Introduction

These notes point to some of the ways in the past and present by which the documentary resource of an organization has been formed.

Appraisal - Archiving as a recordkeeping process

Appraisal is a substantial topic, and is dealt with in another subject in MIMS, IMS 5010. The term itself is used professionally by archivists who for much of the twentieth century have used it to describe selecting material for accessioning as part of the holdings of an archival institution. In other teaching notes, in order to promote discussion between archivists, I have sometimes described archiving in the following terms:

Archiving: a recordkeeping process that involves the carriage of records through time and across space so that those records serve multiple uses. Strategies and methodologies for archiving are built upon appraisal and description processes.

In fact, archiving traditionally has meant bringing archival material into the custody of an archival institution or into a separate physical repository within an organisation. But appraisal looked at as a basic process and defined in a non-professional sense, has always been fundamental to organising a resource as memory, to organizing the archive and not just the archives as separate institution.

This is not a subtle theoretical point. Despite the masses of literature to the contrary, archivists do not own appraisal although their authorization role is vital to democratic societies. Appraisal is a process for evaluating something, and within records management disposal programs there should be a constant process of assessment occurring. Any destruction of records or transfer of records [disposal decision] is based on an evaluation of some sort keeping in mind that if destruction occurs you cannot access that which does not exist (although within a good recordkeeping system, by using the control records you may well be able to access the space it once occupied and a lot of surrounding detail).

Description

Using a similar simplifying and non-professionalised argument, description means depicting or portraying something using words or images and is vital for processes of accessing the resource. In a records management context those outside the immediate activities involved in the construction and use of a records system can not reliably access material unless it has descriptive data attached. Description is a process which is ongoing. Its main avenues of operation are connected with processes of document creation and records capture.[metadata]. Traditionally, however, there have been organizational level applications, such as those involved in surveying and inventoring.
Appraisal and Description as a Joint Strategy

Kennedy and Shauder, chapter four, deals with appraisal, and notes the role traditional descriptive practices [inventorying] has played in this.

Both appraisal and description processes are fundamental to accessing documentary memory. Barbara Reed has expressed this in relation to appraisal in the following terms:

“Appraisal is the fundamental determinant of recordkeeping tasks. It pulls into its purview all of the complexities of what records are, why they are created, why they are kept and the complex web of stakeholder interactions and expectations. The stakeholders' interests impact throughout the dimensions of the continuum and are by no means restricted to an external 'imposed' view of records. They are at the heart of records creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation... Far from appraisal operating at the end of a record's "active life" before it is permitted to cross the archival threshold, the essential decisions of purpose, use, access and control are determined by appraisal at the point of capture. Appraisal becomes a crucial recordkeeping process. It shapes the record available for all future recordkeeping processes, including archiving. One outcome of the appraisal process is the creation of records. This process becomes equally crucial at all subsequent points of potential crisis in the existence of a record, such as at times of migration...

- Appraise transactions and the actors initiating them for whether documents should be created
- Appraise activities and those involved in them for how evidential the process of records capture needs to be [and for what documents need to be connected to each other?]?
- Appraise functions in an organisational context for the place of records in the memory of the organisation and its archives and
- Appraise records in a broader institutional or societal context for their purpose and their place in collective memory at this broader level and in any related archives.

(Frank Upward: Teaching Notes for Topic 12 LAR 5530, Managing the Records Continuum, 1997.)”

Barbara's statement takes a continuum approach, and refers to my approach based on transactional, structural, functional and organizational analysis, an approach which began to be set out in the lectures on workflow and regulatory environment minus the continuum theory but with an emphasis on the JOINT operation of these processes.

The Survey as a Descriptive Tool for the Archival Resource

In relation to the archive - the records resource described in the paper “Archiving and Corporate Memory” - the main method of consolidating memory into a single accessible system has been the survey. When done comprehensively surveys provide a structured overview of the whole resource. Surveys have provided after the fact information about the recordkeeping objects contained within the archive, within a descriptive vocabulary which includes words like file, dossiers [often used for case files] and series. There are many different ways of aggregating paper records and the survey can be used to describe them, whether, for example, they are

- periodic transactions where regularly but intermittently produced documents such as quarterly reports are kept as a separate series,
- once off simple transactions such as the purchase of something which may be kept in a purchasing file
- serial transactions, where transactions of the same type may be aggregated together within a chronological series, such as paid claims in an accounting system
- transactions which flow one upon another and may be kept as a packet of documentation, such as insurance case files
- unpredictable transactions grouped into dossiers, such as personnel case files, or
- information material used in transactions and held in related dossiers.

