

# We need a Library

At a recent industry gathering I saw a presentation by a “Data Management Strategist” from one of the major oil companies that described the complexities of integrating three key data stores and a range of related applications. At the end of the presentation a senior observer (not me, I hasten to add) pointed out that he’d seen much the same presentation 25 years ago during the early discussions about what became Geoshare. My personal feeling was that the fundamental points of the presentation were first shown 20 years ago, rather than 25, but other than the timing I thought the comment seemed about right.

The complaint that many of the papers presented at these events are just reiterations of old ones is perennial, justified and deeply unhelpful. When those new to the field discover for themselves the insights that, in previous years, led to major developments, it is legitimate for them to want to share their hard won understanding with others, the fact that some of us have seen those same perceptions explained half a dozen times before is hardly the newcomer’s fault. At the other end of the experience range those of us with longer memories strive to deliver innovative material that builds on previous results, potentially leaving those in the audience unfamiliar with earlier findings puzzled.

Personally I’d prefer to watch a presentation that stretches my understanding and challenges me to keep up rather than sitting through yet another explanation of the SEI’s Data Management Maturity Metric that is less interesting than the version presented in 2008 (and just don’t get me started with the iceberg). Over the last 20 years there have been hundreds of presentations and white papers. Some of them, like the 2008 maturity paper, have left a major impression, others have disappeared without a trace. Those of us who’ve been around for years have collated our own particular favourites and refer to them when the occasion arises. But what of those who are new to the field? Obviously having a good “Body of Knowledge” would help them get up to speed with “what everyone should know”. PPDM, ECIM, CDA and DMBoard are all moving towards that goal, and, of course, the book is my personal attempt to create such an introduction (however idiosyncratic it might be).



But a good body of knowledge and expert training will only do so much, the focus of every practitioner is on the experience of real-world implementers, the details of challenges overcome and places where the obvious approach failed. These can be found scattered in various locations, but the key word here is scattered.

Until an easily accessible comprehensive library of past white papers and presentations is accessible for new data managers to refer to we really have no grounds for complaining if their material treads down well-worn paths. Anybody interested in starting one?