Metadata for information and records

1. Introduction

Metadata is descriptive data that helps people find, understand, authenticate, trust, use and manage information and records. If information and records have metadata, we know what it is, what it has been used for, and how to use it.

2. Definition of metadata

Different professional communities define the term "metadata" differently and use metadata in different ways. Metadata for the information and records management profession refers to descriptive information about the content, context, structure and management of information and records needed now and in the future.

3. Benefits of using metadata

Metadata is a very flexible and powerful tool that serves many purposes. Some of the benefits of using metadata include:

- helps organisations create reliable and trustworthy evidence of their business activities
- enables users to find, access and identify information and records
- facilitates interoperability and helps promote and encourage the easy creation, use, reuse, and sharing of information and records
- maximises and amplifies the value of information and records by adding context and allowing greater understanding
- can be used to manage security and privacy requirements, including intellectual property requirements, so information and records can be appropriately stored and protected
- as a tool to proactively plan for and perform ongoing accessibility and preservation activities
- automation of certain actions, for example, the sentencing of information and records, and
- assists public sector organisations meet the minimum compliance requirements as defined in the *Information and records management standard*, particularly requirements 2.3, 3.2 and 3.3.

4. What is included in metadata?

Metadata for information and records:

- consists of data describing the context, content and structure of information and records, and their management through time
- identifies, authenticates and contextualises information and records, and the people, processes and systems that create, manage, maintain and use them, and
- focuses on transactions and activities (how records and information are created, received, exchanged, managed, used and reused).

Metadata for information and records can include information about:

- business context
- dependencies and relationships among information and records systems
- relationships to legal and societal contexts

- relationships to individuals, workgroups or organisations that create, manage and use information and records.

4.1. Common examples of metadata

Common examples of metadata for information and records include:

- descriptive information (such as record names, extent, relevant dates, author, editor)
- identifiers (such as document numbers, client numbers, supplier numbers, contract numbers and asset numbers)
- dates (such as date registered, date actioned or date destroyed)
- protective markings to identify sensitive information and records
- system process information that provides an audit trail of who has used the information and records, and for what purpose
- workflow information that shows how information and records were tracked and actioned across an organisation.

5. Different types of metadata

Information and records consist of content and persistently linked metadata. Without key metadata, the value of records and information is significantly diminished.

Metadata for information and records includes **point-of-capture metadata** and **process metadata**.

5.1. Point-of-capture metadata

Point-of-capture metadata documents the content, appearance, structure and technical attributes of information and records, as well as the context in which they are created.

Point-of-capture metadata is acquired or assigned at the time the information or record is created or captured. This metadata does not change. Additional point-of-capture metadata is captured if the information or record is repurposed in a new system.

5.2. Process metadata

Process metadata documents the management processes performed on information and records. Such processes include registering into a system, applying or changing security and access rules, transferring control, and destroying or migrating.

Process metadata also includes information about how information and records are used. It will keep accumulating for the lifespan of the information and records.