

*Designing and Delivering a
Records Management
Training Program*

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A recent survey of On Record readers identified records management training as one of the top five challenges facing organizations. Given the pivotal role that training and awareness initiatives play in the success of any records management program, this is hardly surprising. Even the best records management tools and practices are useful only if they can be applied effectively by staff across an organization. By bridging possible gaps between day-to-day performance and organization-wide goals, effective records management training initiatives go well beyond educating staff in RM basics, making the training a critical tool in effective change management, increasing program profile and cost savings.

Benefits: Beyond the Basics

Whether you are building an RM program from scratch or introducing new technology and processes into an established program, a well designed and dynamically delivered training program will deliver a number of advantages for your organization including:

- Decreased employee stress: more informed employees are more likely to embrace change and benefit from new records management controls and tools, increasing levels of job satisfaction and decreasing turnover across the organization.
- More reliable capture of records eligible for offsite storage and/or disposal, leading to direct savings on storage costs.
- Quicker incorporation of new policy requirements, business processes and technology into day-to-day work, decreasing the total costs of implementing the change.
- Overall decrease in legal liability and other business risks, as records are managed in a more cost effective and legally compliant manner.

Getting There

Realizing the full benefits of RM training requires a strategic approach based on careful planning and tailored to specific organizational needs. This white paper lays out a number of strategies for designing, developing and delivering a records management training program that supports compliance with records management requirements and helps add value to your organization's unique business operations.

Just as the day-to-day work of managing records requires specialized education and experience, so too has the field of training and development evolved highly specialized skill sets in instructional design, e-learning and training delivery.

Before You Start: Obtain Senior Management Endorsement

As with any major initiative in records management, training cannot be fully successful without vocal endorsement from a senior management sponsor. Such an individual should take the lead in communicating the organizational objectives discussed above, as well as highlighting how achieving individual learning objectives can help the organization meet its broader goals.

Just how this message is delivered will vary depending on the communication culture within your organization, not to mention the availability of the program sponsor. In some organizations, it is not uncommon for a senior management sponsor to actually attend the first day of training and address participants directly. Where this is not feasible, a message from senior management can be incorporated directly into training manuals and multi-media material.

Know Where RM Lives

Senior management sponsorship and frontline interest can both be scarce commodities in busy times, so look for opportunities to highlight your project's relevance to some broader initiative. If your organization is implementing an improved performance management framework, could completion of records management training be listed as a required item within that framework? Are there any broader-based compliance or business efficiency training into which records management content can be integrated?

Provided that RM-specific requirements and tools are not underemphasized, they can be very effectively combined with such initiatives as privacy compliance, corporate accountability (e.g. Sarbanes-Oxley) or enterprise content management. Understanding where your change management needs fit into the bigger picture can also provide much needed focus to the different assessment, design and development work outlined below.

Engage Training & Development Professionals

As a subject matter expert in the field of records management, you should play an integral role in the identification and development of necessary training content. But content is just one side of the training equation. Just as the day-to-day work of managing records requires specialized education and experience in its own right, so too has the field of training and development evolved highly specialized skill sets in instructional design, e-learning and training delivery. By combining your own in-house subject matter expertise with specialized methodologies in training design, you are in a better position to cover not just essential RM program content, but also special techniques necessary for delivering that message to its intended audience.

By directly addressing the value proposition of records management in general and the training in particular, you will better engage participants and enable them to communicate that value proposition back to their managers and client.

Know your audience

Any major change in corporate process will involve different levels of stakeholder engagement, with equally different training needs in terms of depth, comprehensiveness and topical coverage. A "one size fits all approach" to training development will likely miss these differences and fail to meet the specific needs of discrete audience groups.

In assessing your organization's overall training needs, identify all distinct audiences, such as:

- Management-level records management specialists.
- Specialized records management support staff.
- Management-level "sponsors" responsible for developing and implementing RM program requirements in their particular business unit.
- Departmental "super-users," such as administrative support personnel with designated responsibilities for implementing and maintaining records management controls in their own business units.
- Basic records management end users.

