InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES) 2: Experiential, Interactive and Dynamic Records

APPENDIX 16

Overview of the Records Continuum Concept

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Overview of the Records Continuum Concept[1]

The following text was extracted and adapted from:

> Xiaomi An, "An Integrated Approach to Records Management," *Information Management Journal* July/August (2003): 24–30.

As defined in Australian Standard 4390, the records continuum is "...a consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records (and before creation, in the design of recordkeeping systems) through to the preservation and use of records as archives."[2]

The earliest view of the continuum concept came from Australian national archivist Ian Maclean in the 1950s. He said records managers were the true archivists, and that archival science should be directed toward studying the characteristics of recorded information, recordkeeping systems, and classification processes. His view promoted the search for continuity between archives and records management.

The records continuum as a model concept was formulated in the 1990s by Australian archival theorist Frank Upward based on four principles:

1. A concept of "record" inclusive of records of continuing value (archives) stresses their uses for transactional, evidentiary, and memory purposes, and unifies approaches to archiving/recordkeeping, whether records are kept for a split second or a millennium.
2. There is a focus on records as logical rather than physical entities, regardless of whether they are in paper or electronic form.
3. Institutionalization of the recordkeeping profession's role requires a particular emphasis on the need to integrate recordkeeping into business and societal processes and purposes.
4. Archival science is the foundation for organizing knowledge about recordkeeping. Such knowledge is revisable but can be structured and explored in terms of the operation of principles for action in the past, the present, and the future.[3]

In her book *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: A Continuum Responsibility*, Sue McKemmish writes: "The model provides a graphical tool for framing issues about the relationship between records managers and archivists, past, present, and future, and for thinking strategically about working collaboratively and building partnerships with other stakeholders."[4]

In *Records Management: A Guide to Corporate Recordkeeping*, Jay Kennedy and Cherry Schauder explain the four dimensions that Upward used in his concept of the continuum model:

5. At level one, the model identifies accountable acts and creates reliable evidence of such acts by capturing records of related/supporting transactions. Records of business activities are created as part of business communication processes within the organization (e.g., through e-mail, document management software, or other software applications).

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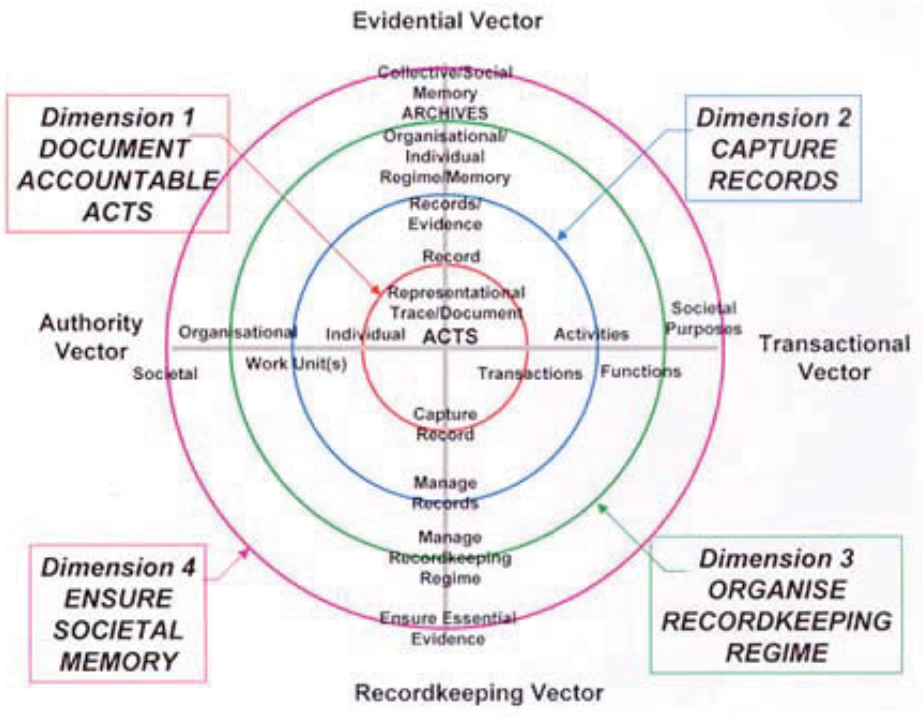
[1] See also http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/.

[2] Standards Australia, *Australian Standard 4390, Records Management* (Homebush, New South Wales: Standards Australia, 1996).

[3] Frank Upward, "In Search of the Continuum: Ian Maclean's 'Australian Experience' Essays on Recordkeeping," in S. McKemmish and M. Piggot, eds. *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* (Sydney: Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994). Online reprint available at http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/fuptrc.html.

