

E-mail Records Management in 21st Century New Zealand Government



Research Questions

- How do individual employees across the New Zealand government identify and manage e-mail records of critical value to their government agency?
- To what extent and in what ways are personal electronic record management practices of these individuals in line with legal requirements (e.g. Public Records Act)?
- What specifications for effective electronic record management across the New Zealand government can be identified?

The Four Acts

- In New Zealand, the expectation of greater accountability to citizens is reflected in 4 inter-related pieces of legislation that regulate how records are managed and retained within Government agencies.
- They are:
 - The Official Information Act, 1982
 - The Privacy Act, 1993
 - The Electronic Transactions Act, 2002
 - The Public Records Act 2005
- These Acts form the environmental background in which elected and appointed officials in New Zealand help to maintain transparent and accountable government.



The Official Information Act, 1982

- “To increase progressively the availability of official information to the people of New Zealand in order
 - (i) to enable their more effective participation in the making and administration of laws and policies; and
 - (ii) to promote the accountability of Ministers of the Crown and officials; and
 - (a) thereby to enhance respect for the law and to promote the good government of New Zealand;
 - (b) to provide for proper access by each person to official information relating to that person;
 - (c) to protect official information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the preservation of personal privacy.”

The Privacy Act, 1993

- **The Privacy Act 1993:**
 - Covers personal information in both the public and private sectors
 - Regulates government data matching
 - Authorises the making of codes of practice to modify the privacy principles by making them stricter or more lenient to fit cases
 - Mandates the Commissioner to monitor and comment publicly on government policies and laws which affect personal information. (Shroff, 2005)

The Privacy Act, 1993

- Agencies can develop their own information-handling policies and can use and disclose information if they have been clear about the purpose for having that information and have ensured that the purpose has been communicated to the individuals concerned
- The intention is to ensure that information handling policies are open and transparent and to reflect the commitment to accountability and to fair and reasonable information handling

The Electronic Transactions Act, 2002

- The purpose of this Act is to “facilitate the use of electronic technology by:
 - (i) reducing uncertainty regarding -
 - (a) the legal effect of information that is in electronic form or that is communicated by electronic means; and
 - (b) the time and place of dispatch and receipt of electronic communications; and
 - (ii) providing that certain paper-based legal requirements may be met by using electronic technology that is functionally equivalent to those legal requirements.”

The Electronic Transactions Act, 2002

- This acknowledgement of the role of electronic technology in mediating communications ensured that electronic communications can meet specified legal requirements provided:
 - that the time and place of dispatch, and
 - the record of receipt of electronic communications be retained

The Public Records Act, 2005

- The Act requires all agencies to create and maintain full and accurate records of their activities and these records must be maintained in a recordkeeping system so they are accessible over time
- No person may dispose of, or authorize the disposal of, records without prior approval from the Chief Archivist
- The Act requires organizations to transfer records of archival value to Archives New Zealand at twenty-five years

