Order, Order! Lessons learned from records management

Written by
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Digital

transformation requires records analysis and appraisal to be able to determine the information that must be created and fixed to document theprocesses and activities of the organization and, at the same time, define the requirements to manage it.

Laying the foundations on how to do this analysis and carry it out has become a major activity of my consulting work in the recent years. Taking this experience as a starting point I would like to share some **learned lessons** in this post.

It seems that, the larger and more technologically advanced organizations are, there is an innate tendency to "disorganize." The division into areas or organizational units that well-meaningly seek to perform better and automate their tasks leads to a **lack of overall vision**
. When records analysis begins, including the several areas and processes, contradictions and different ways of doing things jump very quickly into the light. It is relatively frequent that in any implementation of any computer tool records requirements are defined without considering any kind of general guideline, which results in different solutions to solve equal situations. Hence the title of this post as an old joke about a collective sex session:
"order, order
" is the first thing is needed.

This is reflected by understanding how the organization works and, above all, seeking **synergies**
with other sorts of analysis that are surely being carried out inside the organization. Although sometimes in a project's environment, it may seem that this is complicating it, but finally results

in a   **be
nefit**
for the organization, that is what records management seeks. Examples of other general analyses that I have come across lately are: the definition of processes in an ISO 9001 implementation environment, the definition of the procedures for the
"Administrative Information System (SIA)
" of the Spanish public administrations or the conceptualization of a Portal for clients and users. But perhaps the most important thing is to establish
clear guidelines
to apply records requirements when certain process is automated or a techonological tool is implemented. An intelligent comment I recently heard said that if the guidelines were made they would act as a riverbed, water would always go through the same place simply because it is easier than trying to change the course.

This also means that records analysis must be **tailored** for each organization. The archivistical tradition for this type of analysis is a very solid base, but it cannot be imposed at the cost of being isolated. We must consider that the analysis that has been done in archives has traditionally been one of self-consumption and has served to organize paper fonds once an activity has been completed. When the organizations go towards the fully digital environment , this way may not serve us.

I have taken part on many discussions on the definition of processes (procedures) and their relationship with records series. For me, and for many others in this field, the **"one-to-one"
relationship between process (procedure) and records series**
should be natural, but for that we surely need not to strictly follow the series defined for paper archives.

Likewise, I think there is a lot of potential in the **classification schemes** used in records management. As   ISO
 15489: 2016
states " classification schemes primarily exist to link the records to the context of their creation", and therefore represent the functions, activities and processes of the same. Any need in the organization to classify areas, functions and processes can use the same tool. That is why when talking about the "record classification scheme" an alert must be produced. The functions' classification table or simply the organization's classification is much better.

Another important lesson is that records management instruments or controls (metadata schemes, access and permission rules, disposition authorities ...) are not the goal of records

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management, but the means we use. Usually I repeat as a mantra "**If the instrument is not useful it will have to be changed**
".

And in any case, we always need, when proposing how to comply with the requirements of records management, to find the **balance** between standardization (with equal needs propose the same solutions) and the necessary flexibility that allows the optimization of work processes.

Note 1:As in other occasions, for the sake of good understanding and traslation, I have used the term records analysis to describe what in ISO 15489: 2016 in English has been called "appraisal"

Note 2: When I wrote this post I just realized what an absorbing task records analysis is. I've been over a year without posting in my blog!