

DIRKS – a Tool for Achieving Better Business Outcomes

Not many people outside of the records management sector are familiar with the DIRKS methodology. What is DIRKS you ask?

DIRKS is a process for organisations to improve their records and information management practices. DIRKS stands for the design and implementation of recordkeeping systems. The methodology is compliant with, and expands on, the Standard for Records Management, ISO 15489 – 2002, and consists of the following eight steps:

- preliminary investigation (Step A)
- analysis of business activity (Step B)
- identification of recordkeeping requirements (Step C)
- assessment of existing systems (Step D)
- identification of strategies for recordkeeping (Step E)
- design of a recordkeeping system (Step F)
- implementation of a recordkeeping system (Step G), and
- post-implementation review (Step H).

DIRKS is neither new nor revolutionary. It is based on traditional system design methodologies, but has been adapted for the records management environment. It is an intensively analytical process that examines every facet of an organisation – structure, environment, stakeholders, processes and outputs. During the analysis, all relevant sources of information are collated and referenced.

For a range of reasons DIRKS suffers from a poor image.

Commonwealth agencies who must carry out DIRKS steps A to C in order to obtain an approved disposal authority (required to legally dispose of growing records stockpiles) have found DIRKS projects to be time consuming and expensive. The scale of these projects is hard to manage (the entire organisation must be consulted) and the skills required (research, language development and business process analysis skills) are in short supply. Much of the work is outsourced to consultants.

Because the focus is on recordkeeping, the value of DIRKS to the rest of the organisation is generally overlooked. Business managers have yet to recognise DIRKS as a significant business process analysis tool which has relevance for the entire organisation, whether public or private, large or small.

To understand how DIRKS delivers business benefits we need to take a closer look at the first few steps.

Step A – Preliminary Investigation

The objective of Step A is to identify and document the role of the organisation, its purpose, structure, the business, regulatory and sociopolitical environments in which it operates, and major factors which affect its recordkeeping and information management practices.

For records managers Step A delivers a report which provides the approving archives body with information about factors that influence the need to create and maintain records.

For the business, Step A provides fundamental information that every organisation should know about itself. This is the type of foundation information that should be made available

on the corporate web site and in the annual report, and is required for any due diligence examination.

It's quite remarkable how many organisations find it difficult to assemble this information. The DIRKS process often exposes a serious deficiency of self knowledge, particularly in respect of legislative and regulatory requirements.

Step B – Analysis of Business Activity

The objective of Step B is to develop a model of what the organisation does and how it does it through an examination of business activities and processes.

The output from Step B is a **Business Classification Scheme (BCS)** which describes the organisations business processes in a hierarchy of Functions, Activities and Transactions where:

- Functions represent the major responsibilities that are managed by the organisation to fulfil its goals. They are high-level aggregates of the organisation's activities.
- Activities are the major tasks performed by an organisation to accomplish each of its functions. They form the second level of a business classification scheme. E.g. Tendering
- Transactions are the smallest unit of business activity. Uses of records are themselves transactions. They form the third level in a business classification scheme.

For example:

Function: Property Development

Activity: Tendering

Transactions: Specifications for works and services are prepared
Requests for tender or quotation are issued
Responses are received from interested parties.

If the functional analysis is done correctly the BCS should provide the organisation with a detailed framework that describes every single task performed by the organisation. No small undertaking!

Records managers use the top two levels of the BCS as the basis for naming files and folders, and for linking to retention and disposal rules. But to be used purely for this purpose is failing to appreciate the value of the BCS.

As a business tool the BCS documents the foundations of the business. It is key analytical tools for assisting with organisational restructuring and business process improvement. The BCS can be used as the framework for organising policies and procedures; for mapping business processes and defining position descriptions for staff.

A major advantage of using the BCS for describing your organisational framework is that functions and activities change very little over time. This stability is one of the major reasons why the functional analysis model was adopted as a standard for records classification – the need to rename files/folders every time there is organisational change is removed.

The stability of the BCS also provides benefits for business management – as functions and activities are fairly constant, efforts can be focused on business process improvement at the transactional level.

Step C - Identification of recordkeeping requirements

The objective of Step C is to identify and document the recordkeeping requirements of the organisation. Recordkeeping requirements are derived from an analysis of the business needs, legal and regulatory requirements and community obligations. Using this analysis we can determine the need to create, capture, secure, provide access to and dispose of records.

In step C a risk analysis is also undertaken to identify the level of risk to the organisation should any of these recordkeeping requirements not be met.

For records managers, the end point of this analysis is the creation of a retention & disposal schedule, where records with the same recordkeeping requirements are grouped together and assigned a common retention period. The disposal schedule can be incorporated into an electronic recordkeeping system to manage the disposal of files and documents.

For the business, DIRKS C analysis provides many outputs which can satisfy a wide range of business purposes:

- The analysis of documented sources delivers a list of legislative and regulatory requirements available for reference by legal and compliance stakeholders
- The recordkeeping risk analysis provides material suitable for inclusion into the corporate risk management strategy
- The analysis of recordkeeping requirements delivers IT with information about access and storage requirements for electronic business records, and
- The stakeholder analysis delivers valuable information about the requirements of external stakeholders that could be made available to public relations and marketing staff

Common outcomes

In many ways DIRKS is a reinvention of a wheel that is constantly turning in an organisation. Many businesses undergo functional analysis – the challenge is to integrate the DIRKS process for records management with other organisational or process analysis initiatives. Even without integration there is opportunity to share information between DIRKS and other projects lessening effort and achieving more consistency between records classification and business language. This could even lead to the use of common terminology. Now that's a radical thought!