

## ***Records Management in 1983: Challenges and Opportunities\****

The theme adopted for this Seminar, "Office Automation," is very timely. Records managers and archivists throughout Canada are becoming increasingly involved and increasingly concerned with the progress in this field. The office of the future is here, and exerting a powerful influence on our profession. This is an appropriate time for discussion, cooperation, and exchange of information on the management of recorded information in general, and office automation in particular.

It is no secret that the circumstances affecting records management have changed drastically even in the last decade. There are several factors in this change. One is technological development in the field of information creation and dissemination, which includes the increasing use of computers, microforms, word processing equipment, and the use of lasers and a wide range of developments in the field of communications, including satellites. While earlier warnings that paper would be displaced as an important recording medium have proved to be exaggerated, the fact is that a profession whose procedures have been based primarily on the management of paper records cannot help but be affected by the widespread use of other records media.

The variety of records media has led to the general acceptance of the concept of information management. This is based on an emphasis on the content rather than the form of records: the message is more important than the medium, and the obvious conclusion is that there should be a systems approach to information which is multi-disciplinary in nature and involves a control over the management of information in whatever form it may be and throughout its existence.

Thirdly, public awareness and concern about records has increased greatly as a result of legislation such as the Access to Information Act, the Privacy Act, and emphasis on the paper burden—the impact of records on the public and particularly small business.

Finally, in a period of restraint, when economic conditions make cost effectiveness particularly important, it is recognized that good records management promotes both efficiency and economy.

The impact of these changes on records managers is predictable. It constitutes a challenge and an opportunity. An important challenge is for individual records managers and the profession collectively to adapt to technological change by acquiring sufficient knowledge to be able to use computers, for example, as a tool and to utilize the entire range of available equipment and options in order to make most effective use of information for the benefit of particular uses and users.

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\* A luncheon address to the Annual Training Seminar, Association of Records Managers and Administrators, Ottawa Chapter, 20 April 1983.

A related challenge concerns professional training which will prepare records managers to handle more comprehensive responsibilities. Recent initiatives include modified training courses and ARMA's certification process, but it must be extended to include regular and continual updating in the records field.

Another challenge is to integrate all aspects of information management from creation to final disposition, including archival uses, into a single integrated system. The danger is that the present records management profession, unable to meet the challenge of adapting to the new conditions and requirements, will be bypassed by other information specialists who will master the more glamorous aspects of information management, leaving the conventional paperwork manager in an isolated and probably subordinate position. This is a real danger, and there are steady examples of records managers who are being left behind. For those who can rise to the challenge, the opportunities are impressive. The factors which present challenges also provide opportunities.

The challenge of adapting to technological change provides the opportunity to handle information more effectively in every respect: creation, storage, retrieval, dissemination. New generations of computers are adaptable to more uses and more budgets; the increasing use of microforms, particularly COM and microfiche, is evidence of the value of miniaturization and photoduplication; and the expansion of word processing introduces technology to every office.

The important thing to establish is who is boss—man or machine. We have, I hope, advanced beyond the stage where a programmer adapting a simple software package for the most routine information was regarded more highly by management than the custodian of the most sensitive and vital records on paper. But it is clear that the successful records managers of the near future should have a grasp of all available equipment and media and be able to use each in an appropriate way to provide improved services. It is not necessary for the information manager to be a technician any more than for a car owner to be a mechanic, but he should know the capacity, comparable costs, and other features which will permit him to make appropriate decisions and manage a multi-media information programme.

It was with these principles in mind that the Public Archives recently amalgamated its records management and micrographic services. The work on micrographic standards, the operational services of the Central Microfilm Operations, and the advisory/coordinating functions of Micrographic Advisory Services are now a responsibility of our Records Management Branch. Of special interest is the merging of Micrographic Advisory and Records Management Services to form a new "Records Management and Micrographic Systems" division with a broad mandate in the field of information management.

The challenge of integrating information regardless of its form provides the opportunity to demonstrate the value of information. It is difficult to put a price tag on it either in individual units or as a total package, but it is now being realized that recorded information is a valuable resource without which only the most primitive operations would be possible.

