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ARCHIVES AND THE CHALLENGES OF APPRAISAL PRACTICES

Abstract

Every records creating agency produces a large body of records but a very few of them are of permanent nature which have historic importance. Only such records should find a place in archives. This requires a careful appraisal of records. There are occasions when non-permanent records of little historic importance are transferred to archives. This creates a problem for an Archivist. All such records are required to be returned to the originating department or agency. In India most of the records are transferring directly by the creating agency / department to the archives according to the retention / preservation schedule. Sometimes observed that records may be worth keeping even it does not provide the best evidence. It needs to define criteria for selecting the best one which may have best evidence, historical and legal value by applying best appraisal practices. For that Archivist might consider sampling, weeding and culling when faces with large volumes of archives.

Key words: Appraisal, records, archivist, archives.

GLI ARCHIVI E LE SFIDE DELLE PRATICHE DI VALUTAZIONE

Sintesi

Ogni agenzia di creazione di documenti produce un ampio corpus di documenti, ma pochissimi di essi sono di natura permanente e di importanza storica. Solo tali record dovrebbero trovare un posto negli archivi. Ciò richiede un'attenta valutazione dei record. Ci sono occasioni in cui documenti non permanenti di scarsa importanza storica vengono trasferiti negli archivi. Questo crea un problema per un archivista. Tutti questi documenti devono essere restituiti al dipartimento o all'agenzia di origine. In India la maggior parte dei documenti viene trasferita direttamente dall'agenzia/dipartimento di creazione agli archivi secondo il programma di conservazione/conservazione. A volte è stato osservato che può valere la pena conservare i registri anche se non forniscono le prove migliori. Deve definire i criteri per selezionare quello migliore che può avere la migliore evidenza, valore storico e legale applicando le migliori pratiche di valutazione. Per questo l'archivista potrebbe prendere in considerazione il campionamento, il diserbo e l'abbattimento quando si trova di fronte a grandi volumi di archivi.

Parole chiave: valutazione, record, archivista, archivi.

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ARHIVI IN IZZIVI VREDNOTENJA

Povzetek

Vsak ustvarjalec pri poslovanju ustvari veliko količino zapisov, vendar je zelo malo od njih trajne narave z zgodovinskim pomenom; samo takšni zapisi naj najdejo prostor v arhivih, kar pa zahteva skrbno oceno zapisov. Obstajajo primeri, ko se netrajni dokumenti majhnega zgodovinskega pomena prenesejo v arhiv, kar ustvarja težave za arhivista. Vse take zapise je potrebno vrniti izvornemu ustvarjalcu. V Indiji večino gradiva v arhiv neposredno prinese ustvarjalec, skladno s klasifikacijskim načrtom. Včasih opažamo, da je morda vredno voditi evidence, čeprav ne zagotavljajo najboljših dokazov. Določiti je potrebno merila za izbiro tistega gradiva, ki ima zgodovinsko in pravno vrednost, z uporabo najboljših praks vrednotenja. Arhivist bi lahko razmislil o vzorčenju in izločitvi, ko se sooča z velikimi količinami gradiva.

Ključne besede: vrednotenje, evidence, arhivist, arhivi

INTRODUCTION

Appraisal is a process of complex analysis fundamental to all archival operations. Appraisal consists of a series of analytical questions asked during a sequence of events at all levels of the archival process. This paper will describe issues surrounding appraisal decisions for records, including specific strategies, challenges and factors for consideration and levels of appraisal (Hackman & Warnow-Blewett, 1987). Special attention will be paid to appraising complex records, with the intent of providing recommendations for records of continuing value that require permanent retention and those that may be disposed. Developing clear and consistent appraisal guidelines for collections is extremely critical due to the nature, and often quantity, of the records they contain (Samuels, 1986).

Archival theory and practice has provided a number of appraisal approaches. One of these includes developing a documentation strategy (Schrock, 1987) an integrated process in which records managers, keepers, and users develop and implement appraisal frameworks for collecting within defined subject areas. There are also the traditional appraisal considerations of evidential, informational, and intrinsic value. In the SAA appraisal manual, F. Gerald Ham defines the five basic tools for the evaluation of records to determine permanent value as functional analysis, content analysis, context analysis, use analysis, and cost-benefit analysis (Ham, 1992). Other approaches to appraisal include applying the concept of continuing use within the framework of primary and secondary use, or assessing records in terms of their value as documentation, or for potential use, or artifactual significance.

