



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

PRINCIPLES AND FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

FOR RECORDS IN ELECTRONIC OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

CASE STUDY – IMPLEMENTATION OF ICA-Req MODULE 3 IN A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008 the International Council on Archives released the *Guidelines and Functional Requirements for Records in Business Systems*, as the third module in a suite of advice concerned with principles and functional requirements for records in electronic office environments.

Business systems¹, as distinct from electronic document and records management systems, have to-date generally not been designed to manage the maintenance and disposition of records.

These Guidelines and Functional Requirements (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines) were developed to help organisations ensure that evidence (records) of business activities transacted through business systems are appropriately identified and managed.

A range of case studies about the use of the Guidelines are now being developed to highlight potential implementation challenges and share experiences and learnings.

PURPOSE

This case study describes the story of one organisation's use of the Guidelines to assess the records management functionality of their existing key business systems. Its purpose is to assist others who may be planning to use the Guidelines for a similar purpose by sharing the learnings and experiences.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study was developed with the support of a questionnaire and a face-to-face interview with the lead staff member responsible for the project to assess the records management functionality of key business systems. The time and candidness offered by this person is appreciatively acknowledged. For privacy and confidentiality purposes the organisation described in this case study will remain anonymous.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The organisation is an Australian, state-based statutory authority established through legislation. It provides information and services to financially and socially

¹ The Guidelines define business systems as automated systems that create or manage data about an organisation's activities, entailing those applications whose primary purpose is to facilitate transactions between an organisational unit and its client, for example, e-commerce systems, finance systems or human resource systems. Electronic document and records management systems, which are specifically designed with the management of records as their primary function, are not considered business systems.

disadvantaged people. It has approximately 450 staff located over a number of sites.

A range of records are created by the organisation and must be retained for varying retention periods, some up to 90 years. The management of these records is governed by jurisdictional archival legislation.

At the time of writing, the culture of recordkeeping within the organisation was generally considered lower than average, for example, a range of records was stored in systems with inadequate controls, staff awareness about their records management responsibilities was often not high, and disposition was not well-practised.

However evidence of improvements was becoming noticeable, with some recordkeeping policies being implemented and the 10 year old Retention & Disposal Schedule recently updated to comprehensively cover the records created by the organisation.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2010, a project was established within the organisation to review the functionality of existing business systems for their records management capability.

It was suspected that the management of the records had not been adequately considered at the time of designing and implementing these various business systems. Therefore the review was driven by the desire to ascertain the need for additional funds and resources to ensure the records were adequately managed. Its objectives were to demonstrate the need for change to ensure formalised management of the organisation's records created in business systems and to support the bid for the organisation to procure an electronic document and records management system (eDRMS).

The project was overseen by a senior records coordinator and senior project officer, and data gathering was initially conducted by a project officer. For reasons outlined further below, the gathering of data was subsequently conducted by a senior project consultant.

Eight business systems were selected for review, encompassing systems such as finance and call centre applications.

The identified process for the assessment entailed:

1. **Determining the types of records and target systems, and liaising with system owners regarding the review** – The process of identifying the evidence of the business activity, i.e. the records, had already been completed as part of the update of the organisation's Retention and Disposal Schedule. Therefore the type of records within the business systems had already been identified. Despite knowing the types of records, Part One of

the Guidelines was read and discussed by the team to get members into the right frame of mind for the review.

To determine the systems within the scope of the project, a high-level risk assessment was undertaken to identify those systems in which public records were most likely to be generated or stored.

With clarity on the systems within scope, representatives for each of the business systems were sought to participate in the assessment. Getting the right person was critical – that is, people with intimate knowledge of the system, not simply a user of the system. Identifying these people was often challenging but essential in order to be able to obtain effective results for the review.

2. **Determining which functional requirements were to be assessed from the Guidelines** – Acknowledging the low maturity in the culture of recordkeeping within the organisation, the decision was taken to assess only the mandatory, and not the optional functional requirements from within the Guidelines.
3. **Unpacking the functional requirements to gain consensus on their intent and meaning** - This process involved in-depth discussions within the project team about the intent and outcomes of each of the mandatory functional requirements to ensure there was clear agreement and understanding. This was a critical phase in the project and required a significant level of recordkeeping expertise and understanding about recordkeeping functions and processes.
4. **Developing a checklist of questions, along with anticipated responses** – Based on the agreed intent and desired outcomes of each of the functional requirements, a checklist of simplified questions along with ideas for potential responses to the questions were developed. This also involved discussions about how evidence of the response was going to be ascertained.