In a survey this sort of information is brought out by descriptive series titles and explanations of methods of arranging material in the series.

Survey forms for much of the last half of this century have been important in carrying out appraisal processes. They have also been invaluable descriptive tools, enabling a records manager to know what sort of records are created and maintained, within what sorts of systems, and where priority attention is needed.

There are a number of forms presented in Kennedy and Schauder. There is a Public Record Office survey questionnaire which depends on interviews, is quite detailed, and connects with drawing up disposal schedules [p. 74]. There is a quick walk-through method which is great for giving an overview of large swags of paper in an organisation [page 76] and there is the vital records inventory [page 247]

That is it. The main method organisations have had for the last fifty years for controlling their documentary resource has been the system used for preparing inventories. Follow up uses for these inventories have been the disposal schedule or the vital records plan. Those uses are illustrated in your readings from Kennedy and Schauder.

The survey approach works well for managing paper records and their bulk, but to manage electronic business records effectively you HAVE to analyse the business processes.

The Emphasis on Business Activities

Introduction

The survey approach remains relevant in today's hybrid environment, particularly in relation to disposing of the existing paper mountains. Increasingly, however, approaches are being developed which are more managerially connected to the business activities of an organisation and are less physical.
One of the major changes starting to occur in the records management field is the movement towards a managerial approach. This managerial approach can have a number of manifestations, including

- analysing the business functions, activities, and transactions to see what records should be kept and for how long [This way of constructing disposal schedules can enable more authority to be passed down to the action officers within a compliance based strategy - as the disposal is based upon activities they understand and are involved with on a daily basis]
- analysing business processes to identify at a more fine grained level the retention status of particular documents, and to work out what sort of recordkeeping objects [packets of transaction based documentation] should be constructed. (To understand what some of the possible 'logical' packets are possible re-read the list of ways of aggregating paper records in the paper record)
- using risk management strategies.

Functional Analysis (see Week 4)

There is one method outlined in an earlier topic which is not based on physical survey of records - the functional analysis approach. The textbook references to functional analysis, which you have read earlier in the course, point to the influence of the earlier Australian Standard on Records Management, AS 4390, and later AS ISO 15489: Records Management. AS 4390 puts forward a different articulation of the appraisal process to that provided by the traditional archival texts. It defines appraisal as:

the process of evaluating business activities to determine which records need to be captured and how long the records need to be kept to meet business needs, the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations.

Barbara Reed, in teaching notes, has commented that:

“This definition embodies functional analysis as a key recordkeeping skill which is required before implementing appraisal. Organisations and their functions, activities and transactions are located specifically within a legal and regulatory framework which identifies their responsibilities and accountabilities to the general community, and within a social framework which identifies all parties with an interest in the records. Once this basic analysis has been carried out, the analysis is applied to individual activities and transactions which result in the creation of records. Which records to capture are specified in conjunction with the record creating bodies and how long they are required to be maintained is embodied in decisions taken during this process.”

Functional analysis is not a new idea. The American archivists Margaret Cross Norton and Theodore Schellenberg refer to it in their textbooks published around the middle of the century and the analysis of business activities has been part of Australian practice from the 1950's.

It has been taken up in the successive Australian records management standard, and is having results. One example is the NSW Records Management Office AAA thesaurus, which is being adapted for use in the Commonwealth Government. You can get some information on the thesaurus from the NSW site:

NSW Records Management Website - use the site search mechanism for the phrase keyword AAA, at http://www.records.nsw.gov.au
Risk Management

One managerial approach, risk management, is beginning to assist in forming the corporate archive in a number of organisations. It is particularly useful when connected with a vital records program. It can be considered to be very much part of what has been called organisational analysis in this course. A risk management program, if carried out in conjunction with a functional analysis (see Week 4) will also help determine security levels for records, and in determining access permissions. It can also provide a framework for decisions made in relation to structural and transactional analyses at the work ‘coal-face’.

There is a tendency for some records managers and archivists not familiar with the process of risk management to fear that it is a licence to destroy anything and everything. The phrase conjures up images of deliberate risk taking. In fact risk management programs done in accordance with risk management standards will be responsible programs. From an archivist’s point of view, for example, an appraisal of what records to retain done in accordance with risk management may result in as much material being kept as in any other quality program and will result in the creation, gathering and collation of much contextual information. Risk management strategies enable a more informed decision to be made, and better records to be kept.

Risk management is a feature of the management of most organisations and is undertaken in relation to many different types of risk. Issues such as product liability, with its increasingly stringent legislative controls on responsibility of companies and individuals are as much a part of risk management as are the financial losses entailed in disasters.