[4] See Sue McKemmish (1997), "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: A Continuum Responsibility," in *Proceedings of the Records Management Association of Australia 14th National Convention*, RMAA Perth, 15-17 September 1997.

6. At level two, recordkeeping systems manage "families" of transactions and records series documenting processes at the work-unit or single-function scope of complexity. Records that have been created or received in an organization are tagged with metadata, including how they link to other records.
7. At level three, a seamless recordkeeping scheme embraces the multiple systems and families of records that serve the entire documentary needs (i.e., business, regulatory, and cultural/educational/historical) of a single juridical entity. Records become part of a formal system of storage and retrieval that constitutes the organization's corporate memory.
8. At level four, a collaborative recordkeeping establishment under the guidance of a suitably empowered public recordkeeping authority serves the needs of the total society, its constituent functions, and the entities that carry them out. The recordkeeping establishment serves the documentary needs of many entities within its jurisdiction and ensures the accountability and the cultural memory of the society as a whole. Records required for purposes of societal accountability (e.g., by corporate law) or other forms of collective memory become part of wider archival systems that comprise records from a range of organizations.[5]



In the article "The Records Continuum Model in Context and Its Implications for Archival Practice," Sarah Flynn explains that the records continuum model is significant because it

[5] Jay Kennedy and Cherryl Schauder, *Records Management: A Guide to Corporate Recordkeeping*, 2nd edition (South Melbourne: Longman, 1998).

- broadens the interpretation of records and recordkeeping systems offered by the lifecycle model. Such broadening is helpful, given the variety of contexts in which archivists and records managers operate and in which archives and records are used;
- reminds us that records (including archives) are created and maintained for use as a result of business and administrative functions and processes, rather than as ends in themselves; and
- emphasizes cooperation beyond the walls of repositories, especially between the closely related, if occasionally estranged, professions of archives administration and records management—a cooperation that is more important than ever in the contemporary climate of outsourcing and cross-sector working.[6]

In the article "Life Cycle Versus Continuum: What Is the Difference?" Peter Marshall states that the records continuum's primary focus is the multiple purposes of records.[7] It aims for the development of recordkeeping systems that capture, manage, and maintain records with sound evidential characteristics for as long as the records are of value to the organization, any successor, or society. It promotes the integration of recordkeeping into the organization's business systems and processes.

According to McKemmish, the best-practice mechanism behind the records continuum model uses an integrated approach for managing records and archives. Records managers and archivists are brought together under an integrated recordkeeping framework with the same goal: to guarantee the reliability, authenticity, and completeness of records. The framework provides common understanding, consistent standards, unified best-practice criteria, and interdisciplinary approaches and collaborations in recordkeeping and archiving processes for both paper and digital worlds. It provides sustainable recordkeeping to connect the past to the present and the present to the future. It can coherently exist in a broader dynamic, changeable context that can be influenced by legal, political, administrative, social, commercial, technological, cultural, and historical variables across time and space. The integrated recordkeeping framework would:

- facilitate provenance
- underpin accountability
- constitute memory
- construct identity
- provide authoritative sources of value-added information

The continuum's purpose-oriented, systems approach to records management fundamentally changes the role of recordkeeping. Instead of being reactive, managing records after they have been created, recordkeeping becomes proactive. In partnership with other stakeholders, identifying records of organization activities that need to be retained, then implementing business systems designed with built-in recordkeeping capability ensures capturing records of evidential quality as they are created. Built-in capture and assessment mean that records of value are created in the first place whenever electronic systems are used for business transactions. With appropriate metadata to ensure that they are accurate, complete, reliable, and usable, these records have the necessary attributes of content, context, and structure to act as evidence of business activity. And, Marshall notes, knowing from the outset which digital records must be kept for the longer term means such records can be migrated across systems as hardware and software upgrades occur.

[6] Sarah J. A. Flynn (2001), "The Records Continuum Model in Context and its Implications for Archival Practice," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 22(1): 79–93.
[7] Peter Marshall (2000), "Life Cycle Versus Continuum: What is the Difference?" *Informaa Quarterly* 16(2): 20–25.

The mechanisms of best practice behind the records continuum model are ideal for integrating records and archives management because the records continuum focuses on:

- similarities rather than differences
- qualities and quantities rather than quantities alone
- positive and cohesive ways of thinking rather than disparate or passive ways
- integrated policy making rather than fragmented frameworks
- integrated control of policy implementation rather than separate control
- integrated rather than disparate approaches to problem solving
- meeting customers' needs through collaboration rather than by duplication and overlap

These arguments highlight the records continuum model's importance as a best-practice model for managing digital records when the aim is to improve responsiveness, increase efficiency and satisfy users' requirements.