



# The requirement for developing functional records classification



Umi Asma' Mokhtar\*, Zawiyah M. Yusof

Faculty of Information Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Records and information management (RIM) is managed based on the lifecycle concept which significantly marks three phases consist of the creation, maintenance and disposal. Classification is one of the elements in the creation phase alongside with capture. However, not much research were conducted on function-based classification making records left unclassified. Function-based classification is an approach to classify records based on *respect des fonds* and provenance. This study investigates the requirements for developing functional records classification in Malaysia. The study used qualitative approach to investigate the classification problems encountered by the identified case study using interview and content analysis techniques to collect data. The technique was used to seek the requirement for developing the function-based classification system. This paper reports the findings from the analyzed data.

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## 1. Introduction

Classification as a concept is popularly used in information-related fields, particularly library science. Applications include systemizing information to facilitate retrieval. Although the concept itself is quite simple, application differs widely in different fields. This study seeks to investigate classification from a records management perspective, as studies on this concept are scarce. Classification is a foundational element of records management; neglecting it leads to inefficient and incompetent records management. Research has shown that good records management particularly the electronic ones could strengthen electronic government services by supporting business continuity; security and risk management; legal compliance and accountability; evidence-based decision making and transparency; good governance and public trust; and good performance and government capability building (An, Shuyang, & Wei, 2011). Without proper understanding of such concepts, it becomes difficult to implement an efficient and effective records management initiative addressing the complete lifecycle of records from creation to preservation. Although classification plays a key role in the preservation of records over time, it may be overlooked or neglected when information systems to manage digital records are developed or implemented in favour of those elements of the records lifecycle that focus on earlier

stages such as storage and retrieval. Consequently, vast quantities of digital records remain poorly managed.

Although classification is paramount, many organizations do not understand the concept or put it into practice. There are repercussions for not practicing records and information management, such as not making use of valuable information for making strategic decisions. Organizations in Malaysia are not practicing records management initiative (Umi & Zawiyah, 2009) due to a poor perspective concerning records. Furthermore, records are not considered an asset which may be exploited to give many untold benefits.

Moreover, research on classification in records management is scarce, even less so in relation to function-based classification (Orr, 2005). Most research has emphasized standards and guidelines; technological issues; appraisal, and preservation. Classification from a records management perspective has not received sufficient attention and is rarely discussed; studies are isolated (Feng, An, & Liu, 2009; Orr, 2005; Xie, 2008) or under-researched (Santangelo, 2009). This is because its application has been wrongly perceived as being only appropriate and applicable to the library context. Furthermore, the absence of a consolidated theory of classification has also contributes to the problem, as most or all studies in classification have been largely undertaken in the Library and Information Science field (LIS) (Jones, 2005; Szostak, 2004). In the LIS field, functional classification has developed in a relatively arbitrary manner due to a lack of a consistent theoretical background and methodology (Alberts, Schellinck, Eby, & Marleau, 2010), which in turn has affected the usability of systems (Orr, 2005). The application of classification differs between the library and records management fields. In the library field, classification is

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60 3 8921 6174; fax: +60 3 8925 6732.

E-mail addresses: [umi.mokhtar@gmail.com](mailto:umi.mokhtar@gmail.com), [umimokhtar@ukm.edu.my](mailto:umimokhtar@ukm.edu.my) (U.A. Mokhtar).

used for retrieval and searching (Ariff, 2008; Evans, 2007), whereas in records management, classification has been designed for preservation purposes and to maintain required record characteristics (Schellenberg, 1956). The authenticity, reliability, integrity, and usability of records must be maintained throughout their lifecycle.

Initiatives have been undertaken to provide guidelines for developing records classification systems. Most initiatives are found in standards, guidelines, principles, functional requirements, or handbooks. These are usually qualitative models and are made up of conceptual models that come in many styles, and emphasize the ability to assist records manager, archivists, or researchers. Conceptual models may serve as a foundation in the development of more complex systems (Carleton College, 2009).

In Malaysia, function-based classifications for electronic records are still absent despite the need for them in record management initiatives. Most of the globally existing models provide functional requirements to develop electronic systems for the management of records from creation to preservation.

This paper intends to find out how is a classification system developed in organization in Malaysia. Prior to suggesting a solution, this study critically reviews existing records classification models to identify their strengths and weaknesses. In the model reviews, the current internationally applied classification system has been acknowledged and the method of classification system identified, either covering entire lifecycle of records or merely selected components of the lifecycle.