Long term effects of events, such as the threat to poison random packets of biscuits or paracetamol, also involve public perception of how well individual companies faced the problems, with what honesty they acted and how the public interest was measured and dealt with in relation to the organisation's interests. [There have been a number of major cases of this over the last five years in Australia].

While the focus of risk assessment is often the quantitative measurement of exposure to monetary loss, in fact, risk should be considerably more broadly defined. It incorporates exposure to an enormous range of possible outcomes, from loss of public confidence in the product or company, bad public relations, or damage to reputation to liability to damages for negligence or internal or external fraud.

For public sector organisations, risk management involves assessment of risk in both the areas of activity common to all organisations which manage funds, assets and staff, and which deal with the public, and in the areas of specific statutory responsibility. Examples of areas of risk specific to their statutory functions are the management of armaments in the Defence Department's establishments or advising on the environmental impact of major development projects by the Department of the Environment. There are also issues of public perception of government agencies, their credibility and community standing.

Risk Management is the term applied to a logical and systematic method of identifying, analysing, assessing, treating, monitoring and communicating risks associated with any activity, function or process in a way that will enable organisations to minimize losses and maximise opportunities.
Recordkeeping and Risk

Risk management is a complex set of events, probabilities, perceptions and controls, impact minimisation and contingency planning. While we are concerned specifically with recordkeeping risk, it needs to be understood in the broader context of risk management.

Despite the association of risk management with dealing with accidental losses or unforeseen circumstances, risk is an identifiable factor in all business decisions. Speculative risk is intrinsic to business management. Risk is assessed in introducing new product lines, moving to new technology, in business strategies such as "just in time" stock management, as well as in financial investment decisions. But it is also an aspect of the myriad of decisions which all organisations and individuals make in the course of their business activities. Deciding whether or not to make and keep a record should be seen as falling into this larger category of business risk.

There are three distinct aspects to risk management as it relates to recordkeeping:
1. Recordkeeping as a response to identified risks for defensive and preventative purposes.
2. Risk arising from the decisions to create, or not to create, and keep records and arising from the management of those records.
3. Assessments made in relation to the quality of the records - the extent to which they may need to serve a role as evidence, for example

Where risk has been identified, assessed and a management program instigated, recordkeeping is part of the response strategy. Section 5 of the Australian/New Zealand Standard: Risk Management (AS/NZS 4360:1999) states categorically:

Each stage of the risk management process should be documented. Documentation should include assumptions, methods, data sources and results. (p.19)

It goes on to make an exemplary statement of the reasons for good recordkeeping for all business-centred purposes, not just the risk management process - to provide evidence of action taken, to provide an accountability mechanism, for monitoring compliance and measuring the success of the program, to record, share and communicate information.

Take an example: where use and management of hazardous chemicals are part of an organisation's business, there are identifiable risks which also incorporate legal liabilities. Such an organisation needs to manage those chemicals in compliance with the law and regulations, in accordance with the appropriate industry's acknowledged standards and best practices.

However, it is not enough to have the proper equipment, the safety procedures, and appropriate training for the workers, and accident prevention and response programs in place. In the event of an accident, the organisation must be able to demonstrate that all reasonable care was exercised to prevent such an occurrence. It must have the evidence that it has addressed the risks with due diligence in compliance with the law. Identification of risks in such instances has recordkeeping implications which will dictate what records need to be created and indicate how long they need to be kept.
Once decisions to make and keep records have been taken, risk management in relation to those records must be undertaken. Issues of the adequacy of the recordkeeping (completeness, authoritativeness, access and retrieval, security and maintenance) are considered in relation to the activity which the records document. Specific risks to the records, such as unauthorised or accidental destruction, improper access or disclosure, inadequate controls which could prejudice their status as evidence or simply make them hard to find, are taken into account in the design and management of records systems. It is a truism that assessment of the recordkeeping risk must be informed by the nature of the business/activity which the records document.

Some aspects of traditional practice of records management and archives administration have always been concerned with minimising risks. The concept of the vital records program, for example, is to identify and ensure the safety of critical business records. Expressed dramatically, vital records are those which an organisation needs to have to hand if the entire premises were wiped out by some disaster.

Another example is the disaster recovery programs within organisations particularly in archival institutions. More generally, in both the private and public sectors, disaster recovery plans are commonly focused on the information technology areas of the organisation, but have direct relevance to recordkeeping.