Public Records Act, 2005

The Public Records Act, 2005

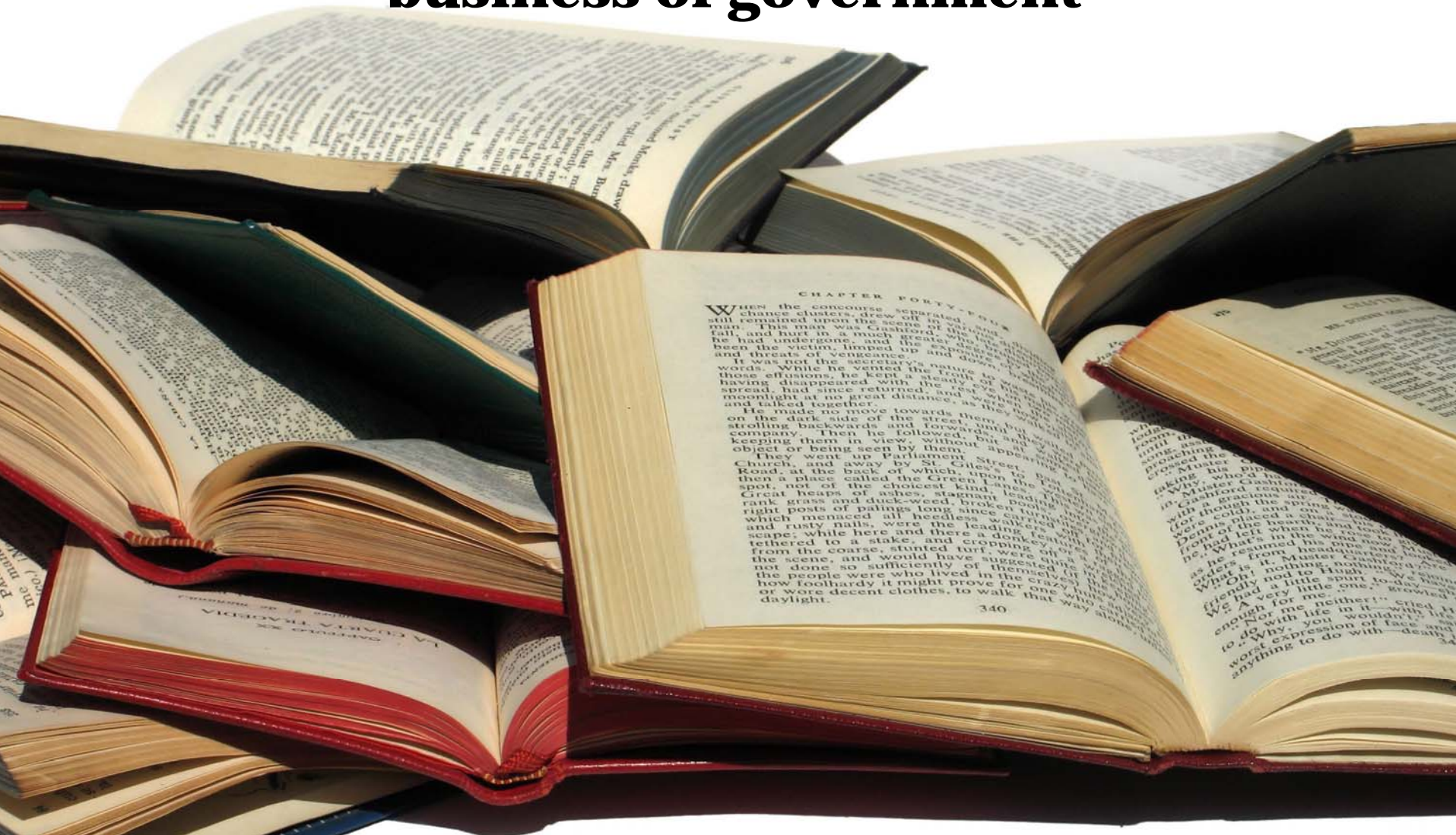
- “The power of the OIA is critically dependant on the quality of the public record, including both the information itself and its accessibility” (White, 2007)
- The need to become regulatory compliant now impacts all public offices
- With regulatory compliance, agencies must be able to produce documented proof they adhere to the regulatory statures that govern their business activities
- Commencing in 2010, the Chief Archivist will initiate independent audits of agencies recordkeeping practices every 5 to 10 years, and can inspect “central and local government recordkeeping incidents” and “work constructively with agencies to resolve any issues” (Archives New Zealand, 2007)



PAIN theory

- The Personal, Anticipated Information Need theory hypothesises that the anticipated need of information by individuals drives behaviours associated with collecting information.
- We understood the personal, anticipated information need of a public servant as an individual's need to identify and manage e-mail messages as official government records appropriately, that is on:
 - the basis of their professional role, and
 - in anticipation of future information requirements to government.

There is little empirical research available on how individuals employed by government agencies manage e-mails critical to the business of government



CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

When the concourse separated, the man still remained upon the scene of the fall, and hurt in a much greater degree than he had undergone, and the spectators had been the victims, limped up and down, and threats of vengeance.

It was not the secretary's nature to vent those effusions, he kept a steady eye upon having disappeared with the rest of the spread, had since returned, and was at moonlight at no great distance, as they and talked together.

He made no move towards them, but on the dark side of the street, until he was strolling backwards and forwards, and company. Then he followed, but at a distance, keeping them in view, without appearing to object or being seen by them.

They went up Parliament Street, Church, and away by St. Giles's to Road, at the back of which, upon the then a place called the Green Lane, a spot, not of the choicest kind. Great heaps of ashes, stagnant pools of rank grass and duck-weed, broken right posts of palings long since carried which menaced all heedless walkers and rusty nails, were the leading feature of the scene, while here and there a donkey tethered to a stake and cropping off from the coarse, stunted turf, were not done so sufficiently of themselves, the people were who lived in the neighbourhood, and would have suggested (if how foolhardy it might prove for one who or were decent clothes, to walk that way daylight.

