

REVIEWS

Stephen Harries, *Records management and knowledge mobilisation: a handbook for regulation, innovation and transformation*, Oxford, Chandos, 2012. xiv + 275 pp. ISBN 978 1 84334 653 1. GBP£49.50

Can records managers be key players in the transformation of public policy? This is the essential question explored by Stephen Harries, as he analyses the change which has occurred in the delivery of government services and how records management fits, both in a theoretical and practical way, within public policymaking and program delivery. Harries argues that to remain relevant, records managers need to adopt a more interactive strategy and engage with the information and knowledge processes central to public policy and government transformation.

Opening with an examination of the transformation of government service delivery and policy development in the United Kingdom (UK), Harries identifies trends in the environment that impact on institutions and the ways that they view information resources. These shifts are significant and signal a need to adapt strategy for embedding records management principles in the public sector.

Harries argues that the constraints of records management in practice are not helping organisations to solve intractable policy questions or enable outcomes. Where public policy is aiming to achieve social health outcomes, for example, the role of records management has focused too much on back-room compliance and too little on contributions to knowledge utilisation and transformation. He proposes connecting records management with mobilisation of knowledge, in what he terms an ‘interactive knowledge and records strategy’ (iKRS).

Harries is not simply rebranding records management as a ‘knowledge’ or ‘information management’ enterprise. He spends a good portion of the book outlining the conceptual basis of records, information, knowledge and action. Building on the Records Continuum model and layering knowledge mobilisation, he constructs a global (globe-shaped) model, where the emphasis of different approaches (records management, knowledge mobilisation) can be displayed by shifting the focus from one view of the globe to another. This is a visualisation of the tensions and interplay between regulation and innovation; ideas and evidence; governance and memory.

While the first half of the book sets the scene with ‘principles’ and the theoretical framework, the second half concentrates on ‘practices’. Here, Harries covers techniques that might be adopted and the background to their use. For example, in a chapter on achieving added value, he describes work on models and meanings in measuring value in records management and how they can be mapped onto the creation of public value.

In the final chapters, he outlines steps and techniques that could be used to undertake knowledge based intervention. There are useful signals here for those who want to look at practical implementation.

Finally, Harries reflects on the impact that the proposed knowledge mobilisation approach to records management could have on professional ethics. By adopting a

changed role for the records manager in public policy development and delivery, he considers that accountability would need to be viewed more pervasively. The iKRS implies that the records manager is working with, and for, stakeholders, beyond the organisation in which he or she is situated.

The author has excellent credentials in public policy and first-hand knowledge to enrich his observations. Now a consultant in knowledge and information management, he led The National Archives' program developing electronic records management within the UK Government during the late 1990s and early 2000s. He draws on examples and understanding from this experience in challenging records managers to reset their focus and contribute more directly to problem-solving and enabling outcomes for the organisation.

This publication is of interest for its analysis of public sector transformation, particularly in the UK, but also evident elsewhere. The articulation of a view of information management, knowledge management and records management as mobilised and active is also thought-provoking. While likely to be of immediate applicability to those in government, this book contains insights on taking a strategic approach and clearly thinking and communicating the value of recordkeeping skills in a changed world.

Kathryn Dan

The University of Melbourne

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2013.799429>

L Morra and J Schagerl (eds.), *Basements and attics, closets and cyberspace: explorations in Canadian women's archives*, Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier Press, 2012. ix + 335 pp. ISBN 978 1 55458 632 5. CA\$85.00

Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace is a fine example of the systematic ways in which Canadian scholars (to a greater degree, perhaps, than their Australian counterparts) have successfully opened out and responded to some of the larger and more compelling questions concerning what it means to work in, and with, archived personal papers, whether as archivists or researchers. As Morra and Schagerl observe, their collection 'addresses the real and sometimes peculiar challenges that affect archival work today', and they freely admit that some of that work now involves 'deciding what constitutes an archive' (p. 1). The subtitle, *Explorations in Canadian Women's Archives*, indicates that the volume is especially directed towards those engaged in ongoing debates concerning the archiving of material produced by women, but those professing little or no knowledge of these debates or Canadian literature more generally still have much to gain from these detailed and sometimes provocative essays.

If, as Catherine Hobbs suggests in her contribution to *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace*, 'archival theory has done a terrible job of accommodating the particular needs of individual people's archives' (p. 181), this volume arguably goes some way towards addressing this lacuna. Comprising 20 essays, as well as a lengthy introduction and afterword, it is a substantial work. The essays are organised into three thematic sections: 'Reorientations', concerned with new ways of understanding what