The Problem… in context of Information Overload

The challenges to modern day information-intensive enterprises are increasing tenfold as companies work toward efficiently managing the enterprise knowledge lifecycle. Consider the case of Mary, a corporate executive with a global investment firm who is tasked with leading the development of an intranet portal, used to provide a single source archive where employees can locate important corporate documents.

• Mary begins by searching the current Intranet for documents, articles and information relating to many diverse topics that will be available to search in the portal. With the copious amounts of information spread across servers, proprietary databases, local hard drives and corporate archives, this research can take months, particularly if Mary's only tools are search mechanisms provided by content management applications and their limited keyword search criteria.
• In an attempt to address the large result sets and irrelevant information limitations of keyword search, the company implemented a content management solution that allows for the manual creation and attachment of metadata to documents. Due to the amount of information within the firm, this process required a team of employees and more than 6 months of reading documents and creating abstracts to reference the context of information, and required a substantial investment above and beyond the purchase price for the software.
• Despite the initiative and abstracts available to Mary, she is frustrated. What Mary has noticed is common among applications with manual metadata creation, the abstracts she is able to search against for contextual meaning are interpreted very differently than she would have done herself. Her search results returned although less in quantity is still largely irrelevant, and she is forced to individually read each document.
• Mary has also noticed that the abstracts she has available to search exclude information found in databases and that stored on local hard drives. Mary also finds that there is information that may prove valuable to the portal located in satellite offices across the country. This dramatically increases the scope of the project since the existing management software does not account for this in a central location. Again, Mary must sift through this left over content on her own, increasing the time and resources needed to complete her project. Unfortunately, she is not able to get the valuable insights and viable information found in the documents of certain firm experts without a trip to those offices.
• Mary is now performing an extensive search on her company's local area network and finds some important archived material. Mary believes that there is also additional relevant information in the Institutional Sales group, but she also suspects that their information is resident on their unshared local drives. Mary does not have any way of knowing what is available and will have to do a repetitive search on each local machine available and maneuver through repetitive information.
• Given that the content in question is spread across disparate information sources and all relevant information is of great importance, it would be of great value to have a tool that could interpret the context of documents in many different environments. Ideally, this process of indexing context within information could be automated to reduce the differences in human interpretation and also allow additional metadata to be created for special circumstances. Mary will not have a cost and time advantage such as this since she does not have any such tools available to her.
• Lastly, Mary compiles all her research and organizes it for the portal, another resource-intensive task that an automated contextual index could have alleviated the need for. Her co-workers will access the information in the portal via her personal interpretation of context and those abstracts created by her peers with the content management system. Doing the best job possible with the resources and tools available Mary's project has taken more time than expected and gone over budget.
• The following month, Mary decides to leave the company and is replaced by John. His first assignment is to research employee use of the portal and make recommend improvements. It is unfortunate that he will not be able to leverage the months of work that Mary has already done, since her notes and files like much of the information she had searched for had not been captured anywhere but her hard drive, that was erased to allow John the storage space and performance of a clean machine.

In summary, the business case clearly illustrates the inefficiencies of modern enterprise information management at every stage of the knowledge lifecycle.

First research is collected and organized. This research is then manipulated and shared with coworkers to reach a deliverable format. Ultimately the research and the deliverable are made available for future reference and retrieval.
However, there are numerous challenges along the way that are crucial to properly managing modern information.