



THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON OPEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RECORDS AND TO PROTECT KNOWLEDGE SHARING OF SENSITIVE COMMERCIAL INFORMATION: A SHORT RESEARCH

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Abstract- Purpose: The main purpose of this paper is to show the relationship between the Australian government policy on open access to records and policy to protect knowledge sharing of commercial information.

Design / Methodology: The article explores the essence of knowledge and information management in government from a perspective of legislations. A wide range of archives, records and knowledge management-specific sources are used to explain basic knowledge management system of Australian government.

Findings: This study provides a through overview of basic understanding of the Australian government records, archives and knowledge and information management strategy. This study also guides the government ways of protect sensitive commercial knowledge as well as shows some important requirements on knowledge sharing for open government.

Keywords- Records, Information, Archives, Knowledge Sharing, Australian Government

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Introduction

The Australian government has an obligation to maintain good records of its business activities for legal purposes, support future operations and enable to access the information. This paper presents a brief concept of records, archives, and knowledge and information management policies of the Australian government. Records management principle and strategy have multiple purposes in terms of their value to an individual, organization or society [10, 15]. That is why the aim of the study is to demonstrate the benefits of records management for the future references. The purpose of this paper is also to represent the relationship among records management, accountability of efficient and open governance. Through this work the paper tries to identify the major key issues of government archives and information legislations and strategies for the creation and management of public records of governments. The key goals of this paper are to find out the ways of reconciling of protecting commercial knowledge and requirements of knowledge sharing for open government.

Records and Archives

'Records are evidence of business conducted by an organization' [11]. In the course of daily life, individuals, government and business organizations create and maintain records about their personal and business activities. These records and the places those are kept are called 'archives'. According to Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 'Archives are those documents which no

longer have an everyday use, yet have been kept because of their historical value' [7]. Sir Hilary Jenkinson, Deputy keeper of public records, UK [10,10] notes that 'Archives are the documents accumulated by a natural process in the course of the Conduct of Affairs of any kind, public or private, at any date; and preserved thereafter for reference, in their own custody, by the person responsible for the affairs in question or their successors'.

Australian Official Government Business Records

Australian Archives Act 1983 [2] defines that '*record* means a document, or an object, in any form (including any electronic form) that is, or has been, kept by reason of: (a) any information or matter that it contains or that can be obtained from it; or (b) its connection with any event, person, circumstance or thing'. Records are important evidence of business conducted by any organisation. Business transactions might include events, incoming or outgoing correspondence, minutes of meetings, records of conversations and telephone calls, cables, email, agreement, or any other communications those are placed on file. Records can be in any format like physical (paper) and electronic.

Purposes of Australian Government's Archive Management

Good information and records management is important for proper management and open Government because it supports the Government suppliers, business agencies, making them more efficient, effective and accountable. The Australian National Audit Office has

recommended that Australian Government agencies develop and implement a record management strategy within the broader context of an information framework [2]. Major purposes of archives management policies are to identify the archival resources, preserving and making publicly available the archival resources, maintenance, and disposal of corporate records, overseeing Commonwealth record-keeping, imposing record-keeping obligations in respect of Commonwealth records etc.

The Australian Government Archives Legislations

It is important that every organization should have own policies and legislations for highest level of management. The Archives Act 1983 provides authority to National Archives of Australia to set the requirements for adequate and proper recordkeeping of business activities and decision making. However, this record legislation in a number of jurisdictions has given powers to State and Territory archives regarding government business records keeping. According to the Act, main functions of the National Archives of Australia are conservation and preservation of the existing and future archival resources, providing advice to other commonwealth institutions regarding recordkeeping, making records available for public access in according to this Act, encouraging and facilitating the use of archival material etc. The Archives Act also sets a guideline and total systems, functions of National Archives of Australia, and functions of the Advisory council, what to preserve, how to preserve, and accessing condition of the records etc. Moreover, Australian government has the following related legislations to maintain all government business records properly:

- Archives Act 1983;
- Crimes Act 1914;
- Electronic Transactions Act 1999;
- Evidence Act 1995;
- Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997;
- Freedom of Information Act 1982;
- Privacy Act 1988; and
- Public Service Act 1999.