The ability to translate the functional requirements into questions phrased in a language that business owners could understand was particularly challenging, requiring specific expertise and dedicated time but the project team recognised this was a vital component to the success of the review.

5. **Conducting interviews** – Interviews were conducted with each of the identified business system ‘owners’, with interviews for the larger systems taking approximately 1.5 hours and smaller systems approximately 45 minutes.
6. **Compiling the results** – The data gathered from the interviews was collated to ascertain the extent to which the mandatory functional requirements from the Guidelines were met by each of the business systems. None of the systems were found to meet all of the requirements.

7. **Providing the opportunity for business system owners to review -**
Business system owners were provided the opportunity to review and provide comments on the results. Although no feedback was forthcoming, the team had identified this as an important process to undertake to ensure stakeholder buy-in and transparency.
8. **Submitting the results and recommendations to senior management –**
The results of the review were developed into a formalised submission, with appropriate background and recommendations, for consideration by the organisation's executive team.

OUTCOMES OF THE WORK

The project clearly demonstrated the low levels of processes in place for managing the records created in the business systems. Informed by the results of this project, the need for an eDRMS for the organisation was further justified and the necessary resources secured to undertake a project to plan and implement an eDRMS to manage both the records created in their business systems and other records created within the organisation.

KEY ISSUES

The project raised a number of issues for the project team which highlighted the need for:

- recordkeeping knowledge, capability and expertise in the project team in order to be able to interpret the intent of the functional requirements specified within the document
- skills in translating, simplifying and articulating the intent of the functional requirements into a language and terminology that made sense to those without records management knowledge
- strong communication and change management skills including the need to secure buy-in from stakeholders, advocate for change, clearly communicate the objectives and key benefits of the project, and actively resolve conflicts.

KEY LEARNINGS

The organisation found the project an interesting and useful exercise. The team identified a range of lessons learnt from the project which include:

- **Understand the intent of the functional requirements within scope 'inside and out' and simplify into questions where possible**

The person gathering the data requires an expert level of records management knowledge, an understanding of the requirements and the ability to clearly

articulate and translate the concepts into tangible business system examples. The first attempt at interviews was conducted by a team member with limited skills in this area which resulted in frustration for the business system owners and built a level of distrust and resistance to the project, resulting in the team deciding to independently appoint a senior records management consultant to re-conduct the interviews and work to resolve any conflicts.

The process was much smoother the second time round when more time was taken to unpack and understand each of the requirements. Anticipating possible ways that evidence of the system meeting the requirements may be displayed was also useful in aiding discussions during the review.

It was learnt that time and effort must be dedicated within the project to translating the records management concepts into a plain language that makes sense to the business system owners, IT professionals and other stakeholders. This process took a number of days of intensive consideration by the project team, but was well worth the time spent and effectively facilitated a smoother interview and assessment process. Familiarisation with the questions was also important so that where the system clearly didn't meet a requirement, related inappropriate follow-on questions were not asked.

- **Take the time to identify the correct person(s) to interview during the review and keep them informed and engaged**

To achieve a successful outcome, the interviewee(s) must know the system, or parts of the system, in detail in order to be able to effectively answer questions, and not be a basic 'user' of the system.

Upon review of the project, the team acknowledged that there was a need to better communicate with the interviewees to ensure the intent, objectives and benefits of the project were well understood, any concerns addressed, and any risks or conflicts actively managed.

Often, there was a tendency for business system owners to become defensive when records management functionality was lacking within the system. Therefore it became apparent that there was a significant need to highlight that the project's intent was not to draw attention to mistakes or deficiencies in and of themselves, but to help build the case for securing resources to improve recordkeeping practices.

- **Make a demonstration of the system in action a necessary part of the review**

It was often difficult to ascertain whether a requirement was sufficiently met or not without active demonstration of the system. Whilst business system owners were often resistant to showing the system, successful completion of the review was dependent on some demonstration of the system.

- **Clearly define the scope and intent of the review**

Business system owners tended to focus on the potential of the system to meet the requirements, for example through configuration or further possible development, and not on the current state of the system. However the purpose of the review was to assess the current state. The lack of understanding of the scope of the review led to some frustrations for the team and interviewees.

- **Ensure there are the right skills and expertise on the project**

There is clearly a need for experience and knowledge in recordkeeping functions and processes in order to be able to successfully understand and translate the functional requirements from the Guidelines. There is also a need for strong communication, negotiation and conflict resolution skills during the assessment process.

- **Take a pragmatic and manageable approach based on priorities**

Given the recordkeeping culture within the organisation, the decision to only review the mandatory requirements during the project was considered an appropriate approach at this stage of the organisation's recordkeeping maturity.

