Ownership as an Issue in Data and Information Sharing: a philosophically based review

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Abstract

It has long been an aim of information management and information systems development to enable more effective and efficient data and information sharing within organisations. A commonplace assertion has been that data and information belong, or should belong, to the organisation as a whole as opposed to any individual or stakeholder within it. Nevertheless, despite the potential benefits of data and information sharing within organisations, efforts to achieve it have typically run into more difficulty than expected and have frequently been less successful than the technological capabilities would, at least prima facie, allow. This paper is based on the proposition that perceptions of ownership can have an important influence on data and information sharing behaviour, and explores philosophical theories of ownership and property with the aim of better understanding the origins of such behaviour. It is further proposed that what are here called “implicit” theories of information ownership on the part of different individuals or parties within an organisation can lead to varying perceptions as to who is the legitimate owner of particular data or information, and that this view is illuminating of the difficulties that have often been experienced in trying to achieve effective organisational data and information sharing.

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