The Online Survey



- Available to government employees working at Public Service departments
- We received 562 responses
- No responses from 7 departments



**89% of respondents said
that e-mail was critical
in their work**

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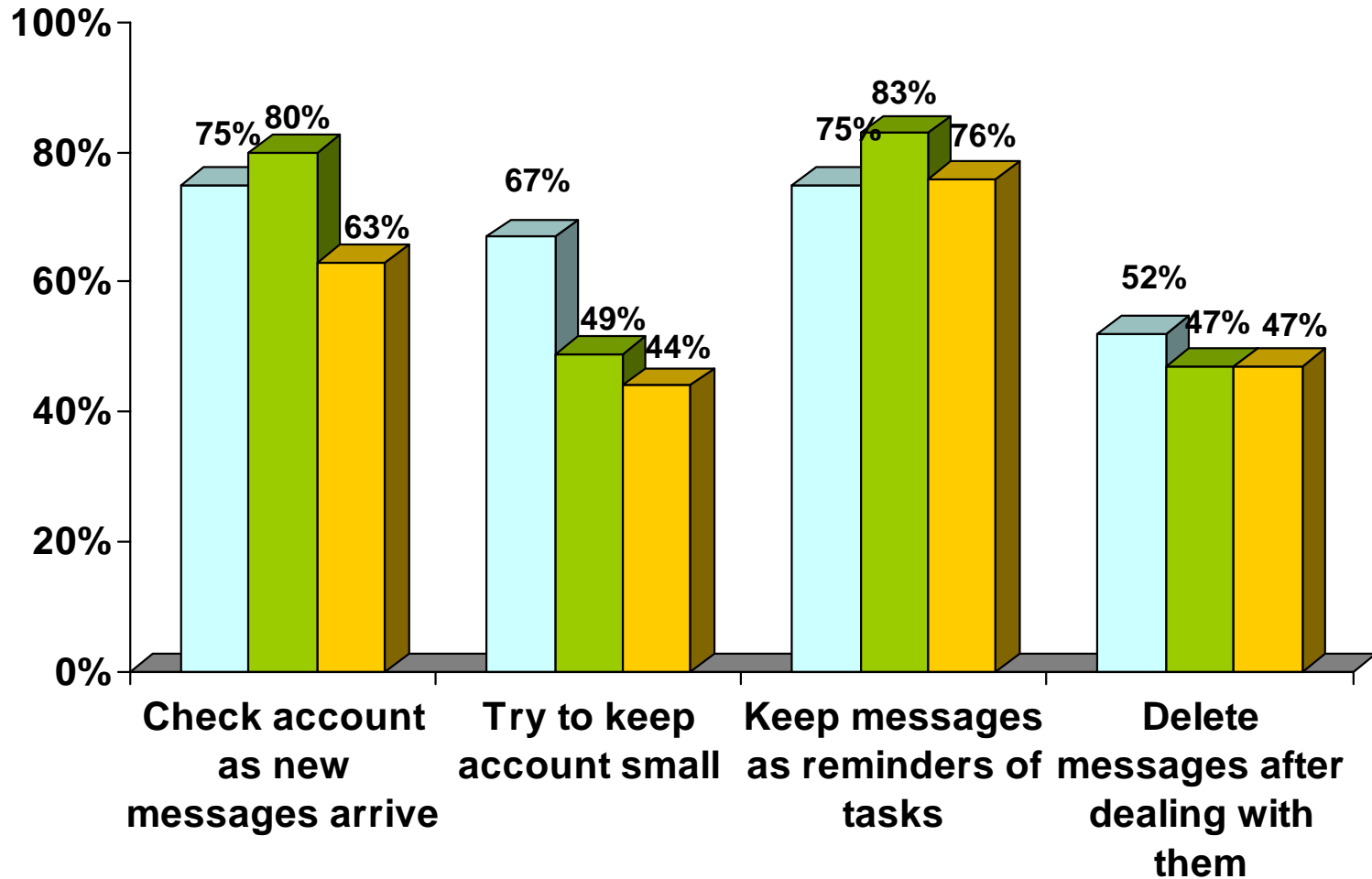
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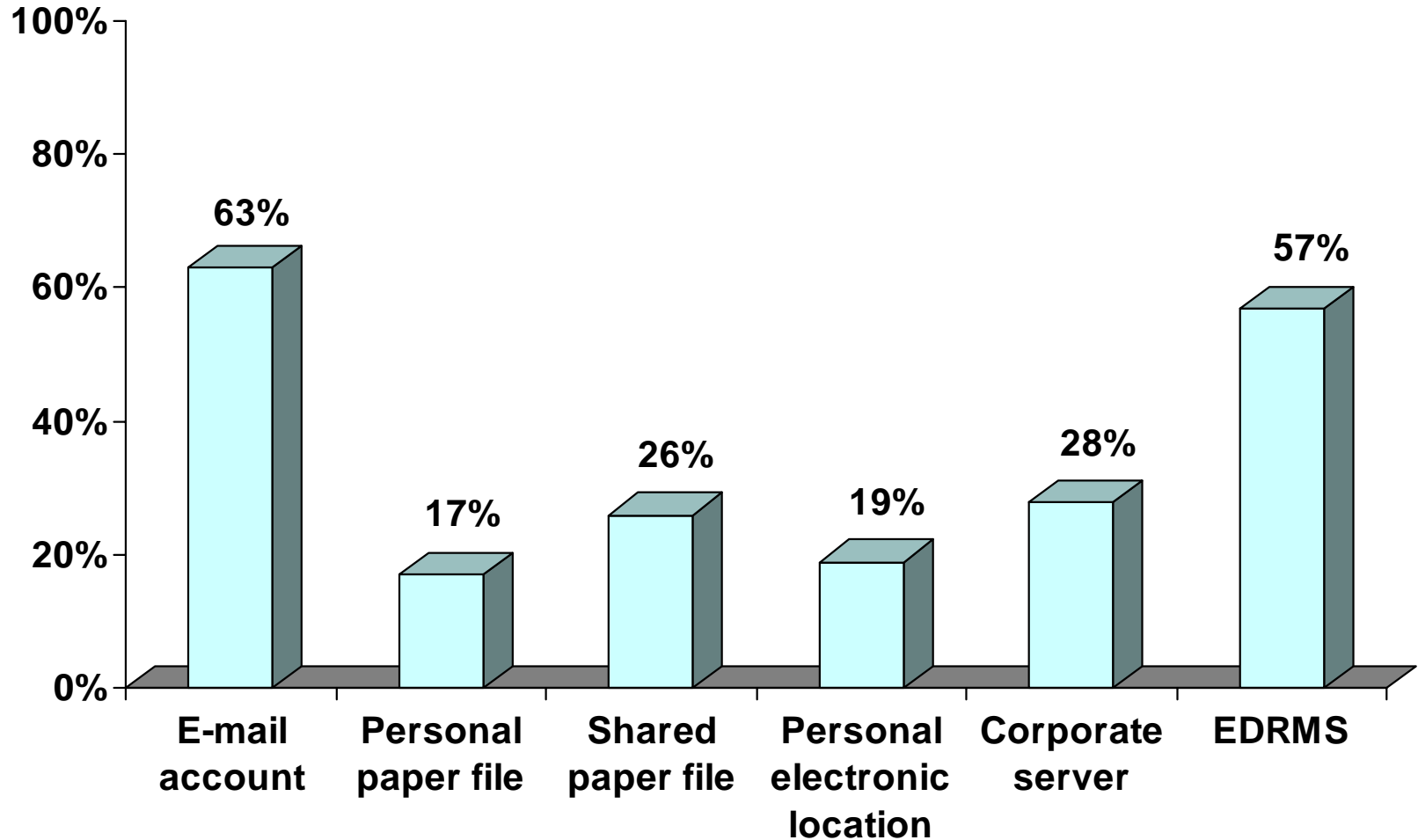


