


Chapter 15

Challenges to Records and Information Management in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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ABSTRACT

The fourth industrial revolution has created many challenges for records and information management. This chapter provides an overview of the field of records management and describes the fourth industrial revolution and its impact. Further, it identifies several challenges to the profession of records manager, such as the effect of cloud computing, big data, mobile devices, and financial and ethical concerns. The author investigates how records managers can keep up to date with the changes in their profession by training and continuing education opportunities. Finally, the author discusses some possible solutions to the many challenges records managers face so that they can do their jobs effectively.

INTRODUCTION

The field of records and information management (RIM) is filled with challenges. Creating retention schedules, getting buy-in from the organization, staffing, and finding adequate space are daily challenges that have existed for a long time for records managers. The “fourth industrial revolution” (4IR) (Schwab, 2016) has ushered in other types of challenges as well. In this chapter, RIM will be defined along with what constitutes a successful RIM program, and then the 4IR will be discussed with particular attention to how it is challenging RIM. There will be an investigation into what can be done to overcome these challenges in order to establish and/or sustain a successful RIM program. Finally, some future directions will be discussed, so that records managers can prepare for the future.

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BACKGROUND

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (2016) defines record management as

the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records. (p. 3).

The Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) (ARMA International, 2016) expanded the definition to emphasize the role of policy by stating that RIM is “responsible for establishing and implementing policies, systems, and procedures to capture, create, access, distribute, use, store, secure, retrieve, and ensure disposition of an organization’s records and information” (p. 43). ARMA added that records and information are subject to being managed regardless of the format, medium or the location. Why is managing records so vital to an organization? Franks (2018) stated that records provide evidence of and value to the organization and that the value can fit into four distinct categories, namely administrative, fiscal, legal, and historical (research/archival), although there is some overlap within them. Understanding the types of records created will help in understanding the functions of RIM.

Administrative records document the activities of the organization and its policies and procedures. They help provide a historical record and context for decisions made within the organization. They include correspondence, ballots and election results, by-laws, committee files, email, policies, and organizational charts. These are common records that organizations create and use in their everyday activities (Franks, 2018).

Fiscal records are needed to satisfy fiscal requirements and provide evidence of financial transactions. They include invoices, budgets, accounts payable and receivable, budget files, financial reports, and travel records. They also provide a historical account of financial business within an organization and provide transparency to the public, which is important for accountability (Franks, 2018).

Legal records exist to satisfy legal requirements. They protect the rights of individuals or the organization and can help defend against litigation, although all records can become legal records if they are needed as such. They include contracts, compliance records, complaint files, and property and real estate files (Franks, 2018).

Historical records help document the history of the organization and they provide evidence of its decisions and policies. Records flagged as historical are determined to have significant value and are not discarded. These types of records may be housed in an archive or another location and transferred to another format, such as digital or microfilm, to preserve them indefinitely (Franks, 2018).

The Role of Retention Schedules

Managing these records effectively through retention schedules is fundamental to records management. A retention schedule is a list of records series (i.e., categories or type of record) that indicates how long a record is to be retained and its disposition once it has reached its scheduled end of life (ARMA International, 2016). The end of life of a record is determined by looking at the records within the four categories above for their value and usefulness, taking into account outside regulatory groups that may have their own retention schedules. For example, in the United States, a federal grant agency might have a shorter or longer retention period than that which the organization normally uses.

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