## 2. Function-based classification

Classification is the arrangement of information items into manageable and logical categories. Classification in terms of records management is different than library classification used to process information (Pearce-Moses & Davis, 2008). Librarians classify materials from various sources by subject into a single system, gathering related materials together for convenient access. On the contrary, records managers do not re-organize records, but maintain their original order while abiding by the theories of provenance and *respect des fonds*. Such an approach ensures that the evidentiary value of records is preserved and the structure or functions of records remain intact.

Function-based classification is more stable than subject-based classification (National Archives of Australia, 2008; Orr, 2005). Function-based classification could also ease the process of classification and retrieval (Library of Archives Canada (LAC), 2006). Moreover, function-based classification provides a context for records, rather than content (ISO 15489, 2001; LAC, 2006; National Archives of Australia, 2008; Shepherd & Yeo, 2003). Function-based classification could aid appraisal and disposal activities and support the proactive management of records (National Archives of Australia, 2008; Bantin, 2002).

## 3. Method

This study has adopted a qualitative approach to explore the identified case study, using interviews and content analysis techniques. There are four phases involved, and each phase has its own purpose and data analysis or technique.

Phase one deals with reviewing literature from previous related research. Since this study focuses on the classification from RM perspective, the literature is discussed in terms of the evolution, comparisons, and issues related records. The scope of discussions has been broken down to classification concepts from various fields, as found in Archival Science, Library Science, and Information Science. The review of classification is made to find comparisons and classification approach, which becomes the selected approach for

classification in this study. Once the approach for classification is identified, namely function-based classification (also known as RC), the official documents related to the selected approach are collected and reviewed. The 20 official documents consist of functional requirements, standards, guidelines and handbook, which have been selected and analyzed in phase two. The findings from phase one and two identify case studies, objectives, research questions, the problem statement, study scope, research design, methods and techniques, and finally strategy. Moreover, the literature also contributes to identification of related models of RC. The conceptual framework of the study will also be approached in terms of the literature findings. Content analysis is used analyze the official documents, which does not involve computer software due to the low number (20) of identified documents.

Phase three involves gathering data through a snap-shot study using interviews. This involved multiple interview sessions conducted at DSJM. First interview is conducted to collect a preliminary overview at the DSJM, in particular the e-Syariah system (SCCMS). The respondents in the first interview consist of head of unit, system analysts, and programmers. The head of unit explains the SCCMS briefly, while the system analysts describe the system flows. The following second and third interviews are held between researcher and one identified system analyst to assist the researcher in gathering information about SCCMS throughout the study. The data collected from the interviews is to obtain information on current classification system. This data are then analyzed through direct inference based on Krippendorff's (1989) suggestions.

Phase four involves data gathering as well, but takes place at NAM with the archivists. The questions for the archivists take into account with the current approach of classification system in Malaysia. The interviews at NAM are essential because NAM is a body to advise for all public agencies in Malaysia in related with records and archival management. Thus, the classification approach imposed by the NAM must be complied by all public agencies in Malaysia. The technique to analyze the data is also based on direct inference.

## 4. Data analysis

Classification in archival theory has developed and changed drastically over the past 120 years. The RM field was introduced in mid-20th century for adapting archival, law, and management theories. Classification is the core function for managing records, as RM is the field of managing records systematically by assisting in decision making and maintaining based on lifecycles of records.

From the interviews, it may be concluded that there is no classification for managing electronic record. The need for RC is crucial, because there is no RC in the organization to manage electronic records. The importance of classification is realized by the staffs who manage paper records, hence suggested on the classification scheme for the paper records. However, the scheme remains incomplete. Findings based on the research questions are tabulated in Table 1.

Further discussion of the findings led to the realization that the e-Syariah system does not include any form of RC, records retention schedules, appraisal process, data recovery centre, or preservation methods. The department's retention schedule is managed by the records unit, which is separate from the IT department. Preservation processes are carried out by the National Archives of Malaysia (NAM). The NAM set the maturity period of records or data at seven years. Statistics from a survey in Table 2 found that most of the problems that occur relate to judges, chief judges, or lawyers. The problems usually involve reference, registration, court or order, communication, cooperation, administration, and attitude.

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