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ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT OF COURT RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology has been advancing at an ever-increasing rate over that past decade. Courts are no longer reluctant adapters of new technology applications. Courts are upgrading their technologies and exploring innovative ways to reach out over the Internet to provide better information and improved service to the public. The problem that is being addressed in this research is the disconnect between the organizations established in the courts, particularly in New Jersey, for technology and records management. With this situation records management is not benefiting from technology to the fullest extent possible and basic principles of records management are overlooked or ignored in the technology area.

This research was designed with the goal of eliciting the opinions of court management professionals at the state and local level concerning the following research question. “Should court records management and technology be more organizationally aligned at the state administrative office and in the trial courts?” By designing a survey containing a series of statements related to organizational issues and applications of technology this question was put to the test. The basic question about applying records management principles to technology projects and initiative is being raised in other sectors and by other professional groups. Some lament the paucity of sound management when “flavor of the day” technology applications are adopted by government organizations.

The methodology for this research centered on selecting and surveying a sample of court administration professionals. The national sample was comprised of state court administrators, trial court administrators, plus a few court management consultants and other court managers. The survey was limited to this audience to prevent the perceived bias that would be predictable from professionals in the records management and technology disciplines. The analysis of the survey responses concentrated on the “average” score on a 1 to 5 scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided/Don’t Know, Agree and, Strongly Agree). Additionally the review of relevant literature lead to some interesting insights related to the research question.

The response rate of over 70% of the surveys sent out was fairly evenly distributed among the major categories in the sample. Therefore the results and comparison between the groups should be credible. Added remarks to over 40% of the returned surveys provided some interesting insight and raised new questions to be pursued in the future. Only two states asserted that their records management and technology programs work in consort or alignment with each other. The research was successful in raising the issue stated in the research question and educating the author on some of the multiple aspects of the basic problem.

It can be concluded from this research that there is a lot of work to do in the area of organizational alignment, communication and collaboration between court records management and technology. There is also a challenge facing us to educate top-level court administrators at the state and local level in areas of technology applications to records management issues and the application of records management principles to technology programs. It is recommended that New Jersey and other court systems take an objective look and how their organizational alignment is managed. Another recommendation is that the courts reach out to other professional organizations to learn more about these issues. These include, but are not limited to

the National Association of Government Archive and Records Administrator, the Association of Records Managers and Administrators International, and the Association of Information and Image Management International.

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