**38% of respondents spent
more than 1 hour a day
handling e-mails**

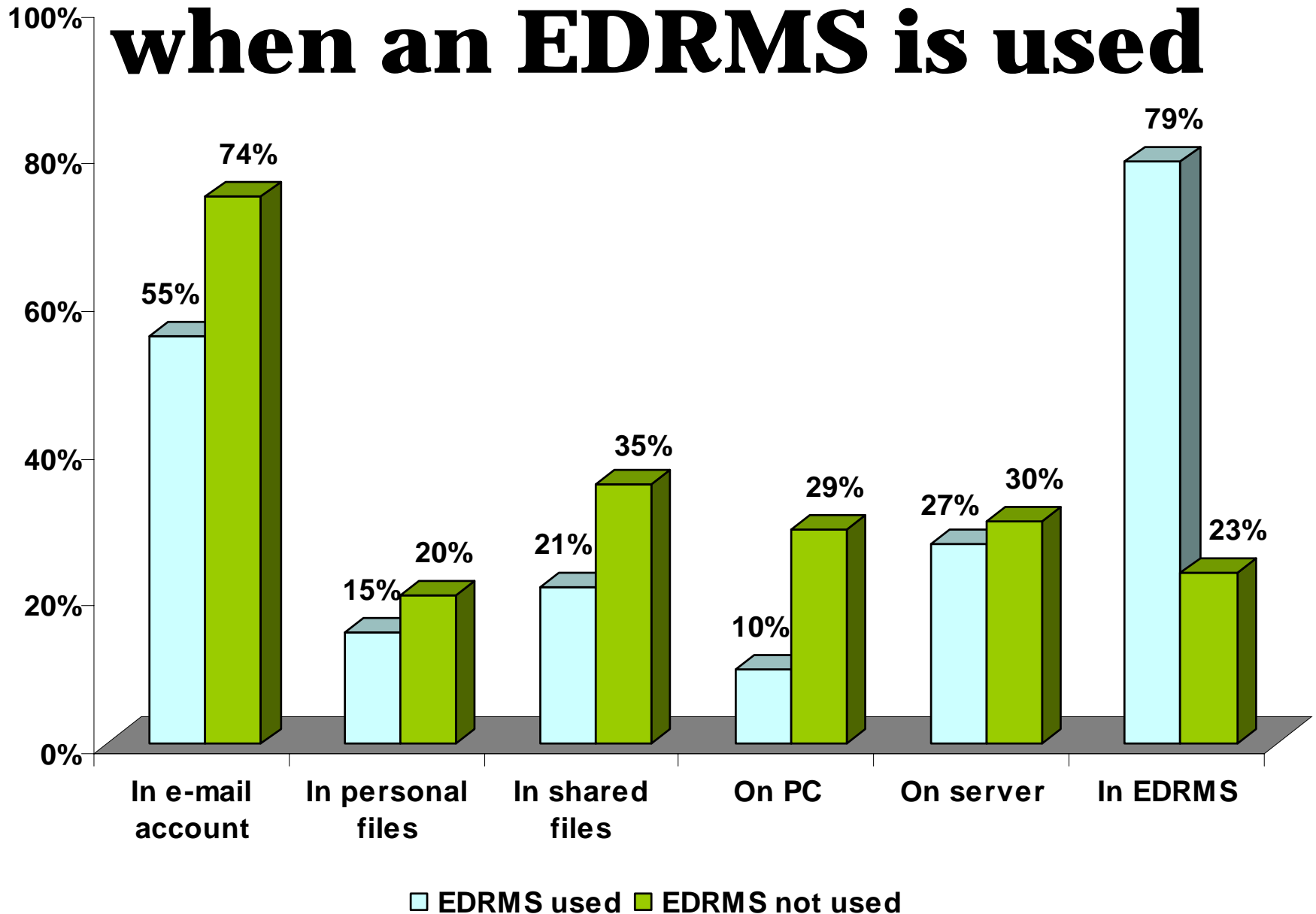
