

ISKO Singapore – Gaynor Deal on Email Recordkeeping May 13, 2022

Edited chat transcript notes

When defining rules for organising emails, it is important to use standard terminologies in naming folders for continuity over time - otherwise emails can be lost, e.g. when staff leave.

The organisation that is the source for an email can often be inferred from the email address, but they can change their name over time.

Sorting of emails, e.g. by subject line can be useful to locate them quickly. However, the system-added prefixes such as RE: and FW: can impede this function. These prefixes should be stripped out when filing.

For internal emails the originator of the email thread is responsible for filing. For emails from outside, there should be an explicit agreement in the thread about who is responsible for filing.

When filing an email thread, it is important to remember that attachments are removed from an email using Reply, so if you are filing a thread with a RE: that originally had an attachment, it may not have the attachment.

Response from participants: mixed use of rules, some do for personal emails, some for shared email folders, some find the emails too varied for rules to be effective.

Filing into EDRMS - need standard terminology for where stuff gets filed, and need to consider who should have access to them.

One of the biggest problems with email filing in EDRMS is about finding the materials again in the system - multiple causes for findability issues - advice is to keep originals in your local email for local findability plus the organisation has a record copy.

Staff should be as familiar with the IM/RM rules of the organisation as they have to be about finance and HR rules.

MS 365 now has a records management module in the compliance centre. But do the systems developers understand how the records need to be used and managed?

Emails are “too easy” - that’s why there’s less thought around it. There is less implied formality in emails compared to creation of a separate document - emails have more conversational tone and include casual interactions. We have not been able to shake off the informality elements of email

Takeaways:

Training and awareness is very important: have been meeting with depts individually on current practices across depts - many variations in how they manage their records -

surprising that even if you have good governance and processes embedded in daily work, and good technology, at the end of the day without good awareness and training among the people, the system will fail - people are the key element.

Besides putting in place the system and processes, raising awareness, education/training and change management is still critical.

Need publicity and training around governance. Would help to have a few email disaster stories (or near misses) to make the story stick.

Need for regular and repetitive reminders to staff about email filing practices

Organisations should have Annual Records Days focused on housekeeping of email records.

We need to focus on making things pragmatic and practical for staff, not just driving rules.

Have a rep from each dept as our advocates for these initiatives. Support staff are often lumbered with records management responsibility and they may not have a voice in the dept. HOD nominated a focal persons with set criteria to be the liaison - as a result, saw a positive change in terms of makeup and buy in - no longer just a junior admin role - having an influential local person is important. Criteria for RM focal nomination: certain staff level, at least manager level onwards - middle managers - the ones who can reach seniors and juniors; they must have been with the dept for 2 years or more - familiar with the work of the dept; personality - must be approachable, willing to learn etc.

Constant incremental change very important - build record keeping into the daily routine.

Edited by Patrick Lambe