Framework for Open Access to the Records

In Australia, the incentive to adopt freedom of information regimes at National and State levels was a broad - sweeping set of administrative reforms in government commencing in the late 1970s [10, 184]. *Freedom of Information Act 1982* states that, 'records and archives management can contribute to good governance by public access modernization of public services, open and accountable government' [1]. Public have a right under the *Archives Act 1983* and *Freedom of Information 1982* to access records. The *Archives Act 1983* and the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* are the main principles of legislation to make available access to archival records for public. These Acts provide access to records 30 years after the creation of the record. The *FOI Act 1982* also governs public access to records created since 1st December 1977 with the exception of some records.

Access to Confidential Commercial Information

The Acts also provide guidelines to access any sensitive or confidential records. Under the *Archives Act 1983* and *Freedom of Information 1982* public are not allowed to access the records that contain information or matter that are sensitive which would impact on Commonwealth interests, or the private affairs of people. This infor-

mation could cause potential damage to international affairs and also could pass of confidential information and some internal working documents.

Importance of Protecting Knowledge Sharing of Commercial Information

Security and protecting of corporate information is an important issue for information and knowledge management. Government policies and systems usage should guarantee the protection of information/data or knowledge under the responsibility of those who are charged in corporate governance. Disclosure of commercial information may cause human rights violation, loss of intellectual intelligence, property and contractual, and legal or archival failures. Therefore, it is obvious that the management of commercial records are more essential for a higher quality of life for public and institutional stakeholders.

How does Government Reconcile Protecting Knowledge Sharing of Commercial Information?

Main question is how does government can reconcile commercial knowledge sharing with the current trends toward knowledge protection. Government legislations and practical implementation of these legislations are very important to protect confidential commercial information. In order to ensure the policies and legislations are effective, government authority must need to monitor recordkeeping practices in a variety of ways. Each and every department including overseas posts can undertake a self-assessment and internal audit at least once a year which is compliance with records management policies. In addition, managers should ensure that each officer is fully aware of their recordkeeping responsibilities as part of their regular activities. Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act 2002, known as Sarbanes-Oxley Act [3] states, 'the integrity of the audit process for publicly traded companies and the reliability of audit reports on corporate financial information can help to improve protecting knowledge sharing'. The retention and preservation or recorded financial information is the core elements of knowledge management [3]. Hence, proper management of an existing reliable recordkeeping system is also a precondition for protecting knowledge sharing of commercial information.

Open Government

The Australian open government policy is based on the innovative use of new internet technology. According to the government declaration, the main goal of open government is to promote greater participation in Australia's democracy, it is committed to open government based on a culture of engagement, built on better access and use of government held information, and sustained by the innovative use of technology [6]. The Declaration is about making more sharing of information available to the public in online and on-time.

Knowledge Sharing Requirements of Open Government

Knowledge and Information is always valuable asset which needs to be managed strategically. To ensure successful knowledge sharing for open government some essentials requirements are important. These are, provide leadership, demonstrate value, act collaboratively, establish clear governance, establish custodianship guidelines, building interoperability, use standards-based information, promote information re-use and ensure privacy and security. These components aim is to ensure delivery of the right services, to the right people, at the right time, at the right place, through information.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can get a brief overview of basic concept of knowledge management policies of Australian government. In general, archives management principle has been selected for permanent or long-term preservation on grounds of their enduring cultural, historical, or evidentiary value. A good and open governance, information security and records management are connected altogether. Government legislations require preserving corporate records and open access records for further references. A sound recordkeeping practices are essential for a well-management of commercial information and can help to fulfill open government requirements. The setting of the government policy can establish a framework for the creation and management of government business records. Finally, all staff working for the knowledge management are responsible to follow this policy and to maintain record-keeping practices in their everyday work.

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