Recordkeeping Cultures

In an institutional environment characterized by change and complexity, organizations produce information in different types of media to document their actions. As a means of ensuring better compliance with institutional and legal requirements for accountability and transparency, this information should be effectively managed, using appropriate tools, policies, and procedures. However, if records management is viewed as a common role between several organizational actors (i.e., front-line employees, managers, decision-makers, etc.), the description of their respective responsibilities may not clearly indicate this. Moreover, records management policies and procedures may coexist in an organization, but each administrative unit may have its own practices that result from different appropriations of information culture. Based on these observations, in this book Gillian Oliver and Fiorella Foscarini, associate professors in information sciences, respectively at Monash University (Australia) and the University of Toronto (Canada), aim to highlight records management cultures in contemporary organizations. Adopting North American and Australian perspectives on recordkeeping, the authors present the results of a large-scale research project carried out between 2015 and 2017 and aim to describe records management practices as well as the different information cultures in organizations.

Recordkeeping Cultures is an updated version of a previously published book entitled *Records Management and Information Culture: Tackling the People Problem* (2014),[1] and it offers a more in-depth exploration of the cultural aspects of records management, such as the design, the application, and the use of policies, procedures, filing plans, metadata schemes, and so on, especially in digital and collaborative workplaces. Using the conceptual framework suggested in the first edition of this work, the Information Culture Framework (ICF), the authors provide deeper insight into the attitudes and records management practices of managers, employees, and decision-makers. More specifically, Oliver and Foscarini describe through concrete examples how the different levels of the ICF can manifest through the organizational actors' actions. The analysis results in several techniques for records management audits, particularly relating to the normative frameworks and recognized standards such as ISO 15489—*Information and Documentation: Management Systems for Business Records, Designing Information and Recordkeeping Systems* (DIRKS)—as well as the Association of Records Managers and Administrators' (ARMA) principles.

The book comprises seven parts. The first part contextualizes the research topic. Oliver and Foscarini begin their reflection with discussions about information culture. They highlight the current theoretical discussions on the differences between the concepts of *information* and *records* and argue that recording is a process that distinguishes the latter from the former (p. 19); it supports institutional duties for accountability and transparency. Then, they discuss the concept of *information culture*, which is defined as the set of values and beliefs shared between organizational actors with regard to the creation, management, dissemination, and use of information. To study information culture, the authors present the models and theories used to build their ICF model, namely 1) the records continuum model, which highlights the dynamic nature of records management and the plurality of actors involved in it, and 2) the maturity models, which serve to quantitatively measure the quality of records management practices. The authors posit that the ICF model aims to describe, in a qualitative perspective, records management practices and the contexts that influence them, rather than measuring them quantitatively by performance indicators. The ICF model, already described in the 2014 version of this work, consists of three levels represented as a pyramid: 1) the most *unconscious* level, located at the bottom of the pyramid, represents the values accorded to records as resources used for accountability purposes, as well as the preferences of organizational actors with regard to information. These values (i.e., importance given to records) are embedded in interpretative schemes and are, hence, very rarely questioned; 2) the *intermediate* level, consisting of information skills and awareness of the legal issues surrounding records management, is a more conscious and reconfigurable level; and finally, 3) the highest level of the pyramid is related to technology and information infrastructures and is seen as the most conscious level that provides an overview of an organization's information culture.

The second part of the book includes three chapters exploring the collective and individual perceptions of information as a key cognitive capital, as well as the extent to which records management is seen as a vital function in the organization (chapter 2), the organizational actors' information preferences (chapter 3), and the characteristics of the regional technological infrastructure (chapter 4). The authors address the most unconscious level of the ICF model. The organizational actors' beliefs as well as the importance given to information shape the appropriation of records and the implementation of their management procedures. Furthermore, the organizational culture, which is influenced by the national or regional culture of a country, has an impact on the relationship organizational actors maintain with IT. Part 2 concludes with assessment tools of organizational actors' needs relating to the quality of information. Oliver and Foscarini offer a series of questions for organizational actors to identify the value they perceive in records and information in general.

The third part examines the intermediate level of the ICF model, namely 1) information-related competencies and 2) organizational awareness of the legal requirements for records management. This level is between the most visible and the most invisible ones, and, henceforth, can easily be adapted to socio-institutional changes (e.g., technological developments, transparency, and accountability requirements, etc.), as it encompasses, among others, procedures and policies relating to management practices. Such managerial tools can be revised and adjusted to achieve the desired level of information maturity through an effective change management strategy. The authors highlight the information skills required to optimize records management. These can be targeted by the change management strategy and take the form of a competencies development plan, and other assessment tools (chapter 5). In the same vein, the behavior of the actors involved in records management reflects the degree of awareness of legal obligations, for example, through records preservation practices (e.g., respecting privacy by adopting the appropriate security measures for digital preservation of nominative records) (chapter 6). Part 3 ends with a series of questions (from interviews and questionnaires) to measure employees' competencies as well as their level of awareness of the legal and normative issues related to records management.

