Introduction to the Minitrack on Digital Documents in Organizations and the Workplace

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Digital documents, and the technology for handling them, hold important potential for improving the performance of organizations. This is true of large and small commercial organizations as well as governments, universities, hospitals, and other institutions. As we continue into the information age, the future will see an explosion in the quantity, quality, and nature of digital documents produced, stored, and transmitted by organizations. Digital documents can improve organizational performance in two ways. First, for some industries such as publishing companies, documents are a direct source of revenue as a product, or as support for a product. Second, for all organizations in all industries, digital documents can improve the information management tasks that are needed to manage, control and operate the organization. These improvements come from improved organizational communication, improved business processes which are heavily dependent on document flows, and better ways for leveraging organizational memory and intellectual capital.

The papers in this minitrack highlight issues concerning digital documents in organizations and the workplace. Some focus specifically on the implementation of digital document systems in government and private sector, while others deal with the impact on organizations, or conceptual frameworks for digital document use and study.

Two papers focus on the adoption of workflow information systems. Stefan Morschheuser, Heinz R aufer and Christoph Wagitsch study the customer-oriented offer processing of a manufacturing enterprise. They report that the use of their systems already turned out to be profitable: they reduced the consumption of paper and operating funds and they were also able to integrate their applications. Another paper deals with the implementation of workflow automation system is written by Pat Bowe and Brian O’Flaherty. They focus specifically on the impact on the managerial control systems in the financial service sector by exploring the attitudes and opinions of three groups, i.e., users, managers and IT personnel. Results showed that the three groups were differently affected by the system.

Judy E. Scott’s paper discusses the benefits and pitfalls of digital documents for engineering design. She shows that these documents improve the engineering design process and reduce time to market for new products. Margaret Tan and Tung Bui also examine the impact of documents on organizations. They focus specifically on the impact of electronic image (Ei) on organization’s structure and strategy. They report, based on a field study, that Ei has strong impact on organizational process that require document management to support business activities. Their paper shows that Ei is a technology enabler that is used as a means for building corporate information management, and promoting effective information sharing and exchange.

Michael H. Zack describes the use of Lotus Notes to automate the publishing process of a large subscription-based industry-research firm. He shows how a product architecture framework can be used to describe the production of digital documents viewed as information products. He provides some guidelines when and how to digitize documents. Johannes Meier and Ralph Sprague provide a framework of the potential benefits available from digital documents. They explain the functions of documents in organizations and the limitations of the technology. They remind us that there are many management challenges that have to be met.

This minitrack also include papers on digital documents in the public sector. Margaret Elliot and Rob Kling describe their experiences in digital libraries (DL) in the courts. Their study is aimed to examine the fit between computer systems and (DLs)
with the social organization of computing in a California Superior court. They discuss different attributes of that fit and how some of them have positive or negative impacts on the courts. Airi Salminen, Merja Lehtovaara and Katri Kauppinen also describe the use of digital documents in the public sector. Their paper discuss the development of standards for structured documents and the special features of legislative documents handled in the Finnish parliament and government. The authors describe their experiences in the first stage of the development and provide some guidelines to expand the project to other agencies. Roberta Lamb describes the online information (OI) resource use during interorganizational relationship mediation in biotech companies and law firms. She reports that the roles of the intermediaries are changing.

The last two papers discuss the importance of digital document systems in recognition and representation processes. Stephen Mitchell and Brent Auernheimer describe a method of automated information content recognition and categorization in the California Agricultural Technology Institute. W. Bruce Croft, John Broglio and Hideo Fujii describe their experience with a range of projects involving text retrieval in Spanish, Japanese and Chinese. They discuss issues related to document representation and retrieval.

Digital document systems will continue to play a key role in improving the performance and effectiveness of organizations. The papers this year shed some light on the use and impact of digital documents and offer some guidelines to successful implementation of document systems in private and public sectors.