

Records and Information Management: The Requirement for Functional Classification

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Abstract

Records and information management (RIM) has gained its importance when it is proven capable in helping organisations to remain competitive and increase their accountability, transparency and integrity. RIM is practiced based on the life cycle concept which embraces creation through disposal where classification falls in between. Currently, most RIM systems are without classification as the systems were developed without considering the importance of the concept. Literature in RIM has proven that classification is crucial to guarantee the effective implementation of RIM and according to the current best practice. This paper seeks to find out how classification system is developed in public organizations in Malaysia followed by a proposal of a function-based model which seems more stable compared to subject-based classification. Function-based classification is chosen over the subject-base one since its ability to ease the of classification and retrieval processes. Also, function-based classification provides context for records rather than content other than aids appraisal and disposal activities and support the proactive management of records. This study adopts qualitative approach to explore the identified case study, by using interview and content analysis techniques. The former technique was used to sought the requirement for developing the function-based classification system whilst the later was used to aid the development of the propose model. Both the techniques have proven that the function-based classification system and a model are essential for public organizations in Malaysia in particular and elsewhere in general.

Keywords

Records and Information Management, Function-Based Classification, Classification, Life Cycle

1. Introduction

Classification is related to systemising information to facilitate retrieval. The concept seems to have similar function in all information related fields, but differs in its application. With reference to Malaysia, function-based classification for electronic records is yet to be in place despite its importance for the implementation of records management initiatives. Classification model is essential for the development of function-based classification system. It is for maintaining the original order abiding by the theories of provenance and *respect des fond* to ensure that the evidentiary value of records is preserved and the structure or functions of records remain intact

[1]. Function-based classification is more stable compared to subject-based classification [2] and provides context for records rather than the content [3]; [4] other than aids appraisal and disposal activities [5].

This paper aims at investigating whether classification has been appropriately practiced in the public agencies in Malaysia with the Department of Syariah Judiciary Malaysia (DSJM) selected as a case study. Upon obtaining the result, a function-based model is proposed which would depict the functionality of a system and the logical interconnections between functions [6] that focus on the classification process. The model also describes how classification flows operate from the highest level with a view of the overall system, decomposed down to lower levels, describing the detailed component specifications [7].

2. Method

This study relies on research question to guide entire the study. The main question is “How is a classification developed in your organisation”. This does not include variables and hypotheses as recommended by [8]. The data analysis is divided into two parts: data obtained from the interview and data gathered from the literature using the document content analysis technique (DCA). The interview involved personnel in charged of records at the DSJM and personnel in charge of classification at the National Archive of Malaysia (NAM). The documents for the DCA techniques are such as Department of Defense Records Management Function and Information Model (DoD RMFI); Information and Documentation - Principles and Functional Requirements for Records in Electronic Environments—part 2: Guidelines and Functional Requirements for Digital Records Management Systems (ISO 16715); International Council on Archives (ICA); Australian Handbook HB5031; Model Requirements for the Management of Electronic Records (MoReqs); MoReqs2 and MoReqs2010; Norwegian Recordkeeping System (NOARKS) (version 4 and 5); United Kingdom Business Classification Scheme Design (UK BCS); Design and Implementation of Recordkeeping Systems (DIRKS); Business Activity Structure Classification System (BASCS); e-Strategi Pengurusan Arkib dan Rekod Kerajaan (e-SPARK); Information Management and Office System Advancement (IMOSA); University of British Columbia (UBC) project (Chain of Preservation Model (COP) and Business-Driven Recordkeeping Model (BDR)); Function-Activities-Transactions (FAT); Pittsburgh project and 3rd GF model.

The data from the interview was analysed using direct interpretation technique (or literal description of communications content). Although such an analysis rarely aims at the literal description technique, but [9] agrees, there are exceptions when to use in scenarios where the text is not heavy or large and the needs to imitate real contents from the interviewees without interfering with the meaning. [10] [11] adopted the same technique when he analysed a small numbers of documents. The data from the interviews has illustrated the current practice and approach of classification in the surveyed departments.

