



# Pushing past the Edge of Intelligence

Many information professionals are busier than ever, but are they focused on the right things? Stephen Phillips discusses perceptions of activities that add value.



Stephen  
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In February 2020, the Financial Times released "[The edge of intelligence](#)", a survey of 547 FT subscribers exploring their perceptions of information management in their respective organisations.

Then, within weeks, our world changed. The Covid-19 pandemic arrived, and with it came a myriad of measures to control the spread of the disease.

Stephen Phillips, who compiled "The edge of intelligence" survey, reflects on how the disruption caused by the crisis – far from rendering the outcomes of the survey null and void – has provided potential opportunities for information managers. He explains that while the pandemic has fundamentally changed the future of work, presenting threats and challenges, it has also presented opportunities in equal measure as many organisations accelerate their transition to remote working and all it entails.

"When I was involved in the commissioning and compilation of "The edge of intelligence", the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications were inconceivable. Looking back now, the crisis served to accentuate and reinforce the importance of its findings. The report is an extensive document, so I will reflect on four behaviours of class leading organisations identified by the survey."

- 1) Recognise the value of better data and insight to improve decision making;
- 2) Know that data and insights enable organisations to understand clients, competitors and supplier, as well as accelerate growth and adapt to disruptive influences;
- 3) Are committed to spend more on data and insights;
- 4) Understand that the pace of change is accelerating and acknowledge that this accelerated pace threatens to leave them behind as they struggle to identify and exploit new opportunities.

There is widespread recognition that organisations need to reshape their business around data, information, insight and intelligence. As organisations embark on this journey, the survey found a number of challenges to address.

Horizon scanning: most organisations are confident of their data and insights in their core sectors. In an age of convergence, they are less assured when it comes to adjacent sectors, their clients' clients, their supply chains and their suppliers' suppliers. Organisations are looking to other industries and suppliers to help them navigate the crisis and improve their own resilience.

Lost in translation: organisations lack the right talent to bridge the gap between technology, data and operational expertise, leaving knowledge workers without the right tools to support their information requirements.

Democratising data and information: organisations worry they are failing to share data and information due to a lack of frameworks to socialise material between functions.

Digital transformation: organisations have aggressively pursued their digital agenda, accelerating interest in AI, machine learning, robotic process automation and related technologies. However, technologists bemoan the dearth of enough learnable data to make these technologies effective.

Data deluge: as organisations mobilise teams to supercharge their digital transformation, they are struggling to create value and opportunities, rather than more complexity from increasingly large volumes of data and information.

Information professionals need to focus their resources to deliver capabilities to support these priorities and address associated pain points. Opportunities exist to exercise their skills:

- Advise colleagues on sources of third-party data and information providers to broaden organisational horizons
- Broker relationships between internal clients, technologists, data scientists to understand and solution for business priorities
- Support knowledge workers with effective platforms to encourage best practices and reduce risk. Facilitate training and coaching to enable them to leverage these platforms to create insights and “make sense” of the world
- Advise colleagues on the best content to power new technologies and identify market opportunities to monetise organisational data where appropriate
- Optimise third party sources of information. Identify, ratify, validate and acquire veracious sources whilst removing irrelevant, duplicate or unreliable products

- Develop robust management reporting to measure value for money and return on investment.

Most information professionals are saying they are busier than ever before, but are they busy doing the right things? The crisis has highlighted the value of information skills combined with deep institutional knowledge. The need to find creative, cost effective ways to build capacity and capability quickly, enabling them to focus on those activities that add the most value.

Ultimately, constant innovation will be “business as usual” as organisations move at speed and with agility to deal with rapidly changing situations. Excellence in information management will be a fundamental requirement to support the new normal.

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**Stephen Phillips** is a global leader, influencer and advisor with over 30 years of experience in knowledge and information management, document services, analytics, and vendor management.