**Accountability and risk**

Effective risk management is aimed at anticipation and prevention of foreseeable occurrences, which will have a negative impact on the organisation, or if they occur, at minimisation of that impact. Beyond the immediate consequences of life-threatening events, major financial losses, damage to reputation or public credibility, there are the legal and other liabilities incurred by the parties held responsible for the disasters. Someone will be held accountable.

Risk management accountabilities will generally follow the pattern of decision-making responsibilities within an organisation. From this aspect, the critical decisions of whether or not to create and maintain a record of a transaction, decision, or activity should be taken within an agreed policy framework. Decisions not to make records are defensible but the risk incurred should be identified and authorised at an appropriate level in the organisation. For example, in organisations in which orders are accepted, quotes given or advice dispensed verbally or by telephone, the managers responsible should determine whether or when a record is made of these transactions. Their recordkeeping decisions should be made on the basis of a documented policy and procedural framework, authorised at an appropriate level.

In the environment of the contemporary office where PCs in network configurations, are the norm, the decision whether or not to make and keep a record is often taken by the individual member of staff. In these decentralised structures, the recordkeeping regime must provide explicit guidance in line with that level of accountability, for those decisions. Likewise decisions to make and keep certain records (eg. holding personal or other confidential information) incur a risk which must be managed by adequate security, access controls and data protection components of the records system. This incurs a cost which should be justifiable against the need for the information, but the decision should be consciously made, recorded and authorised.
There have been instances in recent corporate history in Australia in which the decision not to make records relating to particular transactions (fund-raising, movement of funds, company restructuring) was, evidently, consciously taken to thwart accountability. However what is accepted as smart business practice in one era may not be regarded the same way three years later. Almost any chapter of Trevor Sykes's *The Bold Riders*, (Sydney 1994) will offer examples if you cannot bring any more recent instances to mind. [The book deals with corporate collapses in Australia during the 1980’s within what was, at the time, admired business practice, but in the 1990’s had become a symbol of greed]

No doubt we can all think of recent instances. One of the consequences of those decisions which needs to be considered today is the public rejection which they would incur for the persons or organisation so deciding, if they are found out. The relationship between public accountability and the risks of recordkeeping is close, interdependent and highly political.


**DIRKS - Putting Traditional and Modern Approaches Together**

One of the clearest statements of a combination of newer and traditional methods of organising an 'archive system' is contained in AS ISO 15489 on designing recordkeeping systems – and has become known as DIRKS. It is the method that deals with

(a) Preliminary investigation  
(b) Analysis of business activity  
(c) Identification of requirements for records  
(d) Assessment of existing systems  
(e) Identification of strategies for recordkeeping  
(f) Design of a records system  
(g) Implementation of a records system  
(h) Post-implementation review

It also relies on a number of tools underneath including the functional classification thesaurus tool, and the Commonwealth Metadata Scheme.

**Recordkeeping System Discussion**

In the DIRKS methodology, recordkeeping system is almost a synonym for the archive. When you venture into Barbara Reed's case study on the virtual university in which the recordkeeping system is 'a floor' underneath the many information systems, that is exactly what it is. Anne Picot, writing in Monash teaching material noted that:

“A recordkeeping system operates within an identifiable unit such as an organisation, government agency, company, or defined part thereof. "System" here embraces not merely the records specifications of a single records system, but multiple records systems, multiple series, the business rules by which those systems are operated, the procedures, policies, and actors carrying out the actions which make and keep records in those systems over time.
The recordkeeping system of an organisation governs the operating of individual records systems in that organisation, be they:

- operational systems, (e.g., the system by which manages the processing of the census returns in the Australian Bureau of Statistics);
- the personnel or accounts payable systems found in every government agency;
- or the systems which capture and manage correspondence and files in most agencies (records management systems).

The first part of the definition takes advantage of the fact that the word system can be all embracing in its meaning. I would describe this broad system as the socio-technical system in which recordkeeping takes place. In the second part of the definition recordkeeping system becomes a synonym for the archief or fonds as defined in the paper “Archiving and Corporate Memory” all the records of an organisation.

Can an all-embracing recordkeeping system 'govern' the operation of individual records systems as happens in the case study? If we mean it is a socio-technical system, then yes it can and does even today, but that is a very loose use of the word system from a practical viewpoint. If we mean the second part of the definition - the resource - then it is an area of debate. Some people would argue that each of the records systems operations will be governed most by their own functional requirements and the technological capacities we possess, not the super functional requirements of the super recordkeeping system.

So how can a single system be set up? What does it require? The answer is not complex. You can set up a single system if you manage all communications as they pass in, around and out of an organization, deciding at what point records will be captured – as per the case study. The answer may not be complex, but implementation is, of course.