In part 4, the authors discuss the most visible elements of the organizational culture (chapter 7), namely records management systems, information architecture, practices related to security in the organization, and organizational records management policies. Such cultural aspects are described as tangible because they can be easily reconfigured according to the needs of the organization. The fifth part addresses the metalevel of information culture (chapter 8), including the language and the "archival" jargon used between organizational actors. These visible elements can be assessed through a series of closed (questionnaire) and open (interview guide) questions suggested at the end of this part.

Parts 6 and 7 provide a summary of the results of the authors' research project. The sixth part sets out the instruments used for evaluating the information culture in an organization, namely the data collection protocols, and guidelines for interviews and data analysis, as well as templates to describe information profiles and types of records. This toolkit was developed in collaboration with the International Council on Archives (ICA) (chapter 9). The toolkit, addressed to all organizational actors, makes it possible to identify their needs to promote a better corporate information culture. Part 7 focuses more specifically on the research project results. Oliver and Foscarini emphasize above all the need for continuing training and education programs in information and digital competencies (chapter 10). A general overview on assessing information culture as explored in this edition of the book sums up their reflection.

As the main topic discussed in this work, information culture is nowadays gaining more attention among researchers and practitioners, especially in the digital context. The authors rightly point out that any organization has an information culture, whether it is mature or not. Nevertheless, it is wrong to take for granted that the various aspects of information culture are assimilated, incorporated, and shared in the same way by all organizational actors. However, despite different interpretations of the same cultural patterns, some records management practices should be made consistent to promote collaboration between organizational levels. This positions records managers as change agents whose role is to promote values relating to good information governance in the organization, such as the importance of records management and use for accountability and transparency purposes. Indeed, as argued by the authors, the adoption of records management systems depends on individual and collective perceptions as well as on the values accorded to information. Hence, records managers also assume roles of supporters for users, regardless of their professional background, to help them use records management systems in more efficient ways. To this end, studying users' technical and informational needs can help records managers enhance the usability of those systems by making them more user-friendly.

The authors' reflection is based on theoretical foundations developed in the previous version of this work. However, the 2020 version differs from its previous iteration because this edition is a continuation of the case studies conducted by the two authors between 2015 and 2017. The results of the research are also enriched by the feedback they received from workshop participants as well as members of online communities of practice. This feedback enhances the ICF model and offers a more in-depth interpretation of its components. Moreover, they note the addition of a new section on the instruments used to assess the maturity of information culture in organizations (Information Culture Analysis Toolkit), codeveloped with the ICA.

The book is well structured and is similar, overall, in structure to the previous version. One of the strong points of this work lies in the dialogue between theoretical (scientific) bases, methodological considerations (questionnaires, interviews, documentation collection), and other research methods such as ethnography to evaluate the different patterns of information culture. This reflects the back-and-forth between theory and practice, which only reinforces the validity of the conclusions the authors reached.

Recordkeeping Cultures, coupled with the second edition of *Information Governance: Concepts, Strategies and Best Practices*[2] by Robert Smallwood (2020), constitute two reference books for researchers and practitioners interested in records management. While the latter provides a comprehensive view of the principles that relate to information creation, management, preservation, and

use, the first explores, through case studies, how such principles are manifested in organizational daily practices. The implementation of an information governance strategy starts with studying the characteristics of the organization in question, namely its corporate culture. Commonly shared values and beliefs about the importance of records in the organization are factors to be taken into consideration to determine the degree of success of a corporate information governance strategy. Thus, the two works complete each other, as they are a must for practitioners and researchers interested in the study of information governance in contemporary organizations. All in all, *Recordkeeping Cultures* is a must for students, researchers, and practitioners interested in exploring how the changes brought about by digital transformation redefine recordkeeping practices and guide contemporary organizational actors toward more effective and successful collaborative records management practices.

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Notes

1   Gillian Oliver and Fiorella Foscarini, *Records Management and Information Culture: Tackling the People Problem* (London: Facet Publishing, 2014).

2   Robert Smallwood, *Information Governance: Concepts, Strategies and Best Practices,* 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020).