



# Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose – The Australian Records Management Case

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**Abstract.** Intrigued by the information management replacing records management phenomenon, this study aimed at shedding light on it. Relying on preserved websites, the study examined relevant contents from 2007 to early 2022. It discovered the battle between records and information, and later on information asset. This battle incurred dazzling changes in managerial considerations, yet the challenges to management – either towards records, information, information and records, or information asset – remained the same. So were the unsatisfactory outcomes. A case seemed perfect to tell the plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose story. It is our hope that future studies can gather mighty strengthen and thus settle down the records-information battle once for all.

**Keywords:** Records management · Information management · Information asset

## 1 Introduction

Records management (RM) is not native to Australia but the Australian RM has developed into a leading position internationally. It is the first country that had a national RM standard (i.e., AS 4390 – 1996 Records Management) and it contributed directly to the publication of the first international RM standard (i.e., ISO: 15489 – 2001 Information and documentation–Records management). Today, the Australian RM voice remains strong in the ISO setting and its domestic RM policies are frequently consulted by RM practitioners and researchers worldwide. Representing this Australian RM force is the National Archives of Australia (NAA), which shoulders the responsibility of “overseeing Commonwealth record-keeping” as stipulated in the Archives Act 1983 [1]. Crafting record-keeping policies and standards has been the most typical way of fulfilling that responsibility. The term record-keeping in the Archives Act does not have a designated meaning but it functions in this context as an equivalent to records management. To use the most recent version of RM definition, RM refers to the field of management

“responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records” [2]. Not an intuitive one, the definition nevertheless points out 1) the goal of RM (i.e., efficient and systematic control) and 2) the series of activities that are needed for managing records (i.e., the rest of the definition). In searching for NAA policies on artificial intelligence (AI), the emerging RM related technology and also the current focus of the InterPARES Trust Artificial Intelligence (ITrustAI) project (2021–2026), it was discovered that there were drastic changes on the NAA website relating to RM: the RM space is now an Information Management (IM) space, in which only two out of the total thirteen menu items are record(s) related, i.e., “Records authorities” and “Building trust in the public record”. The term space here refers to the aggregation of webpages that are devoted to RM or IM, and devotion here is defined by 1) the existence of an entrance page that is clearly marked by the phrase Records Management or Information Management and 2) a menu that organizes contents. A quick going-back to the Archives Act 1983 did not, however, find any principal updates on RM matters and there were no traces of information management in it. So, why this IM-replacing-RM makeover on the NAA website? Is it because that RM has changed into IM in practice yet the Archives Act has not followed up in time (which is common and understandable)? If yes, then what are the fundamental differences between RM and IM in practice, and what provided for the replacement? A study was conceived to look into these questions as a literature search for answers to them did not yield any results. It was rationalized as a component inquiry of the RM & AI study of the ITrustAI project [3], which has equally two focuses of RM and AI. The inquiry utilized a method of historical examination, taking advantage of the historical data that were made possible by digital preservation sites. This paper reports on the findings of the study.

## 2 Historical Examination

The historical examination undertaken by the study refers to the locating and analyzing of the relevant NAA webpages retrieved from the Internet Archive. The determination of relevance is rather straightforward as all webpages/contents are located within the clearly bordered RM or IM space. The locating process followed the menu items, including their orders, which we considered reflections of the NAA focuses on policies and work. The retrieval precision, i.e., the earliest page and the last page of a certain time period, cannot be guaranteed as the Internet Archive chiefly relies on auto-crawling for its collections, and any auto means has gaps. The timelines emerging from the retrievals, expressed in specific dates, are thus not absolute – despite they may give that impression. Nonetheless, as these specific dates were results of one-by-one clicking on all captures, they are largely reliable for aiding the analysis of the retrieved contents. The analysis followed the path of 1) identifying the RM contents, 2) identifying the IM contents, and 3) comparing RM and IM. The contents identifying processes paid particular attention to changes and the times of changing within the respect RM and IM time periods and the comparison looked into the entire RM to IM time period. Content-wise, the comparison consists of three aspects: 3.1) concepts of record(s) and information, i.e., the object of

the management, 3.2) managerial considerations, and 3.3) performance, i.e., the results of the considerations.

