



Integrated information and records systems, processes and practices

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1 Overview

Information and records management requirements must be proactively identified, designed and integrated in all of your organisation's business systems, processes and practices.

Taking a "by design" approach ensures that information and records management is considered before, at the start of, and throughout the development and improvement of both new and existing business systems, processes and practices. This approach is proactive and preventative. It focuses on identifying information and records requirements and building these into your business systems, processes and practices.

You will need to understand your business and its information needs thoroughly when planning information and records management requirements. To do this you will need to:

- identify the value of the information and records you need to create and maintain
- undertake an information risk analysis of your systems, processes and practices related to the stability, accessibility and usability of your information and records
- define minimum requirements and appropriate strategies for creating, maintaining and monitoring your information and records
- plan for integration with current business systems and processes
- be aware of, plan for and manage any information-related impacts of change
- assess your current and future needs for documentation about business systems, processes and practices.

2 Know your business and your business information needs

Systems are often put to use without an understanding of the business information needs they must support. Without this understanding, key business information can be at risk. These risks can be mitigated by clear business system planning and governance.

To mitigate risks, start to develop a business system with an understanding of:

- what business operations the system will need to support
- what part of the organisation owns the business system, processes and practices
- what information is critical, both for staff performing the business and for clients
- what information will be critical into the future, both for staff and for clients
- how long into the future business and regulatory requirements say information will be required
- what information currently supports this business
- what additional information would improve business processes
- what risks to information need to be mitigated in the proposed system.

2.1 Plan for the stability and longevity of your core business information and records

Depending on the nature of your business, it is likely that some information and records in current systems will need to remain accessible and usable beyond the life of the system.

To make transitions into new systems as seamless as possible, it is important to consider long-term information and records needs early in business system planning and development. It is also important to develop appropriate management strategies. Consider these information and records management questions when planning new systems, or undertaking strategic planning:

- identify and plan for mitigation of any issues that may arise when shifting long-term value information to a new system
- develop specific migration pathways for long-term value information
- identify legacy systems that need long-term support
- consider platforms that support open formats for data management and export
- where services have been outsourced, set and manage service agreements that include information management obligations for high value and high risk information, or both.

Information, records and data volumes in organisations are growing exponentially and unsustainably. Impacts of this are starting to be felt. To ensure there is no ongoing legacy of large volumes, business system planning needs to identify:

- what information can be routinely disposed of and when
- what information needs to continue to be sustained by the system and how this will be achieved
- what risk-appropriate management strategies can be applied to high value information and records.

Risks of not planning for information, records and data longevity include:

- poor management of information needed for long-term business purposes
- failure to comply with regulations and requirements for information and records retention
- having to pay ongoing software licensing and offsite storage costs for legacy systems if business areas need ongoing access to information in these systems
- data duplication and dual processes through maintaining legacy systems concurrently.

2.2 Be aware of the information-related impacts of business system change

Implementing new systems gives organisations the opportunity to rethink their business processes, and often processes are simplified and streamlined.

This can mean that information that once had an important use beyond the immediate needs of the business process may no longer need to be captured in the same way, if at all. This may be a necessary trade-off, but nonetheless one that should be made with full understanding and documentation of any implications.

2.3 Plan and manage change

When using new systems for the first time, effective change management and training are needed to maintain an organisational culture that values information and records management.

Where change is not managed well, implementation of new systems can lead to extensive duplication of information, records and data. Staff may be unclear about the new business processes they are expected to use, leading to inappropriate practices such as:

- storing information in multiple places
- adopting unofficial parallel processes
- continuing to retain paper documents despite new automated digital processes.

2.4 Consider metadata requirements strategically

Metadata is an essential and powerful tool for information and records management. When designing information and records systems, consider:

- what metadata will best enable flow of business and the creation and management of effective, useful information
- what metadata will best enable the ongoing use, understanding and accountability of business information
- what metadata will need to be carried forward through business system change and be persistently linked to business information for meaning, context and accountability purposes.

These considerations need to be balanced against the workload of manually creating certain metadata as part of a process. The effort required to check and improve the quality of metadata to maintain the specified requirements over time also needs to be considered. Creation and capture of metadata should be automated where possible, and integrated logically within business processes (for example, naming conventions).

2.5 Assess your need for business system documentation

Information about business systems may be critical for the ongoing use and management of those business systems.

When developing a business system, consider current and future business needs for information about:

- system rules
- system metadata
- system validation and security processes
- workflow authorisations
- workflow processes.

It could also be important to capture point-in-time representations of this information, to identify what processes or rules were in place at any specific point in time.

Where a business system, process or practice is outsourced, you need to consider whether the service agreement includes the right to access business system documentation. If it does not, you should consider whether this could be problematic or an unacceptable risk in the long term.