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A Records Management Maturity Model

An MM that is not candy-coated chocolate, Mickey Mouse, a Detroit Rapper, Maris and Mantle, nor Mauer and Morneau (if you're a Minnesota Twins Fan)

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topics: Technologies/Applications, Manage, Records Management, Other - Manage, Information Governance

— Gordon E. J. Hoke

Last fall in Orlando, ARMA International announced GARP, its Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles. In my post to these pages, "The (Disney) World According to GARP," I called it, "a significant contribution to the burgeoning field of information governance." Further, I noted, "GARP is not a novelty as much as a codification of long-evolving recordkeeping ideals."

Last week, ARMA released GARP's companion, a Maturity Model that was still in beta last fall. The MM – although the content is anything but Mickey Mouse -- evaluates Records & Information Management (RIM) programs on a five-point scale:



- Sub-standard
- In development
- Essential
- Proactive
- Transformational

Within the Maturity Model's 40 cells (eight principles x five levels), an organization can objectively evaluate its RIM program, identifying areas that need strengthening and/or risk reduction. No longer need a records manager's boss describe their program as "pretty good" or worse, "good enough." With the new MM, a program can be designated, for example, as "60 percent of ideal" or "deficient in two key areas." And those statements lead to telling questions: "Is that good enough?" "Are we OK with that?" and "Can we live with that level of risk?"

The Maturity Model is a tool, no more/no less. It doesn't do the evaluation by itself, but it does make a serious evaluation simpler and more accurate.

There are ambiguities to be resolved. Cells contain between two and five statements, and in my first use, I found that a RIM program could stretch over three levels for a single principle. Using the Compliance principle, for example, an organization, simultaneously, could have a Level Two destruction-hold process, a Level Three recognition of "relevant laws and regulations," and a Level Four training regimen for employees.

Further, RIM programs seldom are monolithic and internally consistent. An organization could have a sophisticated program for managing paper and microforms while its digital records are wildly unmanaged.

These are observations, not criticisms. A creative RIMmer will assign a point value to a particular situation to answer the questions, "Are we good enough? Is our records risk acceptable?"

The GARP MM is, in my opinion, the best evaluator currently available. The MM helps perform a current-state assessment, a prerequisite to a plan for improvement.

To plan an itinerary, one needs to know the starting coordinates. The GARP MM meets that need and points to where a RIM program wants to go.

GARP repackaged best RIM practices in a format that speaks volumes to top management. Similarly, the Maturity Model articulates what every good RIMmer already knows intuitively. Its value lies in quantifying quality and setting benchmarks for top management to accept, reject or authorize improvement.

It would be a mistake to minimize any tool that speaks truth to power. Gaining support from top management is always a critical strategy. When moving a RIM program forward, GARP's MM offers significant help.

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Distinguished Service Award.

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