Identify Individual Training Objectives Up Front

An effective training program is designed around clear training objectives. Training objectives should be written in clear, action-oriented language and focus on performance outcomes for individual participants. What should each level of staff participating in the training be able to do after completion of training? Actual objectives will vary with the training scope, but here are just some possible examples:

- Identify paper and electronic documents which are subject to corporate-level records management controls.
- Bring records under control by applying the correct corporate records classification code.
- Perform secure, documented disposal of records in compliance with standard retention schedules.
- Store, index and retrieve records via an electronic records management system.

Don't forget the value proposition

In covering all the details that go into managing records, it is easy for a training program to overlook one basic question that is on the mind of most training participants: why are we doing this in the first place? By directly addressing the value proposition of records management in general and the training in particular, you will better engage participants and enable them to communicate that value proposition back to their managers and client.

Group activities allow participants to work collaboratively through more subjective concepts, such as distinguishing records from non-records or identifying relevant classification categories.

Stay focused on what the objectives of the training are from an organizational perspective at all stages of the training development program, from initial design right through to delivery. You need to demonstrate how training will provide a return on the investment of participant time and energy, as well as budget dollars. Where a change is being introduced, illustrate the problems or challenges which effective training will solve.

Some of the possible organizational objectives relevant to records management training include:

- Comprehensive and consistent application of corporate-level control as a result of increased end-user participation
- Reduction in record volumes and storage costs as redundant copies and competing versions are replaced by one shared file
- Decreased legal and operational risk as a result of records being lost or destroyed in error
- Increased job satisfaction as a result of less physical clutter and better information access

Consider multiple delivery methods

As training and development methods continue to evolve, organizations have a wide range of delivery options. The key is selecting delivery methods which respond to the particular training content, learning styles and practical circumstances identified for each target audience.

Consider the advantages and disadvantages associated with common delivery methods:

- *Classroom or lab-based training* can be very interactive and hands on with the right content design and a dynamic facilitator. Bringing all participants together at one location allows for more consistent delivery of standard policies and process controls. Group activities allow participants to work collaboratively through more subjective concepts, such as distinguishing records from non-records or identifying relevant classification categories. Keep in mind though, getting everyone together can be challenging, especially in geographically dispersed organizations where demands on individual schedules change rapidly.
- *Self-directed study* options such as self-study manuals allow for greater scheduling flexibility. Participants can set their own pace based on operational priorities. The trick is to ensure that employees actually complete the training. Without some form of accountability, a value added activity such as records management training can easily take a backseat to everyday responsibilities and sudden crises.

By applying training concepts to a real world problem that they already understand all too well, participants will better retain training content and leave training well on their way to applying it to their daily activities.

- *E-learning* refers to any form of learning that is based entirely or in part on electronic communication.¹ For example, web-based applications are an increasingly popular alternative to the geographic and scheduling challenges of classroom instruction. Such training can be delivered in either a self-paced format (“asynchronous training”) or a virtual classroom that blends facilitator presentations with participant interaction (“synchronous training”). For optimal success, an e-learning application should also feature audit mechanisms in order to hold participants accountable for completing required training.

Customize where appropriate

Records management concepts and processes can be abstract for training participants who have had limited direct exposure to the concepts in the past. In order to make training more meaningful for those participants, actively look for opportunities to customize training content to better directly address their actual records management reality.

Prior to rolling training content out to a particular business unit, consider performing a quick ‘mini-assessment’ of that business unit’s training needs. What are some of that business unit’s key file collections? How are files organized, accessed and managed? What challenges are they experiencing in managing these collections?

Use the findings of this preliminary investigation to identify real world examples of key training points. There may even be opportunities to apply participants’ own RM challenges and change management concerns directly into training as case studies or hands on exercises. By applying training concepts to a real world problem that they already understand all too well, participants will better retain training content and leave training well on their way to applying it to their daily activities.

