

Chapter IV

The Realities of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995: A Government- Wide Strategy for Information Resources Management

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ABSTRACT

The strategic management practices required for the use of information and information technologies under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-13, 44 U.S.C. § 3501) comprise an important toolkit for federal agencies. There is a special need for strategic planning and management of information in an era of electronic government initiatives, homeland security, federal workforce retention problems, and inter/intra-governmental agency data sharing programs and systems. The PRA sets the policy agenda for information resources management in the US federal government and places the guidance and oversight for enacting the PRA in the Executive Office of Management and Budget (OMB). At both the level of guidance and practice, the PRA has had mixed success

since it was initially signed into law in 1980. OMB has not met its statutory responsibilities under the PRA, and the federal government is left without a cohesive direction and agenda for information resources management.

INTRODUCTION

The policy and practice of information resources management (IRM) has been a requirement for executive agencies of the US federal government since the passage of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) in 1980 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35; P.L. 104-13). This seminal act made information resources—information, technology, and personnel—be viewed and treated as a valuable government asset and managed in a life-cycle manner. The act was revised in 1986 with minor revisions and again in 1995 with major revisions, most notably its attention to strategic planning and strategic management of information resources. The passage of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA)(Section 5501 of Title 15; P.L. 103-62) and the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-106) added support and strength to the recognition of the strategic value of information resources and the necessity of planning for their effective use.

The passage of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act of 1998 (GPEA)(Title 27; P.L. 105-277; 44 U.S.C.) lends further significance to strategic management of information resources with its mandate that federal agencies offer electronic government alternatives by fiscal year (FY) 2003 to citizens, businesses, and other government agencies who interact with federal government. These laws are designed to maximize government performance and efficiency, make top level agency heads accountable for their information technology (IT) management, insure privacy and security for both the information systems and the data maintained by federal agencies, to manage government information collections according to a life-cycle model, to provide public access to high quality government information and transactions, and to do all the above in an online environment by FY 2003 (Fletcher & Westerback, 1999; Fletcher, 2002). Such a major transition to a new technology environment begs for effective planning prior to making this move.

The need for policies to guide the management of federal information resources assumes even more importance in light of the \$44.9 billion allocated to information technology in FY (2002) and the estimated \$50 billion for FY 2003 (Executive Office of Management and Budget, February 2002). This investment in IT dollars makes the US federal government the largest purchaser of IT in the entire world. Yet there is an on-going history of evaluation work

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