



## Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration

The reference for understanding government action

## INFORMATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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A foundational component of public administration, Information Resource Management (IRM) can be understood as a philosophy of management that recognizes and calls for the creation, identification, capture and management of information resources as corporate assets to enable and support the development of policy and effective decision making.

The roots of modern IRM have a very long history, and may logically be traced back to the College of Notaries and the nascent bureaucracies of the Italian city-states and Signorie beginning in the mid-14th century, the great state chancelleries which emerged in England and France during the 15th and 16th centuries through to the appointment of a new class of public records administrators and archivists, seminally in France in the period immediately following the Revolution of 1789 (Brown, 1997; Cox, 2000; Leroux et al., 2009; Moore, 2008). Essentially, as the administration of the state became more complex and more sophisticated over time through the late medieval and early modern periods, so too did the management of its documents and records. By the end of the 19th moving into the early 20th century, codifications of rules and procedures for records management emerged in a series of administrative manuals, ultimately leading to the rise of a new professional class of bureaucrats uniquely occupied with the administration of documents and records (Jenkinson, 1922; Muller et al., 1940; Schellenberg, 1956).

During this period, the number of new government department and agencies in western democracies began to increase, especially in the aftermath of the Second World War. The creation of these new departments, as well as the introduction and prolific use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the telephone, typewriter and the mimeograph in the early 20th century, increased the volume of information produced and stored by the federal governments (McLuhan, 1960; Machlup, 1962).

Western democracies also recognized early on that the effective management of their documents and records was fundamental to effective public administration. By the early 1970s, the rapid production of information and the gradual introduction of the computer in organizations everywhere led to the emerging notion of an information age in which information processing was acknowledged as having become a fundamental component of many jobs in industrialized nations.

The subsequent emergence of the digital age engaged serious studies and debates on the evolving concept of information (Caron, 2011, Floridi, 2010, Leleu-Merviel and al., 2008). As indicated by Leleu-Merviel and codified in the RSQ, chapter C-1.1, information can now be

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understood to comprise both what is communicated– i.e., “The information is delimited and structured [...] and is intelligible in the form of words, sounds or images” – and how it is communicated – i.e., “information inscribed on a medium constitutes a document.”

These evolving historical contexts provided the basis for various disciplines to contribute to the development and understanding of IRM (Papy, 2008; Salaün, 2009). For instance, in the field of public administration, IRM or Information Management is conceptualized as the “planning, organization, development and control of the information and data in an organization and of the people, hardware, software and systems that produce the data and information” (Fox and Meyer, 1995).

Information professionals have defined information management (IM) as “the application of management principles to the acquisition, organization, control, dissemination and use of information relevant to the effective operation of organizations of all kinds” (Feather and al., 2003, p. 263). Thus for information professionals, IM deals with corporate issues related to the value, quality, ownership, use and security of information.

The field of computer science has also defined IRM as a practical approach to the management of information, while emphasizing their specific philosophical understanding of information as a valuable resource that not only should be managed like other corporate resources, but should also contribute directly to accomplishing organizational goals and objectives. IRM “provides an integrated view for managing the entire life-cycle of information, from generation to dissemination, to archiving and/or destruction, for maximizing the overall usefulness of information, and improving service delivery and program management.” (Blass et al., 1991).

Similarly, the data processing management field has also ruminated on the issue of IRM, both from its concern with managing the process surrounding the quality of the data stored and processed, and the information created from data to make more informed and effective decisions (DAMA, 2009, p. 1).

In essence, the emergence of IRM reflects the impacts and influences of the digital age and related socioeconomic transformations within public administration. Looking at the contemporary roles and responsibilities now associated with IRM within the context of public administration and government, the continuous creation, capture, management, and preservation of authentic and reliable documentation has become a fundamental component of 21st-century administrative accountability consonant with transparent governance, effective corporate stewardship and the efficient delivery of programs and services to citizens through public business enterprise (Caron, 2011; Caron 2010). Today, the production and preservation of the documents and records of the state and its public administration in open and accessible form – especially in relation to policy development, decision-making, and interactive relationships between citizens and the machinery of government – is increasingly central to the constitution and maintenance of a democratic consensus conceived under the rule of law. Two of the core-essential principles currently operating within this domain of public administration are that: (1) information resources determined to have long-term value as public or civic goods will be permanently preserved in a documentary resource repository such as an archive or library; and (2) information resources without any ongoing business or public utility will be systematically disposed of in an open and transparent manner. Society now provides normative standards created and recognized at the international level to facilitate and enable the integration and implementation of these core-essential principles within the operations of public administration.

The concept of IRM has been shaped by the converging understanding of the term by a diverse field of experts, the expansion of activities of the federal public administration, and by the gradual adoption and study of new forms of information processing. Core to this evolving philosophy of IRM has been the notion that data and information should be treated separately from the technology that stores and manipulates it.

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In fact, the linkage of IRM with business enterprise is transforming the current discourse on the management of information resources, as practitioners in public administration are now deliberating the concept of Information Resource Development (IRD), which can be understood as the proactive creation and identification of information resources having continuing value to meet contemporary corporate and public objectives (e.g., transparency and accountability), including the long-term needs and preservation requirements for information resources having enduring public or civic value.

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