

“palimpsests,” which were often unreadable, but whose visual message was clearly understandable: colours, traits, symbols, and drawings were an integral part of these documents which transformed the cities into living archives.

In conclusion, Petrucci's book is undoubtedly fundamental reading for diplomatists and paleographers, and a very interesting book for historians and archivists also, but for any reader, regardless of profession, background, or interests, it is an unforgettable human experience: for all those who read this book no city will ever be silent again, because all sorts of displayed writings will catch their eyes and tell them their story.

Luciana Duranti
University of British Columbia

Records Management Handbook. IRA A. PENN, GAIL PENNIX, ANNE MORDDEL, and KELVIN SMITH. Aldershot, England: Gower Publishing Company Limited, 1989. xii, 249 p. ISBN 0-566-05666-6 \$58.95.

The appearance of a new work on records management, such as Gower Publishing's *Records Management Handbook*, is an opportunity to reflect on the state of the profession as the twentieth century draws to a close. In so reflecting, every records manager interested in his or her continued survival, and every archivist whose collections are fed by a records management programme, needs to carefully consider the following: the *managerial* aspects of the records management function; the *purpose and goals* of the records management function; and the *role and position* of the records manager within the organization.

First, records managers must continually remind themselves that theirs is a *management* function, with all that that implies. All too often, records managers define themselves exclusively in terms of the technical functions they perform, or the specialized tools they employ. Techniques and tools are, of course, important, but unless they are shaped, given meaning, and directed towards articulated goals (in other words, unless they are *managed*), these techniques and tools will be employed to minimal effect. Stated another way, the records manager should be a manager first, and a technician second.

But what does it mean to be a manager in today's environment? Even a cursory glance at current management literature reveals that we are in the midst of a managerial revolution, a revolution with profound implications for the way records and information are managed in large organizations. In theory (and increasingly in practice), one can discern a shift away from hierarchical, rigid organizations to flatter, more flexible, team-oriented approaches; from command-and-control, process-oriented organizations to decentralized structures where authority is widely delegated or shared, and where local personnel are truly empowered; and from compartmentalized bureaucracies, where maintaining the position of the organizational unit is as important as delivering the product, to organizations which act *strategically* and which continually redefine their structure to better concentrate available resources to the task at hand. The implications for records management should be obvious: the tools, techniques, and rationale — indeed the whole approach — of classical records management programmes have sprung from a phase of organizational management which is rapidly being superseded. Unless records managers can adapt to the new environment, they are in danger of becoming irrelevant and, worse, an obstacle to progress.

The second concern noted above — the *goal and purpose* of a records management programme — relates directly to the strategic orientation necessary in today's environment. For records managers, a strong argument can be made that a "strategic" orientation should mean a focus on the information resource and its best use in helping the organization achieve its goals. This is in contrast to the more traditional focus on handling the carrier of the information. Most records managers, by training, experience and background, still cling to this traditional focus, with the result that the records management function often gets lumped in with other general office services such as accommodation, purchasing, print shop, and mail room services. The strategic focus — the management of information — is increasingly being taken over by the Data Administration/Information Resource Management function, i.e., by those whose stock-in-trade is the management of data quality, data use, and data life-cycles, and who feed directly into the design of information systems. The gap between these two orientations is widening, and records managers will have to scramble if the gap is ever to be bridged.

The third area of concern for the records manager reflecting on the profession relates very closely to the other two concerns: his or her *role within the organization*. Here again, the managerial revolution swirling around us will profoundly affect the role of the records manager. Increasingly, organizations are trimming "staff" (read: head office) positions, reducing the traditional head office control and standards-setting functions, and placing in the hands of line managers the power, authority, tools, and independence needed to truly manage. At issue here is the question of accountability. Quality suffers where there is no accountability for actions, or where accountability is fragmented or unclear. In an age of decentralization and empowerment, it will be the local programme manager (and *not* the records manager) who will be accountable for the management of information resources, for ensuring that retention schedules are developed and that information security systems are in place, that information is retrievable, that information processing systems are effective and efficient, and so on. Where does this change in the focus of accountability leave the records manager? If trends continue, I believe records managers will be faced with the need to relinquish records control, and to transform themselves into the in-house consultant, the coach, the facilitator. Needless to say, the skills necessary for consulting and facilitating are rather different than those needed for the direct delivery of a service.

In the midst of these dramatic changes has appeared a new text, *Records Management Handbook*, by Ira Penn and Gail Pennix of the United States and Anne Morddel and Kelvin Smith of the United Kingdom. In what is described in the preface as a handbook of basics for the records management practitioner, Penn, *et. al.*, present a wide-ranging examination of the profession, including discussions of the nature of the records management function, the organization of a records management programme, management analysis techniques, and chapters devoted to the management of each of the following: reports, directives, forms, files, vital records, disaster planning, appraisal and retention scheduling, records storage, and archiving.

