussed the importance of using cultural and political language to describe the importance of “tagging,” “cataloging,” or “indexing” specific document data elements to support rapid retrieval of business information. For those trying to make a case for using better technology or using human categorizers to insure metadata capture, it is critical to be tuned in to the business language of the organization. The value for metadata seems to be best articulated in terms of time saved by professionals when trying to find (search) business information. How that message is framed requires aligning the language with the business. Making a case for being able to quickly respond to information requests around legal or compliance, meeting audits requirements in a timely manner, or solving a technical or business problem the company is having with a customer are all good ways to think about describing the value for standard and systematic ways of organizing information.

The question of emphasizing technology tools vs. human support must be balanced with language that recognizes what each can provide. The group seemed to acknowledge that each is dependent on the other. Tools require training, implementation, and humans to insure that they are deployed effectively. Several commented on the need to collaborate with tools vendors and to establish a clear line of communication with the selected vendor. Listening to a vendor’s recommendations for approaching their technology deployment is important to achieving a desirable outcome. A bond of trust needs to be present for the most successful project. If it can’t be achieved, the situation should be reviewed for possible changes.

After the meeting, this contribution was sent to us by Dave Shumaker, a reality check for everyone:

As far as issues around metadata, several experiences I've had of late have led me to 3 propositions that may be helpful in framing discussion:

- 1. Storage capacity for digital info will continue to grow rapidly. How many gigs do we all have on our laptops? How many terabytes are in our data centers? Is there any end in sight? -- I don't think so.*
- 2. If you have structured data, there are more & more good tools (data mining etc.) to help you make sense of it -- detect patterns, extract meaning that has business application. These tools are getting better rapidly & will continue.*
- 3. If your data is unstructured, the problem of creating structured or tagged data out of it is still far from solved. Automatic extraction is inaccurate. Social tagging (a la del.icio.us) would be nice but will people do it in a business environment or do we hit the same old problems of incenting knowledge sharing. Enforced compliance breeds resistance. And there just aren't enough librarians to do the job, even if business could pay them. (Can we really capture the savings from all those hours wasted looking for information?)*

Finally, we agreed on the importance of knowing which principal stakeholders will most benefit from improved metadata and search results, and to establish clearly what the expected benefits will be.

The [bibliography](#) has valuable articles that giving supporting arguments for this proposition.