Appraisal is not an exact science. For design practices, institutional archives, and other archival repositories, the most difficult appraisal activity is determining which records are worthy of permanent retention and which can be transferred or discarded (Singh, 2016). The enormous quantities of modern records and modern design records mandate effective and fearless appraisal. According to Robert Desaulniers, "In selecting records [for permanent retention] it is necessary to take account of the relative value of the various professional practices they document as well as the scale, quality, impact on the built environment, research and innovation, and degree of influence, of the buildings and facilities they record" (Lowell & Tawny, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

For archival repositories, appraisal naturally begins at the collection level. It is important to have a clear mission for your repository and to keep this in the forefront of your collection development practice. Appraisals must be conducted and documented by a qualified appraiser at macrolevel (Cook, 2004).

STEPS INVOLVES

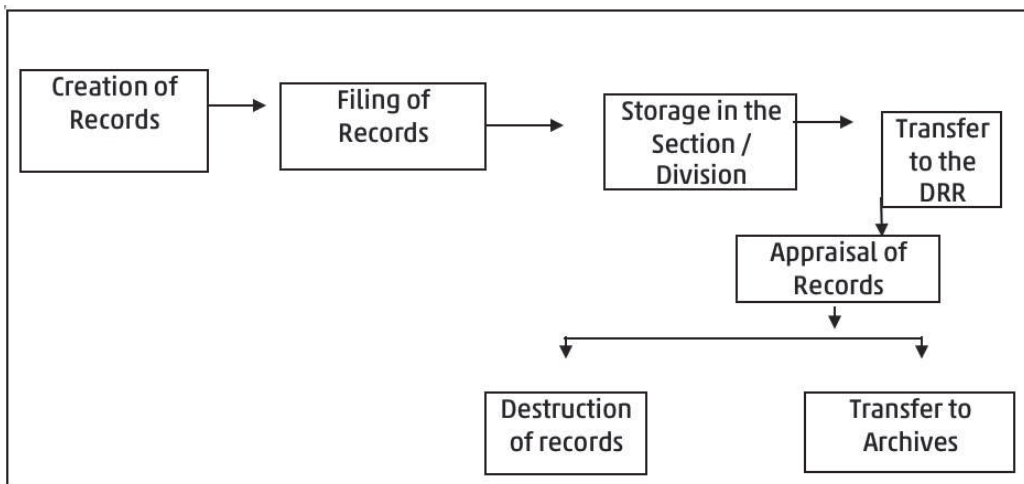
- (i) The process of appraisal has to be extremely cautious, as records are unique and have no duplicates. If destroyed carelessly, it would mean permanent loss to both the administrators and the research scholars. The appraisal standards, however, cannot be precise or definite. They could only provide appraiser with guidelines, which could be applied with discretion. It obviously means that this work could be conducted by persons of sufficient maturity and experience, as records with passage of time acquire values, which are unimaginable while they are current. Wholesale destruction of records for creating some space in the office need not be pursued vigorously, as it is advantageous to retain the end products of such records.

- (ii) Records are to be appraised after taking into consideration the significance of the records creating body, its position in official hierarchy, nature of its activities and relations of its activities with those of superior or subordinate administrative units. Besides, acquaintance with the nature of series of records demanding appraisal would be and understanding of the organizational history of the agency whose records are subjected to appraisal would be desirable.
- (iii) Appraisal process should commence immediately at the time of closing of files and be conducted before the transaction dealt in them have completely faded from the memory. Files which are of permanent nature at the time of recording should not be subject to review or appraisal at this stage. Files coming up for review at this stage would be files relating to house-keeping and establishment matters. The process would become simple and easy if the files are appraised purely from the administrative angle. Before commencing the process of appraisal of files, the appraiser should invariably ask himself a question whether the record under review would be required as precedent or a guide to a possible action, should similar circumstance arise in future. He should not take decision on the basis that the transaction for which the record was created has ceased to exist so the record may be destroyed. Upgrading file from establishment or housekeeping category to record of permanent nature could be decided at this stage.
- (iv) As most of the files about house-keeping and establishment jobs have short-term administrative value, they could be weeded out quickly at this stage. Files which would fall into this category would pertain to routine personnel record, purchase orders, stock control, servicing of equipment and computers, printers, scanners, furniture and stationery. Files dealing with purchase may be destroyed after audit and entries have been made in the stock registers. Files dealing with individual matters can also be weeded out after the purpose in view has been served by them. Similar treatment should be accorded the records of establishment, welfare matters, public relations etc.
- (v) Historical criteria for appraisal can be applied after sufficient time has elapsed since an event or decision on the issue had been taken. As historical research is in no way connected to normal work of the record creating agencies, it would not be proper to leave final appraisal of such files/records to the creating agency alone. They normally have no expertise or actual experience in research, let alone the question of their being aware of conceivable means to forecast with certainty records which future researchers might consider important. It would, therefore, be desirable to associate Archivists with the appraisal process at this stage. Association of the Archivists is also advisable for the reason that they generally come into contact with the research scholars and are aware of what the latter would like to consult. Similarly for appraisal of records relating to science and technology assistance from the experts from the relevant field should be sought to ensure that no important record is lost to future generations.
- (vi) With the passage of time, most records acquire values other than purely administrative. Historians, genealogists and researchers in other fields get interested in them along with administrators for information contained in them. At this stage, files classified as permanent could be looked at with certain amount of objectivity to assess their historical significance. It is, therefore, desirable that they should be subjected to fresh review from the informational value that they might possess. In most of the countries this sort of review is conducted after a file has completed 25 years but keeping in view fragility of paper records a trend towards early review is gaining acceptance.

