# The Records Management Capacity Assessment System (RMCAS) as a tool for program development at the Turkish Red Crescent Society

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The evaluation of institutional condition is regarded as a crucial factor in creating effective and efficient records management systems. In addition, as part of program development studies, national and international programs' best practices and guidelines need to be investigated. In this study, the Records Management Capacity Assessment System (RMCAS) is evaluated and some practical examples that could be used for developing records management programs are examined. The basic aim of this study is to identify records management practices and to provide an example to institutions that are in the stage of program development. The results of an RMCAS analysis of practices of the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) are also presented in this study.

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## 1. Introduction

Records managers are required to assess the extent to which their studies satisfy the needs of an institution. These assessments are based not only on institutional requirements, but also on national and international standards. The first stage of the assessment is comprised of defining the institutional structure and operation. Identification of the internal and external conditions that have an effect on the institution's work and operations is then necessary. Subsequent to this identification, the current records system should be evaluated by taking all of these conditions into consideration. The appropriate techniques for each records management function are expected to be used or developed in the evaluation of the records management system (Information Management Planning, 2005; Shepherd & Geoffrey, 2003). The field surveys may be conducted either in accordance with preliminary studies of the institution or by making use of previously developed techniques.

The development of records management programs in line with institutional requirements, national and international regulations, and the expectations of parties involved with the institution's services are considered to be highly significant. Within this framework, multifaceted approaches should be adopted in program

development for the records that are used for official communication within the institution and that have the function of verification, and, if need be, previous examples of the developed applications and analyses should be used (Williams, 2002). Records management programs are considered to be able to satisfy the institution's internal and external needs by means of surveys to be conducted through both the examples of applications. Program development in records management rests substantially on institutional analyses. The administrative and legal conditions of every work process affecting the records procedures in the institution should be evaluated in the analyses to be conducted. The assessment of the international standards and the application samples that are developed is considered to be feasible through analyzation of the administrative and legal processes that have an effect on the institutional records procedures and through the development of institutional records management programs (Pember, 2006, p. 22; Shepherd & Geoffrey, 2003, pp. 30–31; Spratt, 2004, p. 8; Zawiyah & Chell, 2002, p. 55).

## 2. The program development studies on records management

The primary objective of records management studies has long been to dispose of the growing number of printed records and to relieve the shrinkage of storage areas. The possibilities of access are considered to become more efficient accordingly. Today, however, concepts like the authenticity and reliability of records are being discussed even more frequently, along with the electronic environment. The information required for institutional decisions

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is provided by the records containing the previously run applications and resolutions. Likewise, content analyses conducted for the development of institutional applications are based on the records that comprise the recorded information. These developments necessitate elaboration on records management from a wider perspective (Williams, 2002). The management of the recorded information is described as the management of the information which is recorded in the working process and in a reproducible form (Külcü, 2005; Penn, Mordel, & Pennix, 1994). It is necessary to develop the policies defining the actions to be taken by the records management applications, the scope of which is ever-expanding; to regulate the procedures through which these policies are to be implemented; and to determine how the applications are to be supervised and evaluated (Williams, 2002).

Capacity assessment in records management has been a center of interest for many institutions in different fields and a number of studies have been conducted in related areas. These studies not only enabled the evaluation of institutional records systems, but were also used in the development of general applications and programs on capacity assessment in records management.

## 3. The practices on the development of records management systems

Examples of studies conducted on the development of records management systems in various institutions are presented below in chronological order.

In a doctoral study on the capacity assessment in records management conducted by Hutchinson at La Verne University in 1996 (Hutchinson, 1996), information and records management applications in the public institutions of California are discussed comprehensively. Within the scope of the 58 public institutions on which the study was based, the records management programs are retrospectively elaborated on, the problems encountered in the ongoing programs are described, and the practices, standards, and activities achieved in the development of the programs are touched upon.