Managing e-mail accounts, by occupation



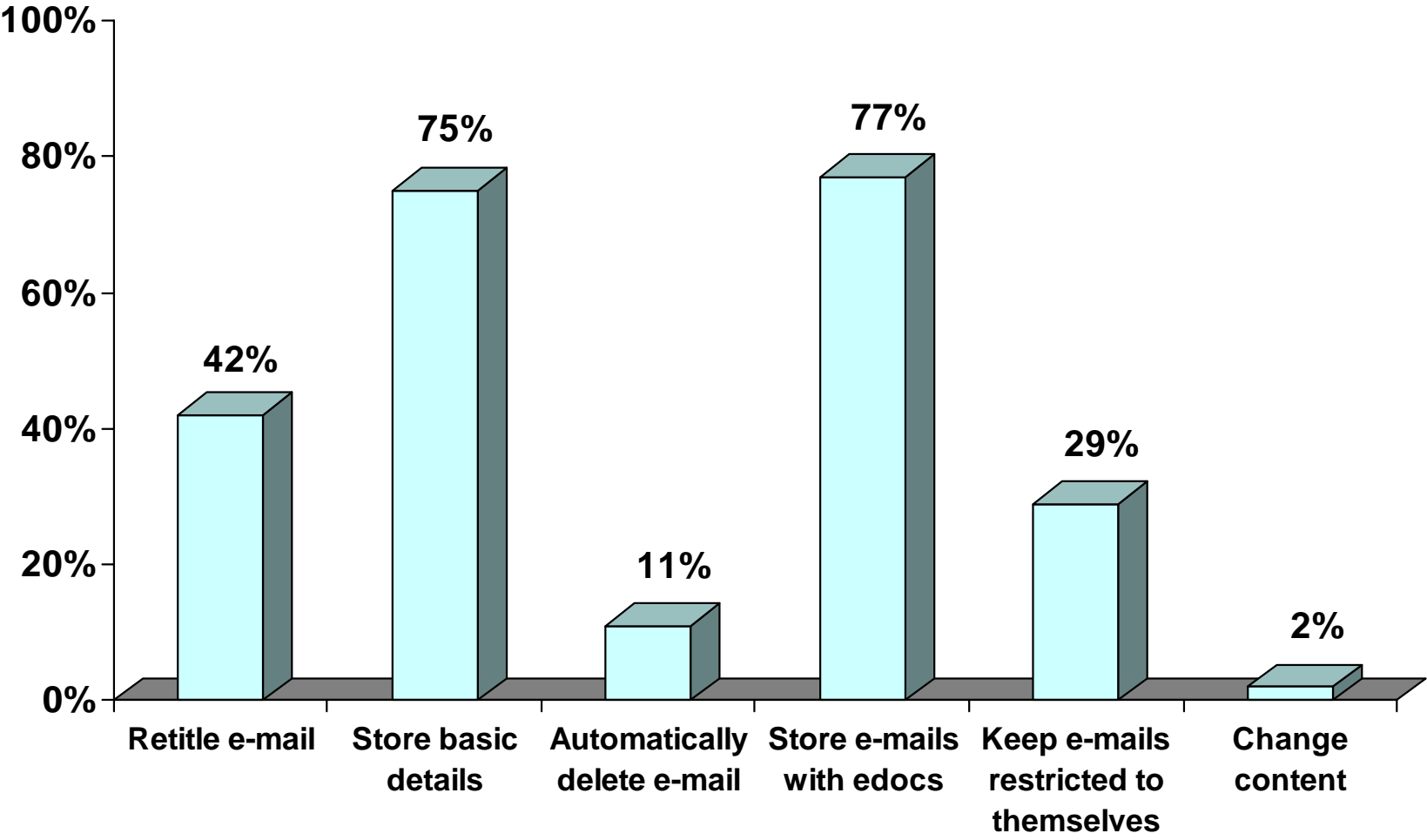
Keeping business e-mails