(vii) Records which are of historical significance and deserve retention for administrative and research purposes would generally deal with enactment of laws, framing of rules and regulations, executive orders relating to creation, organization and re-organisation of offices and departments, establishment matters like recruitment, promotion, retirement, pension etc., interpretation of rules, legal functions and the like. Files pertaining to the title of property, appointment of committees and commissions and their reports, agreements and conventions, public or international events which created great controversy on national scene would merit permanent retention. Papers relating to change of policy are not easy to recognize, yet files containing summary of ministers, appointment of departmental or interdepartmental committees, note for cabinet, instructions to the executive agencies on major policy decisions of administrative, political, economic, and legal and like issues could be preserved for posterity. Files containing unpublished statistical or financial data covering a long period or wide area as also important aspects of scientific or technical research and development could also qualify for permanent retention. Files dealing with the local matters could also be kept provided it is felt that evidence about them would not be available locally. File containing information on obsolete activities or investigations or important schemes which were not executed be retained for posterity. Besides, files containing information of biographical or antiquarian nature should be retained.

Life cycle of record is regarded as tradition approach and appraisal is undertaken at the end of cycle. The records selected of indefinite or permanent retention are identifies and transferred to the archival repository (RBI, 2012). The following chart shows the life cycle of records.

Chart 1: Life cycle of records



All records created and / or received in the course of the business shall be managed in accordance with the policy irrespective of their formats or of the media on which they are created.

CHALLENGES IN APPRAISAL OF RECORDS:

Piggott, an archivist, has identified the following challenges faced in appraisal of records and described it as 'archival appraisal truism' (Piggott, 2012):

- (i) Appraisal is not a science
- (ii) Appraisal is not free from bias and subjectivity
- (iii) Appraisal is the primary archival function on which other functions depend
- (iv) The great trinity mystery – cannot keep all, records have some value, cannot predict future research interest
- (v) Destruction to protect privacy is not appraisal
- (vi) Disposal does not mean perpetual preservation or eventual destruction
- (vii) It is easy to justify keeping but not destruction
- (viii) There is reluctance to copy and destroy
- (ix) Older records are fewer resulting in inclination to keep them.

In view of the above, it can be said that appraisal is not easy work and there are no right or wrong answers. The primary reason why archival appraisal is more complex and far reaching than simply determining what needs to be kept and what not. It is about deciding what will be remembered and what will be forgotten.

For appraisal around the five components are very important for the appraisal information gathering and analysis process (Cook, 2004). These are also challenging for the organisation:-

- (i) Training of Staff
- (ii) Collection of Information before Appraisal or Preparatory Research through office / department visit
- (iii) To Determine the Office Function and Relative Value of the Record
- (iv) The physical examination of selected records according to the retention schedule
- (v) Preparation of Appraisal Report
- (vi) Submission of final Appraisal Report for transferring the selected record to Archives for permanent preservation.

CONCLUSION

It needs to define criteria for selecting the best one which may have best evidence, historical and legal value by applying best appraisal practices. For that Archivist might consider sampling, weeding and culling when faces with large volumes of archives. Regardless of these challenges, can adopt institutional functional analysis and macro appraisal apply according to the unique circumstances.

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