Among the data collected during the study, it is remarkable that 92.86% of the examined institutions have a records management manual. According to further results, more than half of the total number of these institutions have micro records management programs (57) while 50% have vital records preservation programs and 42.68% have form management programs. The institutions regard the records retention charts to be the most significant element of their current records management programs. Other elements specified as significant are access to information, security of vital records, file management, integrated technology applications, records center operations, form and report management, preservation of historical records, and correspondence management.

In a master's study conducted by O'Brien (1999) at Royal Roads University, staff members who run the records procedures at the 23 institutions constituting the sample stated that the workload in records management systems is most notably at top level intensity at the out-of-unit records centers, those storage centers where the records are half-active, at the rate of 96%. The other fields where the workload is stated to be heavy are as follows: filing systems (91%), access services (87%), retention plans (83%), software for information and records systems (78%) and design of the access tools (65%), vital records planning (65%), disaster preparedness planning (61%), cost analyses (52%), project management (48%), performance analysis (43%), micrographs (43%), risk analyses (35%), supervision (30%), work flow design (26%), reprography or copying (18%), and form management (4%).

In a study conducted by Williams (2002), materialized with the support of the Enterprise Content Management Group attached to the Association of International Information Management, content analyses of the records management applications of certain businesses providing services in different fields in the United States are conducted (Williams, 2002). The records management capacities of the institutions are presented and the areas in which problems are encountered are identified. According to the study, the most problematic area in terms of records management within enterprises in the United States is security (68%), and 53% of the studied institutions do not have an e-records management application. However, 61% of the institutions stated that they have a retention plan for their e-mail system and 63% reported that they keep and dispose of their records in accordance with records retention plans (Williams, 2002).

In a study conducted in Mozambique, the relationship between records management applications and sustainable development plans is dwelt upon and it is concluded that provision of efficiency in the field of public administration depends to a large extent upon effective records management applications (Chibambo, 2003).

In 2005, a 75-page guidebook entitled *Information Management Planning* was prepared as a result of detailed analyses and assessments of public institutions attached to the provincial government of Alberta, Canada. The development of records management programs within the institutions is described stage-by-stage in this guidebook, which includes detailed information in the following categories: creation of a planning group for the development of records management programs; specification of institutional mission and vision; presentation of the existing values; description of the deficiencies, problems, solutions, and priorities; and plan development (Information Management Planning, 2005).

In the doctoral study conducted by Munro (2005) for the Faculty of Law of Toronto University, electronic records are elaborated on and assessed within the framework of the risk factors created by Internet service providers, personal information, and legal access issues.

In 2005, the relationship between the applications of records management and quality system documentation in universities is examined and a quality record management model for the Turkish Higher Education System is developed in the doctoral study conducted by Külcü in Turkey (Külcü, 2005). In another study carried out in 2008, a comprehensive field survey is conducted on e-records management applications within e-government and its results are evaluated within the scope of the InterPARES III Project (Külcü, 2008).

## 4. Records management capacity assessment system (RMCAS)

RMCAS was developed as part of the International Records Management Trust's Evidence-Based Governance in the Electronic Age Project, which was been funded by the World Bank. To develop RMCAS, the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) drew upon previous research that demonstrated the relationship between records management, financial management, and accountability. In developing RMCAS, the IRMT's aim has been to not only provide a means of evaluating whether the infrastructure of laws, organizational structures, policies, procedures, and facilities exists to manage records effectively, but also to provide a methodology with which to identify problems and begin to plan solutions. RMCAS has been field-tested by government agencies in Botswana, Kenya, Ghana, India, Malawi, Singapore, South Africa, and Yap, a state of the Federated States of Micronesia. Peer reviews were also carried out in Canada, Iceland, and New Zealand (Demp, 2004).

RMCAS is a three-part tool that maps capacity levels to the principles and statements of good practice in records management. It is comprised of a data-gathering element, a diagnostic model, and a database of capacity-building resources for records