

**University of Texas at Austin**  
Research Summary

**Business Information Organization:  
A Search for Common Concepts  
to Support Information Integration**

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As enterprises grow and subdivide into smaller internal units for better management of their resources, department level managers and information professionals organize their records and other documented information into conceptual structures that allow easy access for departmental decision-making. Eventually, however, enterprise level managers realize that decision-making by departments is not always the best for the enterprise as a whole, move to reclaim some decision-making at the enterprise level, and attempt to integrate departmental information into enterprise wide structures. Yet attempts to create integrated enterprise wide structures by merging department level information, often encounter unexpected expenses because of the complexity of resolving information incompatibility resulting from the different terminology and the different information conceptual structures of the different departments.

Interested scholars, information management vendors, and information architects have generated a rich literature discussing approaches to solving the problems of information integration. Although these approaches have achieved moderate successes, they have not completely solved the enterprise wide integration problem. The approaches are often enterprise specific, concentrating on the ontologies themselves—the information and its organization— independent of the department information professionals who originally organized it. The literature places emphasis on mechanical approaches to combining information and ontologies based on its physical characteristics and mostly ignores the human element. Clarifying the concepts underlying the work of different but related communities of professionals who organize information—the human element—offers the potential of better understanding organizational concepts basic to integrating different but related information ontologies. The need for such clarification and understanding increases as differently organized information must be integrated into ever larger databases. Study of the problem, to provide the insight into how and why

professionals in different departments and communities organized similar information in substantially different ways, is essential for better understanding. To further our understanding, the research goals of the proposed study are to identify the common principles and concepts and to develop the associated theory that underlies information professionals' organizational activities and ontology development.

To meet these goals, primary data from unstructured interviews of enterprise information professionals will be analyzed to identify common principles and concepts of how and why information organization structures are actually developed. Secondary data, consisting of case studies of information structure development, studies of working information organization systems, and reviews of practicing scholar presentations at conferences and other venues will be used so support the primary data. These principles and concepts will be analyzed using constant comparison techniques to develop categories common to the various data sources and associated theory of the information organization structures. Finally implications to our insight and understanding will be discussed in the context of existing literature. Techniques such as bracketing and memoing will be used to enhance validity of the results. The results of this research will increase our theoretical understanding of how and why enterprise information professionals organize their information the way they do and thereby contribute to solving the problems related to enterprise information integration.