Chapter 11
A Framework for a Good Recordkeeping System

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ABSTRACT

A good record keeping system has a number of components that should be in place for the record keeping system to work optimally for the proper management of records in an organisation. This chapter presents and discusses the components of a recordkeeping system that include a records policy, people or staff, classification system, tracking, capturing business processes and controls, physical handling and storage, preservation, retention and disposition, Compliance monitoring and auditing, vital records protection and disaster preparedness, access, and training.

INTRODUCTION

A system can simply be defined as a set of interconnected components assembled to accomplish given specific purpose. The University of Toronto Archives and Records Services (UTARMS) says a system is an array of components that interact to achieve some objective through a network of procedures that are integrated and designed to carry out a major activity (UTARMS, 1999). Ackoff (1981) suggests that a system is a set of two or more interrelated elements with the following properties:

- Each element has an effect on the functioning of the whole.
- Each element is affected by at least one other element in the system.
- All possible subgroups of elements also have the first two properties

Every profession has its own understanding of what a system should be with an inclination towards the key tenets of that profession. Within the record keeping profession Horsman (2001) defines a record keeping system as the whole of people, resources, methods, procedures, data and knowledge with which

an organization moulds into concrete the required quality of its records. The University of Tasmania (2015) defines it as a system which captures, manages and provides access to records through time. Recordkeeping systems can be either electronic or paper-based.

The International Council on Archives (ICA) defines a recordkeeping system as "an information system developed for the purpose of storing and retrieving records, organized to control the specific functions of creating, storing, and accessing records, to safeguard their authenticity and reliability" (ICA, 1997). ISO 15489 (2016) adopts a similar definition to that of international records body preferring to describe a records system as an information system which captures, manages and provides access to records through time.

The words recordkeeping and records management are used interchangeably in the context of this chapter. McKemmish (2000) indicates that in the context of Australia, recordkeeping systems comprise systems that manage both current records and records with archival value. This is largely due to the influence of the thinking behind the records continuum (Piggott, 1988; Upward, 2000; Flynn, 2001). In this context, recordkeeping thus include:

1. The creation of records in the course of business activity and the means to ensure the creation of adequate records.
2. The design, establishment and operation of recordkeeping systems.
3. The management of records used in business (traditionally regarded as the domain of records management) and as archives (traditionally regarded as the domain of archives administration).

The term records management is synonymous with paper records (Yusuf & Chell, 2000; Ngoepe, 2008) as influenced by the records life cycle concept whose development is credited to Theodore Schellenberg of the National Archives of the USA in 1934 (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003). In developing countries such as those in Africa's Eastern and Southern Africa region, the life cycle concept is popularly used as a framework for managing public sector records (Ngulube & Tafor, 2006). The dominant use of the term records management in developing countries such as those in Africa stems from the dominant management of paper based records systems.

Accordingly, the University of Tasmania (2015) avers that all recordkeeping systems should:

1. routinely capture all records within the scope of the business activity it covers
2. organize the records in a way that reflects the business processes of the records creator
3. protect the records from unauthorized alteration, destruction or transfer
4. routinely function as the primary source of information about actions that are documented in the records
5. provide an audit trail of who has viewed or altered a record and when
6. provide ready access to all relevant records and related metadata
7. have accurately documented policies, assigned responsibilities and formal methodologies for its management

Thus, one can deduce that a system can be broadly defined as an integrated set of elements that accomplish a defined objective. Given these definitions a framework for a good recordkeeping system would, therefore, attempt to outline all the essential components and sub-components of a good recordkeeping system. This means that it should provide an interconnected skeleton needed to deliver an accountable,

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