

Structured management of documents

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Background

Definition

Structured management of documents is a way of managing a document systematically through the documents complete life-cycle. In principle this means that a document should always be accessible when it is needed.

Size matters

The need for structured management of documents varies from organization to organization. There is always a need to access all documents, but the method of organizing this varies because of different circumstances. The number of employees and branches are basic elements that determine which method should be used. In a one-man company the owner can easily organize and overview their documents in files and folders. This method may also work in a small company, with few employees and one branch. As soon as the organization begins to grow regarding the number of employees, branches, suppliers, customers and other stakeholders, the time required for filing, retrieving and handling documents tends to grow. Valuable time is lost from the management of the core business. This is the reason why all organizations are trying to minimize this time loss in one way or another.

Traditional method

Historically, document management has been based on keeping records and journals over the documents. The management has always been based on the original documents themselves. The

organization has therefore been sensitive to neglect or human error. Lost originals can cause serious problems.

There are many problems regarding the traditional management of documents. These include:

- No search-function since they are not stored digitally
- Only accessible at the storage place
- Long search-time even if searcher filed the documents themselves. To search for other persons documents is even harder and sometimes impossible.
- Difficulties if a person is absent or has left the organization
- The same document might be filed several times in different file-structures
- Similar documents are filed in different ways in different file-structures
- Physical documents that concern the same business are filed at different places
- The physical document disappears

The conclusion of these problems is that traditional management of documents is inefficient.

Rational method

Efficient management of information increases the conditions for a stable business. This is a basic requirement in order to achieve success on a changing and competitive market. In far too many organizations, collective information is not available in a simple and efficient way. A lot of time is consumed by searching, collecting, reusing and organizing documents. This delays the process of decision, lowers the efficiency, and reduces the competitiveness of the organization.

Solutions for management of documents force the organization to reduce the time and complexity that is connected to filing, organizing and retrieving information. It also increases the conditions for creating competitive edge from the human capital in the organization, without jeopardizing the security and integrity of the information. By integrating the management of documents within the normal routines of the organization, the user does not have to change their way of working.

Structured management of documents

Basic needs

There are some basic requirements in the management of all documents. These requirements are more easily followed when structured handling of documents is applied:

- Orderliness
- Workflow
- Filing
- Privileges
- Handling of versions
- Sharing
- Integrations with other systems
- Publishing
- Faster search time
- Reduce the application of homemade solutions
- Quality control
- Improved risk management
- Filing of original document

Increasing demands

In all sorts of business, the need for more sophisticated methods managing documents has arisen. Filing and sharing is made from the view of every individual user. The working-methods and file-structure differ from each user.

The number of documents is increasing. More people are involved in contacts with customers, principals and other stakeholders. In order to make this situation manageable and to make future usefulness of present and future documents there is a need for search-ability, control and orderliness.

Besides the need of the individual user and the different parts of the business, to easily find relevant documents for their own needs, the demands for feeding other systems with quality-controlled documents from a reliable source is increasing.

Principles for structured management of documents

Structured management of documents is a method of handling a document through the documents complete life-cycle, in a systematic way. The main principles for this are described as follows:

- One storage place with search-functions
- Easy and fast search-engines
- Version management
- History control
- Security on document level
- Automatic maintenance of file-structures
- Automatic workflows and distribution of documents
- Methods and system-support for meeting legal requirements
- Possibility of integrating with other systems, portals, data-warehouses etc

In order to create an efficient and secure management of documents, a system must cover the above-mentioned criteria. Moreover, it is important that the management of documents includes routines and processes around the documents. That is to say, which documents should be filed, how documents should be named, how and when filed documents are removed etc. To achieve an efficient management of documents and to make use of a system for managing documents in a structured way, requires a policy regarding document management.

Policy for document management

Management of documents is a support-process which has the purpose of backing up the business-processes of the company. It should provide the stakeholders with the correct and relevant information, accessible when and where it is needed.

Management of documents and means of control should make the work with documents more efficient and more quality controlled. At the same time knowledge is more easily spread and shared within the organization. The purpose of a policy for

managing documents is to establish a standard for their management, or means of control.

The following principles should be applied when enabling a policy for document management:

- All documents that are produced within the organization should be filed in the system
- All documents that are filed in the system should be accessible for authorized users within the organization
- All documents should be named in accordance with a decided standard
- When a documents has several versions, it is the latest version that is valid
- Each document should have a set of attributes which gives the document a unique identification and which makes the document easy to search from these attributes.

Solutions for structured document management

The market for computerized handling of documents is large. All major suppliers of infrastructure (IBM, Oracle, Microsoft, HP etc) have their own solution. Another group of suppliers has specialized in certain business areas, such as legal or financial. A third minor group provides general solutions. The largest in this group is OpenText.

OpenText is a large and reliable system. A disadvantage is that few consultants have a good grasp of the system. A customer is therefore dependent on one supplier. SharePoint is a product of Microsoft. More consultants are familiar with this system than with OpenText. Furthermore, SharePoint provides the basic needs for most small and medium sized organizations. SharePoint is therefore a natural starting point for these organizations. If the system grows too small, it is easy to convert SharePoint to OpenText.

Original document

The management of the original document is still important, even if a computerized solution for document management is introduced. The most important function of the computerized solution is fast access to a document when and where it is needed. This does not mean the original document loses its

importance. Many legal documents have a value of their own and must be handled and stored accordingly. All original documents regarding a property must be easily obtained when a property should be sold. Even in other situations, there is sometimes the need to get hold of the original documents. These must therefore still be handled with care and manually stored in a structured way. The computerized system could be used as a directory where the documents lie until they must be obtained. Lost originals may cause the organization serious problems even if the system is computerized.

References *Bo Gyllenswärd, Computence Consulting AB*
Microsoft Corporation
OpenText Corporation