What does a handbook of "basics" have to offer the records manager who must come to grips with the challenges facing the profession today? What is offered here that cannot be found in any one of the number of textbooks available? As it turns out, *Records Management Handbook* provides much of value: the "basics" being offered are not so much the technical basics, such as the number of linear feet per filing cabinet (though this

sort of information is provided), but rather the management considerations which should be addressed when establishing or administering a records management programme. As noted above, records managers too often forget that they are managers, and not merely technicians. The authors do not forget this fact and indeed orient most of their discussions around the fundamental questions a manager should ask and the important factors he or she should consider when approaching a problem. Particularly useful in this regard is chapter four, "Management Analysis Techniques," which offers an excellent review of project planning, scheduling, and management; problem solving; fact-finding and interview techniques; costing methodologies; and analysing and drawing conclusions from data. Also useful from a manager's perspective are the checklists of questions and considerations following the chapters on reports management, disaster planning and recovery, and records storage, as well as the insistence here and there throughout the text that *marketing* is a key element of the records manager's job.

The *Handbook* also does the practitioner a service by advocating (in chapter two) a life-cycle approach to the management of records, by which the authors mean the integrated and coordinated management of recorded information from the creation of the record through to its disposal. This one concept holds out the greatest promise for moving the records management function beyond the limitations of administering the carrier of information toward the strategic management of information itself. It does this by focusing attention away from the "piece of paper" and towards the data as it progresses through different media and formats over the course of its life-cycle. Unfortunately, the authors do not sufficiently follow through on the concept, and do not effectively demonstrate the implications of the theory when examining each of the components of the programme. Although it is a good start, managing the life-cycle involves more than merely having all the traditional records management functions report to one position.

The *Records Management Handbook* is less satisfying in other regards, however. The chapters which deal with the components of a classical records management programme, for instance, are of uneven quality and utility. Although the chapters on vital records, disaster planning, records storage, and retention scheduling are solid (if not particularly ground-breaking), the treatment of forms management, file management, and archives are disappointing. It is true that the authors issue the disclaimer that it is not their intention to duplicate what is available in other texts, but what remains of these latter chapters leaves many questions unanswered. The short chapter on forms, for instance, deals almost exclusively with the mechanics of controlling, registering, ordering, warehousing, and printing of forms, and gives scant attention to analysis and design. Surely, though, what is more important than the mechanical aspects of supplying forms is the quality and nature of the data captured, i.e., all the concerns attendant upon the creation/collection stage of the information life-cycle. The chapter on archiving is an overview of topics such as the rationale for archives; arrangement, classification and listing of records; accessioning; finding aids; access and security; and storage requirements and preservation techniques. Of use perhaps to the records manager contemplating the establishment of an archives as part of his or her programme, the chapter will provide little new to the practising archivist.

Two other chapters in the handbook are a puzzle: "Reports Management" and "Directives Management." Both chapters are very well written and informative, but give

rise to the question of why they are included in the book at all. It is fair to say that all classical records management textbooks include sections on these two subjects, but their relation to records management as it is practised is theoretical at best. I know of no records manager who actually runs a working reports management programme — from my experience such a programme is simply not cost-justifiable, nor is it practical in this day of PC-proliferation where reports can be generated at the touch of a key. Regarding directives management, while it is true that most organizations have some kind of central control and registration process for policy statements, this is not often within the records manager's bailiwick.

There are two final points of concern regarding this handbook. First, the authors assert that "records management is a staff [i.e., head office support] function" (p. 6), and further that "the records manager's function is to manage all of [the organization's] information in its recorded forms for the benefit of the organization as a whole" (p. 60). I've noted above some thoughts about the question of accountability in the context of large, decentralized organizations, and the view that local managers (and not the corporate records manager) need to be as accountable for the management of their information resources as they are for their fiscal and human resources. The handbook takes the opposite stand and, I must admit, the authors' views are closer to the way records management is actually organized and delivered currently. Time will tell.

Finally, and this is a major point of contention, the book is not helpful on the issue of records management and automated records. The general thrust and orientation of the *Records Management Handbook* relates to the handling of hard copy records. Although most chapters in the book refer to computers in relation to the subject at hand, the discussion is very general and is often directed to the automation of manual procedures, rather than to the management of the electronic data/media per se. (The exception to this is the very good chapter on disaster planning and recovery, which provides some useful insights into disaster planning for automated records.) Some of the most vexing problems a records manager faces relate to the management of electronic data: in a multi-user environment where information can be shuttled among terminals for input by various authors, or can be compiled by picking and choosing chunks from different data bases, what exactly is the record? Assuming you can answer that question, how should that record be scheduled and archived? What is the legality (i.e., as evidence) of a computer record? and on and on. I'm not aware of any text that has satisfactorily addressed these questions for the records manager — this is, unfortunately, also true of the *Records Management Handbook*.

These are trying times for the records manager. Unless the challenges I've outlined can be addressed, I fear a long, downward slide into irrelevance for the traditional practitioner. On a more positive note, however, there has never been a greater awareness in large organizations of the strategic potential of the information resource, and (within government organizations, at least, thanks to legislation on freedom of information) awareness of the need to carefully manage the collection, use, disclosure, and disposal of information. A judicious application of the lessons of the *Records Management Handbook* will help practitioners become better traditional records managers, but more ammunition is needed if the records manager is to make the leap into the age of strategic information resource management.

Terry Campbell
Guelph, Ontario