Evaluate training outcomes

Once training is delivered, it is not enough to simply assume that the message had its intended affect. On the contrary, all training delivery should conclude with an appropriate form of evaluation to determine whether organizational and individual learning objectives were met. While the exact method and depth of your program evaluation will depend on the size and dollar value of the program, it is worth considering more than one form of evaluation. One of the most widely recognized set of concepts in training and development theory is the four evaluation levels first identified by Don Kirkpatrick in the 1950s. While an in depth understanding of this topic may not be necessary for records management professionals, a quick overview of Kirkpatrick’s four levels is useful for demonstrating the potential approaches to assessing the effectiveness of records management training:

¹ Cy Charney and Kathy Conway, *The Trainer’s Toolkit*, 2nd edition (New York: American Management Association, 2005), p.89.

For many end-users and even novice RM staff, there is a serious risk that the detailed points of managing records across their life cycle can become dry and tedious - look for ways to make training more compelling and enjoyable for all participants.

- **Level 1 – Reaction:** The most common form of evaluation, this level uses a survey form or other tool to gauge participants' own satisfaction with the training content and delivery style. Results are more or less immediate, and the feedback can be particularly useful in pilot deliveries and other situations where further development of training deliverables is still pending.
- **Level 2 – Learning:** This level evaluates how much participants actually learned during training. Have they learned new records management concepts and/or processes? Typical level 2 evaluations test participants both before (“pre-test”) and after (“post-test”) training delivery, with learning measured by the level of increase in scores across the two tests.
- **Level 3 – Transfer / Behavior:** Where Level 2 measures learning of concepts and processes, Level 3 evaluates whether those concepts and processes are being applied in everyday work. In records management, this can mean looking at participants' day-to-day practices in handling paper and electronic records. Is the change in work behaviour sufficient to keep pace with the broader change that your organization is implementing? Is that behavioural change consistent with the training program's learning objectives?
- **Level 4 – Results:** Just as Level 3 looks back at the objectives for individual learners, Level 4 measures outcomes against organizational objectives. If one of the organizational goals for records management training was to prevent misfiles and lost information, do post-training audits of file content reflect such an improvement? If training was partly intended to support cost savings via effective records retention practices, have those cost savings been realized? Where the goal of training is to help manage organizational change, is that change occurring with minimal risks and maximum efficiency? Answering questions like these will help meet organizational objectives.

Don't Forget to Have Fun

As a seasoned records management professional, one can easily forget that this topic is not immediately compelling to everyone. For many end users and even novice records management staff, there is a serious risk that the detailed points of managing records across their life cycle can become dry and tedious. In a change management situation, it can create stress.

But it doesn't have to be that way. By applying those same strategies outlined above, look for ways to make training more compelling and enjoyable for all participants. For example:

- Drawing directly on organizational training objectives, communicate clearly what successful completion of training will mean for participants day-to-day work.

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- In identifying training delivery methods, pay close attention to all available information about the intended audience. Ask yourself, what style of learning best suits the target group? What would they most enjoy? What approach best replicates the culture in which they are accustomed to working?
- Develop training materials that are fresh and interesting. As much as possible, incorporate examples that reflect the real world in which participants live and work. And don't be afraid to inject some humour into case studies, scenarios, sample records and other creative training deliverables. Provided it is not frivolous or inappropriate, a humorous touch can go a long way in keep participants comfortable yet alert.

By employing effective training design and delivery strategies, your organization can look forward to better application of records management controls and a less painful change management process.

TAB Consulting: Records Management Training Services

If you need records management training for your organization, we can provide a comprehensive program customized to your organization's particular RM program and business needs. We have over ten years experience in this area and we can deliver training online or in the classroom, at your facility or ours.

Whether you need "upfront" training on the fundamentals from classification and retention through to TAB SMART, or want to provide training for a specific product initiative, we can help. We can conduct training on a one time basis or on an ongoing basis. We'll work with your existing training methodology and can "train the trainer".

Remember, the benefits of RM training go beyond teaching staff the basics and extend to cost cutting, risk management, compliance and increased program profile. Through our sessions your staff will:

- Enhance and expand Records Management knowledge
- Become leaders in RM
- Support business processes
- Gain competitive advantage
- Enhance professionalism
- Share industry best practices
- Team-building
- Learn methodologies that can be applied in any situation
- Get documentation of knowledge and experience
- Gain confidence in solving Records Management problems

To find out more about how TAB can help you with your RM training, contact Jon Eynon, VP-US, Professional Services, at jeynon@tab.com.