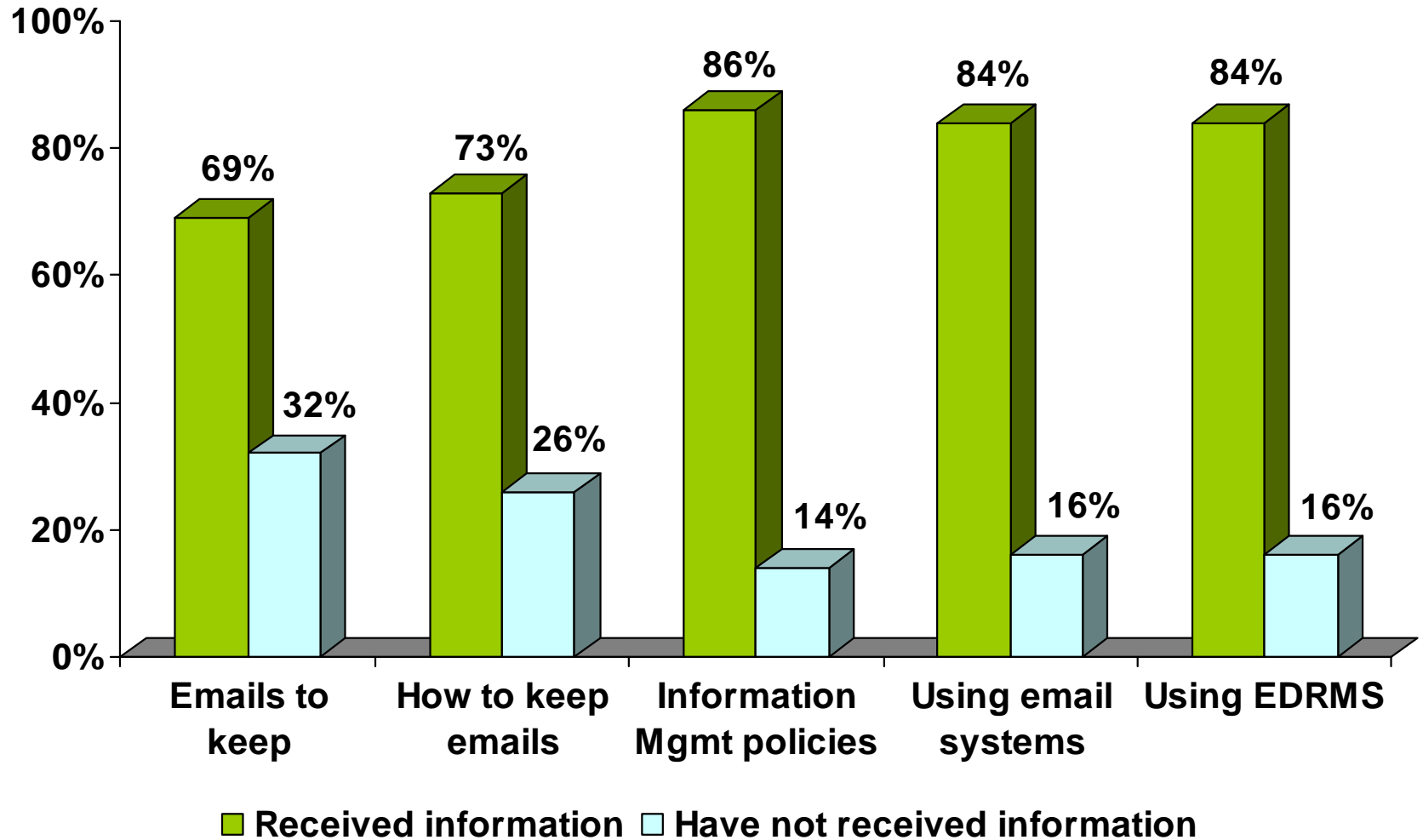
Keeping business e-mails, when an EDRMS is used



