INTRODUCTION 1 [theoretical and philosophical introduction to metadata]

This discussion is about to get philosophical and theoretical. Theoretically in records management the document is inextricably but ultimately unknowably connected to the transaction that gave rise to it. Unknowable because as the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, has argued, the 'trace itself does not exist'. We can seldom know the exact details of the immediate context of creation. Derrida argues that is almost impossible for the trace to communicate directly. In much simpler arguments than Derrida would use, did the author have a headache? Was he having trouble with converting Word and HTML documents at the time and thus lose some of the intended meaning. Did she mean something different from the text on the page? Is he fibbing? How were the words in the document being used by its creator? How did people reading the document interpret the words?

The trace may not exist, but the document does, and it contains potential recordkeeping data, internalised within the document or which can be added to it during communication processes. These are the handles by which it can begin to be extracted from its immediate contexts of creation and carried forward as something more philosophically knowable: the record.

Another French philosopher, Jean Francois Lyotard, describes the record as being like the script for a play. The theatre is gone, the actors have gone, but the scenes are replayable.

In less philosophical terms Anthony Giddens refers to this in sociological process as a disembedding process.

Selection of data to record is therefore important to the ‘replayable’ nature of records. It will control what is brought back to life. This is what makes the issue of metadata such a major one these days within electronic recordkeeping systems.

THEORY AND PRACTICE – THE ARCHIVAL BOND

Elements of content in a document can be established during document creation which can be used to link other documents within records systems. Some of these are obvious, including things like

- the date of the letter
- the office of origin
- a description of the transaction itself
- a description of the subject of the document, which may not be the same as the transaction it is involved with [a transaction might be paying a bill for example, whereas the subject is what is being paid for]
When it comes to discussing the way documents are combined with other documents into different categories of records e.g.

- dossiers which are loose ‘satchels’ of material such as a dossier in a personal filing cabinet,
- files which in English is used interchangeably with the term dossier, but is strictly speaking the ‘threaded’ documents held more tightly in sequence,
- a series of records which might be a series of dossiers or files, but can also just be something like a chronological grouping of documents

Luciana Duranti has provided us with a very useful term - the archival bond. The archival bond refers to the relationships between documents, and the aggregation processes that hold these related documents together.

Duranti defines the archival bond as:

' the relationships that because of the circumstances of their creation, records have with their creator, with the activity in which they participate, and among themselves'

and more fully as:

'The originary, necessary and determined web of relationships that each record has at the moment at which it is made or received with the records that belong in the same aggregation. It is an incremental relationship which begins when a record is first connected to another in the course of action (e.g. a letter requesting information is linked by an archival bond to the draft of a copy of the record replying to it and filed with it. The one gives meaning to the other).'

The fuller definition makes it clear that the archival bond can be seen as relating to the capture of documents within a sequential relationship in a records system. Put simply, it is all about filing.

In Luciana Duranti’s native tongue, Italian, there is no word for record. The phrase used for record in many European tongues is ‘archival document’. The archival bond, seen in this light is the way in which relationships are established between documents in ways which transform these entities into records (into disembedded replays of the past). These relationships include

- the contextual relationships established and documented during its [the document’s] creation [the immediate context of creation],
- the record relationships established during records capture, which Duranti would call records making or receiving rather than capture [the disembedding of a document from its context of creation, and the creation of a record]
- the relationship between the created document and the captured record

The French call this bonding process ‘archivage’ or archiving. In English we are more likely to call it records capture, and use (or more correctly, should be using) the term archiving for construction of the archive as corporate memory. We have a word for record, but the processes of recordkeeping and archiving are closely linked and in some languages not easily diffracted from each other linguistically.

**Introduction 2  Forget the philosophy and theory – What does record capture mean in practice?**

AS ISO 15849 – Records Management, is based on records capture for evidential purposes. This is the recordkeeping approach.