3. Data Analysis and Findings

Data from the interviews has shown that there is no classification function adopted by DSJM in managing digital records. Classification scheme is still under construction and far from complete. The problem in classification has affected other work such as assigning judge/chief judge and lawyer promptly, which in turn affected the court hearing and order, hence delays the processing of cases registered with the Syariah Court Case Management System (SCCMS). Although SCCMS claims for having classification in place, but apparently it is not records classification but rather a form of metadata categorisation which only supports tracking and searching. It fails in tracing the previously registered and related cases. Findings from the DCA on the identified documents revealed that, classification is depicted in all the documents reviewed. The result showed that there is requirement to develop a new mode despite the absence of guidelines for creating such a suitable for managing digital records. The existing classification model is only appropriate for organizing information in the custody of the librarians. The DCA has highlighted the following findings:

1. Although most of the models used function-based approach (with few exceptions such as IMOSA), but, the contents of model documents are lengthy, with at least 50 pages. According to practitioner's view, the effort should be taken to lessen the descriptions as it might confuse the reader.
2. Classification is a daunting task especially to evaluate functions in organisation to prepare the file document. To minimise the task, the activity and transaction are gradually do not included in the model document. However, these existing models did not take into consideration this criteria. Most of the models still impose the activity and transactions in the classification scheme such as in DIRKS.

3. A minimal description, in process flow order for developing classification system is yet existed. Most of the existing models comprised all phases in records life cycle to depict the process flow, without highlighting on the classification.

Therefore, the results from data analysis both from the interview and analysis of documents are paramount to the development of functional model for records classification.

4. Discussion

From the interview, it can be concluded that there is no classification for managing electronic record. The needs of records classification is crucial because there is no records classification in the organisation to manage electronic records. The importance of classification is realised by the staff who manages paper records, hence suggested on the classification scheme for the paper records. However, the scheme is still in-complete.

Analysis on the past studies showed that classification is the core element in record management. Without classification, records management cannot be executed in accordance with the international standards. The classification becomes the important function because records have life cycle of use, from creation until preservation. Classification can help to manage records effectively and efficiently guiding from life cycle (current, semi-current, and no-active). Keeping no-active records in a system is a waste for storage and could affect to service performance. On the other hand, records have its value: vital, importance, useful and non- important. These categories help to categorise records for future reference.

The process of classification evolved from being subject-based, used in the library science field, to function-based classification in records management field. Function-based classification was introduced with the belief that records are by-product of actions, and actions were created within functions. Function-based classification is more stable and rarely changes. The theory of function-based classification has been well accepted in the US and Australia. Many projects have applied such an approach particularly BASCS, DIRKS, UK Business Classification, and Pittsburgh Project.

Function-based classification is related with logical arrangement of all records documenting or evidencing the activities of an organisation by analysing its business functions, sub-functions and activities. These models were described from the view of processes beginning with creation through preservation. Classification of records is carried out at the active phase.

The function-based approach has widely adopted in the US and Australia. In recent years, the modification of function-based approach was made since first introduced. The break-down of function-based approach was truncate from function-activity-transaction into function-activity and function only. The changes were made with the purpose to ease the user follow the guidelines of records classification. The used-to-be lengthy explanation of classification guidelines were shortens to make clearer guidance. The examples can be seen from court records guidelines in Australia.

Function-based classification has gained a reputation in the records management field since its introduction by Schellenberg in the early 1950s. Many organisations have moved from subject based classification to function-based classification because of the benefits it offers to organizations. Function-based classification uses the Function-Activity-Transaction (FAT) model approach as a reference. This approach is widely used and acknowledged especially in prominent classification projects such as DIRKS (2007) and BASCS (2006). However, due to practical limitations in adoption, the FAT model approach has led to slight deviations in use of the terminology, resulting in the use of the terms function, activity and transaction for DIRKS and function, sub-function, and activity for BASCS. [12] suggest that, instead of using the function-activity-transaction terminology, organisations should use a goal-state-action approach in which function is equal to goal and end state, while activities are equal to action. The suggested approach is more easy to understand and explicit. In making the goal-state-action approach workable, one must define functions and processes which are the result of the relationship between actions and processes. An action is defined as a description of an act, while a process is a sequence or flow of actions. Single actions cannot address the flow of information. Therefore, a function is important to be identified in a record because it provides for the flow of information and actions.

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