Managing business e-mails



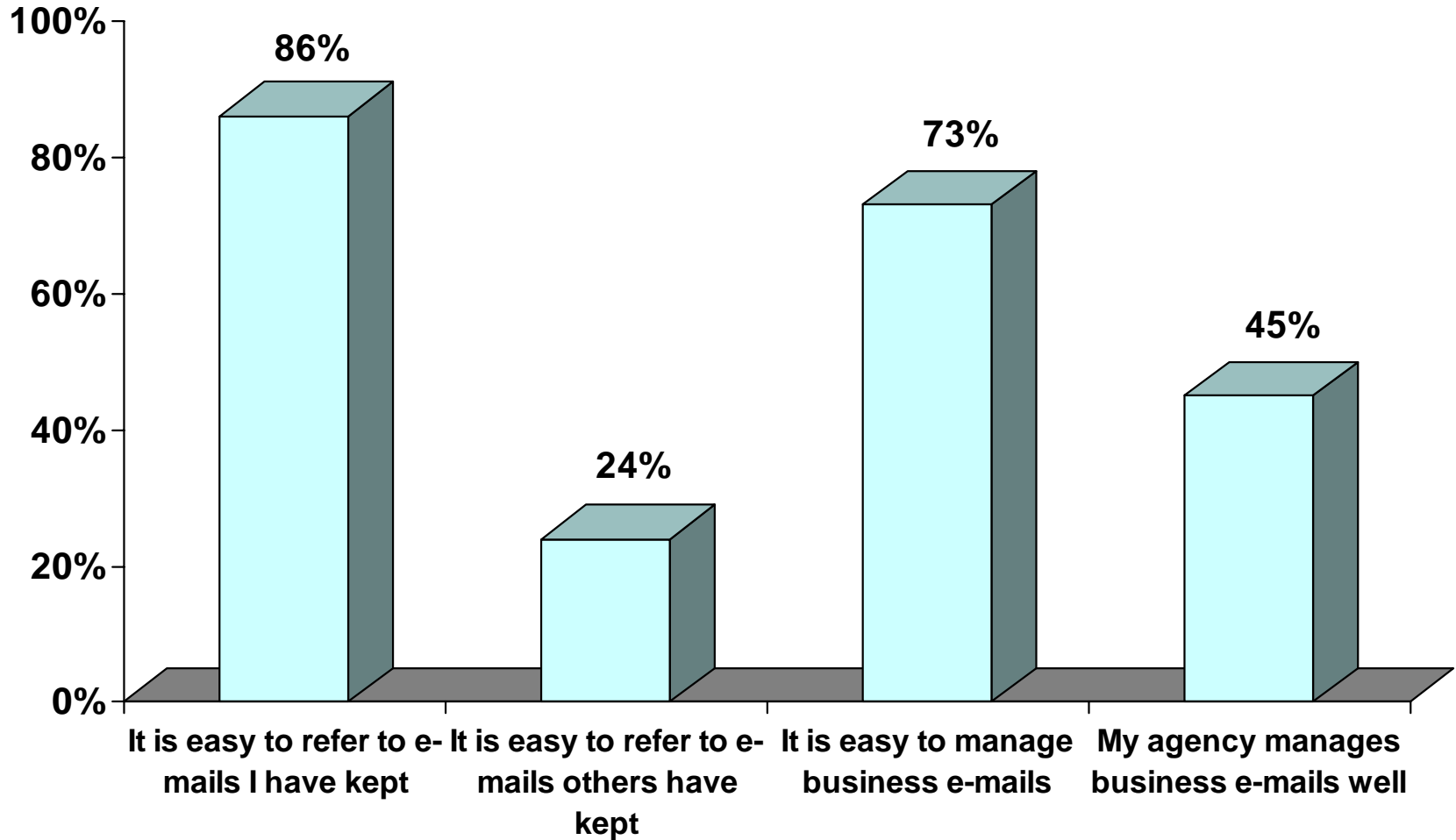
Information on how to manage e-mails



**85% of respondents
who used an EDRMS
had received information on
how to keep business e-mails**



Perceptions of e-mail management



**29% did not
know if their
organisation
had a policy
on how to
manage
business
e-mails**



Interpreting the survey findings

- Diversity of behaviours underpinning the survey findings
- The technical environment of individuals varies between agencies (e.g. EDRMS 'haves' and 'have nots', use of spam filters)
- Individuals' e-mail behaviours are dynamic and change over time (e.g. learning, new categorisations, rules, introduction of EDRMS)



E-mail use in government

- Motivations include:
 - Getting the written record from people
 - Providing background information
 - Transferring data (e.g. between office buildings)
 - CC, BCC, kept “in the loop”, “covering your butt”
 - People want/expect an immediate response to e-mail
 - “your e-mail is generally open all day”



E-mail strategies

- Changing tactics: e.g. “urgent” doesn’t work any longer
- Developing protocols with keywords and corresponding folders (e.g. action, FYI, meeting prep, query, comment)
- Developing protocols for copying people in
- Convenience: it is easier to just keep e-mails in your own account
- people setting up their own e-mail storage so it doesn’t go into the corporate solution
- Storing very last message in an e-mail thread



EDRMS ‘haves’ & ‘have nots’

- **Technology can help you manage e-mails: EDRMS!**
 - Does an EDRMS mean compliance with the PRA?
 - is an EDRMS compliant with the PRA?
 - Usability of EDRMS?
- **Some departments use an EDRMS for only part of their organisation (e.g. corporate vs regions)**
- **Individuals at Departments without an EDRMS keep e-mails into their e-mail accounts rather than into shared drives**
- **EDRMS AND a 100% capture on an e-mail server used as a back-up**

Technology as the ultimate solution: automatic classification, storage and appraisal solutions for future e-record keeping?

E-mail storage

- Keeping everything leads to searching problems
- There is no systematic storage or retrieval system in government
- Related e-mails and conversation threads cannot always be kept together (e.g. saving related e-mails in different locations in shared drives)
- E-mails and attachments cannot always be saved together
- Who is responsible for storing business e-mails? (e.g. everyone who received the e-mail, people CC'ed?)
- New multimedia attachments may mean larger size limits on e-mail accounts are required

Education & training

- “We’ve got the technology but we haven’t done the change management and that is huge”
- People don’t read policy manuals
- Training recipients AND senders of e-mail
- People may save their e-mails but not in the right folders
- Strong emphasis on personal use of e-mail

Requirements

- Individual behaviours differ from ‘central guidelines’, even with training in place: tackling ‘soft-system’ problems
- Technology is not the problem nor the sole solution: attention for combined technical –social solution
- Different hard- and soft-system problems for individual departments or units: tailor-made approaches
- Raising awareness at senior levels of government: PRA Audit as stick and carrot
- More effective education and training:
 - ongoing
 - on the job
 - one-pager instead of policy manual
 - focus on senders and receivers
 - preventive rather than reactive

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