With an increasing emphasis on planning, measurement of effectiveness, and accountability, the value of recorded information as a management tool is more apparent. In the past a great deal of attention has been given to the three M's of

management: money (financial management), manpower (personnel management), and materiel. Nearly twenty years ago the Glassco Commission pointed out that a fourth element, records management, was equally important. This view is now closer to being accepted, with the emphasis on the information which is recorded and used rather than the paper or other medium on which it is recorded.

Closely related to recognition of the value of recorded information is the challenge to develop records management systems and procedures which will be perceived as the management of a valuable resource and also a means of promoting economy as well as efficiency. I need not repeat for this audience the benefits of records management or of its basic elements: sound classification systems, scheduling, the use of records centres for dormant records, and prompt disposition through destruction or transfer to archives. They are still valid and effective whether one talks of savings of many millions of dollars for the federal government or several thousands by a small private company. While developed for and still applicable primarily to paper records, the principles have been adapted to some extent to machine readable records.

Finally, the current interest in public records and in legislation relating to access provides an opportunity to demonstrate how records management can respond to widespread public needs such as the protection of privacy and freedom of information. It is apparent that laws on the statute books are meaningless unless they are implemented and, in this case, the infra-structure for implementation is the records management system. Public concern with records gives records management an unusual amount of visibility. Our ability to respond to public need will increase the stature and demonstrate the value of records management.

The response of the records management profession to challenges in the field of records or information management has met with considerable success. In the federal government the Treasury Board has in the last few years given a high priority to the whole field of management of recorded information and in particular to the development of policy in this area. The proceedings of the International Congress on Archives in Washington in 1976 show the extent of the Canadian reputation internationally in the field of records management. For example, the Director General of the Archives of France insisted that the Canadian experience was the most complete, the most developed, and the most efficient in the world. Success, however, is better measured by results than by words. A favourable result for the Public Archives, particularly in a period of government restraint, was the approval of a request for a computer and staff to improve the handling of millions of personnel records, and the establishment of a tape library for computer tapes.

Recognition of the importance of records management has extended to the international field. One example is the approval of a records management and archives programme which corresponds in principle to the Canadian records management/archives system as an essential part of the General Information Program of UNESCO.

While there is some evidence of growing managerial support and public acceptance of records management, there is a great deal to be done yet. The initiative must come from records managers, either individually or collectively. Each records manager should in his unique position adapt sound records management principles

and procedures to his organization and promote records management. I note with interest that you have a session on the marketing of records management on your programme, and commend the conference organizers for their foresight in doing so.

Collectively, however, records managers through their professional association have broader responsibilities concerning the state of records management throughout the country. Some of those responsibilities are accomplished in seminars such as this, where information is provided and appropriate matters discussed. I suggest that ARMA might consider going further in its support for:

1. the concept of the "life cycle" of records with continuous control from origin to disposition and an integrated records management/archives system;
2. the concept of information management, with the emphasis on managing information regardless of the medium on which it is recorded;
3. the development of professional training which will equip records managers to perform effectively in the context of technological changes;
4. the promotion of relevant standards and procedures and a professional literature; and
5. the advocacy of good records management to achieve a higher public profile and persuade managers in the public and private sector, and the general public, of the benefits of good records management.

This is not a sermon on the mount and these proposals are not engraved in stone. My point is simply to emphasize the importance of ARMA as a professional association of records managers, to suggest that it has a significant role to play in the management of information, to wish you success in coping with the challenges and in capitalizing on the opportunities which you will encounter, and to assure you of my personal interest and appropriate cooperation.

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Dominion Archivist

## ***New Records Management Policy for the Government of Canada***

The Treasury Board has approved a comprehensive records management policy for the federal government. The policy is intended to contribute to the improvement of administrative support for government programmes. It is also the first in a series of information policies aimed at assisting departments and agencies in implementing access and privacy legislation.

The new policy replaces the old Chapter 460 of the Treasury Board Administrative Policy Manual, dated December 1978. It also, in effect, replaces the Public Records Order of 1966. The objectives of the policy are to ensure the effective and efficient management of records of the government so that information contained in records is available to officials in support of decision-making, records are properly