Introduction: Recordkeeping and Archiving Processes and the resource they produce.

Recordkeeping processes are directed at establishing and maintaining evidence. Archiving processes are directed at establishing and maintaining memory. Together they provide organisations with an authoritative and usable resource.

Pre-digital records management practices for creating the resource have included surveying and inventorying, vital records programs, functional analyses, recordkeeping system design and implementation. Newer management strategies include risk management and quality control.

In relation to digital records management practice is undergoing changes particularly in relation to its program control and direction. The more traditional approaches, however, are continuing in some form or another. At a document level there is also a continuing trend to develop better document creation processes directed at essential functionalities relating to creating documents that can exist through time in fixed form and to improve records capture which involves the establishment and maintenance of relationships between documents.

These are components of records management, but it is in the records management program at organizational level that one can expect major advances in the near future as organisations come to terms with trying to establish workable ‘knowledge management’ approaches and organizational control. This moves us out from the evidence issues of documents and records and into their management as memory.

Access to memory is built up by the archiving processes involved in organising the documents and records and collecting them together within larger frameworks as a resource. Records need to be organised so that people outside of the areas that have immediate contact with them can still know about them if need be, and so people inside immediate areas can understand how those records relate to records and activities outside of their area. Otherwise you finish up with lots of disconnected and even unnecessary systems.

These processes will increasingly occur ‘behind the screen’. There are many people in an organisation who will not know how the records are recalled and disseminated, but only those in regular contact with the business processes and the related systems for recording information will be likely to have any detailed understanding. However, co-operation in terms of metadata attribution and classification processes will be required from those doing the business of the organisation, and these will need to be simple and workable.

Records managers and corporate archivists have a range of techniques they have traditionally applied to providing this overview of the corporate resource. There are newer techniques being introduced through mechanisms such as AS ISO 15489 Records Management.
The Archival Resource

The issue of corporate memory could have raised its head at a number of points in the notes you have received so far in the course. For example in discussing document management systems and the technological context for records management today Barbara Reed once noted that:

The consequence of these technological and managerial transformations has been a fragmentation leading to loss of corporate memory...It is the sense of lack of control and loss which has created a market for document management systems. They promise to bring back under control the thousands of documents which workers produce daily, creating order out of chaos, and generating an information-rich resource for the organisation. Whether they deliver, even on their own terms, is another matter.

In fact, organisations are now expecting document management programs to deliver in terms of knowledge management, not ‘their own terms’, to deliver a better corporate resource. A theorist in the area of archiving electronic records, David Bearman, has argued that an 'atomic' approach to memory formulation is essential. An atomic approach relates to document management, data about the documents [metadata] and a structural approach to managing information. In this course we also point to other essentials relating to functional and organizational analysis which are often more closely associated with the process of archiving, the processes of making the atoms ‘rememberable’ across an organisation.

Memory is a slippery term with all sorts of tricks to it, and special connotations. That is something most of us are aware of ever since we became aware of the way Freud began to explore its nature. Organisational memory is no different. Corporate memory, is not the same thing as the archival resource. It is all the forms of memory within an organisation, whereas the archival resource is the recorded information relating to the actions of the organizational entity. This is the resource which has traditionally [at least before the development of records management as an area of specialized practice from the 1950’s] been known as an archive rather than corporate memory.

One problem in using the term archive over the last fifty years has been that almost all records managers, and most archivists, think of an archive from a temporal perspective [i.e. a time based perspective]. Most records managers think this way out of habit, and see it as a way of separating their role from those of archivists. As for archivists, habit is also important. Most of them are used to handling older records.

There is, however, a substantial lineage to my use of the term, and I would accept an alternative if there was a true equivalent in the English language. The Dutch archivists Muller, Feith and Fruin outlined the concept when, in the 1890's, they described an archief [the Dutch word for an archive] as:

An archief is the whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials, in so far as these documents were intended to remain in the custody of that body or that official. [S.Muller, J.A.Feith, and R.Fruin, Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives,... p13]

It may be a long time, if ever, before records managers in English speaking countries will call an archive an archive. They will keep looking for synonyms, be it recordkeeping system, corporate memory, digital resource or whatever. Bear with me, in any of my notes, if I use the phrase archive. I cannot find an alternative for ways of explaining processes by which an organised records resource provides a corporate body [or individual] with a formal system of memory.
Corporate memory is something broader than this. Perhaps I should be less finicky, and call it the 'corporate records store', or use Barbara Reed’s apt phrase and call it the recordkeeping floor. Whatever it is called, its operation can be seen very clearly in the case study on the Dubbo virtual university, (and there is nothing fanciful about the scenario). It does not yet fully exist – but the bits are being done in bitty fashion.