**Extract from AS ISO 15849, Part 1, s.9**

**9.3 Records capture**

The purpose of capturing records into records systems is to

- establish a relationship between the record, the creator and the business context that originated it,
- place the record and its relationship within a records system, and
- link it to other records.
This process can be undertaken by the allocation of explicit metadata, embedded in, attached to or associated with, the specific record irrespective of its format. This should be designed into the procedures of a records system. This metadata is essential for re-tracing, with authority, the status, structure and integrity of the record at any particular time and demonstrating its relationships with other records.

Techniques to ensure capture of records may include:

a) classification and indexing which allow appropriate linking, grouping, naming, security protection, user permissions and retrieval, disposition, and identifying vital records;

b) arrangement in a logical structure and sequence, whether a physical file or an electronic directory, which facilitates subsequent use and reference;

c) registration which provides evidence of the existence of records in a records system; and

d) systems which profile or template the actions undertaken in doing business, which
   1) provide metadata describing the business context,
   2) provide evidence of where a record is located,
   3) identify what action is outstanding,
   4) identify who has accessed a record,
   5) identify when such access took place, and
   6) provide evidence of the transactions that have been undertaken on the record.

Metadata contributes to and controls records capture. If we look at the basic metadata related to document creation listed in Introduction 1, for example, we can see that the

- the date of the letter is important if we are bonding records together chronologically
- the office of origin is what matters most if we are bonding by source,
- the description of the transaction matters to the construction of a transactional file
- the description of the subject matters to subject files.

Back to a theory/practice mix

Record capture should not be confused with the related process of document capture. Documents need to be captured in fixed form, as documents [the document as an unaggregated record]. This is a recordkeeping process in the sense that it is a building block for other recordkeeping processes. It involves capturing documents in a fixed and unalterable form. In that way the relationships established internally within the document are maintained. Document capture, however, is part of the process of document creation. It is often referred to as document fixity. In electronic systems, it should be noted, the document can be both fixed and fluid. You can maintain an unalterable document, and you can draw down a copy which can be edited and re-used.

Capturing a document in a fixed form, however, is not the same thing as capturing a document as a record in the sense of a record as an aggregated sequence of documents. It is a starting point, but there is no single finishing point. There are a number of ways by which records can be captured, each of which can be read against Duranti's explanation of the archival bond (try it). Strategies include:

- placing documents in a transactional sequence in a letter book, a file, an electronic directory - providing those books, files or directories can not be re-arranged without at the very least there being evidence of this;
- registering documents during communication and action processes which provides evidence of the existence of records in a records system and the sequence in which it was placed and used within that system [we will look at registry processes next week, although a brief explanation is given below];
- workflow control which can provide evidence of where documentation is located, what action is outstanding, who has been involved in the transactions, what documentation have the action officers seen, when did access take place, and what recordkeeping transactions have been undertaken on the record.
A record in its aggregated forms can also be both fixed and fluid. It can grow, it can be used in different transactions, parts of it can be used in new transactions. Some nineteenth century records in Australia are still growing, particularly in the legal area [records about property ownership for example, or about the name of a company which was established in the nineteenth century.

A fixed trail of the growth and development of the fluid record can be maintained using metadata approaches. Classifying and indexing processes [see Kennedy and Schauder for explanations of these terms if necessary] are important to this fluidity and fixity. They can provide appropriate linking, grouping, naming, security protection, user permissions, retrieval, disposition, and identification of essential and vital records. The main method of capture, of fixity of the record, however, is registration. As Barbara Reed has written

“The purpose of registration is to provide evidence that a record has been created or captured in a records system. It involves recording brief descriptive information or metadata about the record and assigning the record an identifier, unique within the domain of the system. Registration formalises the capture of the record into the records system.” [course notes for lar5720]

Registration was abandoned by the USA early in the twentieth century, but it is being rediscovered by them in relation to electronic records. They abandoned the process because manually it is time consuming, but electronically much of the metadata can be automatically generated.

The International Standard draws a lot on registration theory, but if you doubt the return of registries in electronic environments think of its many variations such as domain naming registration, Microsoft’s ‘registry’ in its latest software etc.