### 3 The Contents and the Changes

The contents-and-changes identifying process included the parts of RM contents and changes, IM contents and changes, From RM to IM, and The entire process.

#### 3.1 RM Contents and Changes

By the first retrievable RM page and the last retrievable RM page, we established the RM time period as from 2007-08-30 to 2016-10-18. The RM space changed its appearance around 2011-10-16, we did not, however, consider this change warranting further compartmentation. The change was only about color schemes and the arrangement of contents remained the same. In particular, the central message, i.e., the text at the center of the first page of the RM space that answered the question “Why records matter” remained unchanged. By analyzing menu items, a series of changes were discerned. On the first (retrievable) RM page, five menu items were presented: Check-up, Records authorities, Normal administrative practice, Training, and Where to get help. As the Archives Act requires NAA to provide assistance to the Australian Commonwealth institutions regarding RM matters (i.e., S5(2)(c)), we distinguished the menu items into the categories of NAA core assistance (naa-CA) and NAA supplementary assistance (naa-SA). As naa-CA items correspond to representative RM activities (i.e., what RM does and how it's been doing), we used their NAA-given titles in our analysis to indicate their core assistance nature, e.g., Records authorities, and did not individually label them as also naa-CA to avoid repetition. Conversely, we used the naa-SA label for items of a more general nature and grouped them mostly *prima facie*, e.g., naa-SA (Training; Where to get help). In our analytical tables (Tables 1, 2 and 3), we used symbols in addition to table column titles for analysis demonstration: ‘+’ indicates a new item that is added to a previous label, e.g., naa-SA (+ Publication) and ‘→’ indicates a newer version, an expansion, or a reduction regarding a previous item, e.g., (Check-up) → Check-up 2.0. Table 1 summarizes the times of changing after the first RM page and the changes.

**Table 1.** RM contents and changes

{2007-08-30, the 1<sup>st</sup> RM page:  
naa-CA: Check-up; Records authorities; Normal administrative practice  
naa-SA: Training, where to get help}

<b>Time</b>	<b>The updated</b>	<b>New item</b>	<b>Removed item</b>	<b>The same</b>
2007-10-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• naa-SA (+ Publication)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create, capture &amp; describe</li> <li>• Keep, destroy, or transfer</li> <li>• Secure, store &amp; preserve</li> <li>• Access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Records authorities</li> <li>• Normal administrative practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check-up</li> </ul>
2008-04-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information management framework</li> <li>• IT systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 2007-10-11 items</li> </ul>
2011-03-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• → Check-up 2.0</li> <li>• naa-SA (+ Glossary + Register for updates)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other 2008-04-13 items</li> </ul>
2011-10-06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• naa-SA (→ Training and events; → Publication and tools)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic information and records management</li> <li>• Managing your agency records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other 2011-03-11 items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check-up 2.0</li> <li>• naa-SA (Where to go for help; GAIN Australia)</li> </ul>
2012-05-27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital transition policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other 2011-10-06 items</li> </ul>
2014-06-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• → Check-up Digital [4]</li> <li>• Naa-SA (→ Training, events, and development)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• naa-SA (A–Z of information and records management)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• naa-SA (Publications and tools; Where to go for help; GAIN Australia)</li> <li>• All other 2012-05-27 items</li> </ul>
2014-12-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• → Digital transition and digital continuity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other 2014-06-25 items</li> </ul>
2016-03-02 (till 2016-10-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• → Digital Continuity 2020</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information governance</li> <li>• RM agency survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other 2014-12-17 items</li> </ul>

From Table 1, we observed that, during this period, eight times of changing had taken place and the changes occurred with both the NAA core and supplementary assistances. The degrees of change, however, are significantly different. For clarity, we further labeled the two parts of NAA core assistance into managerial considerations (i.e., what RM should do; naa-CA-mc) and performance (how RM has been doing; naa-CA-p). We observed that naa-SA and naa-CA-p were both rather steady and naa-CA-mc was the main part of change. While individual items were updated, replaced, or added, naa-SA had always concentrated on providing general information on the core assistance and offering customized help when needed for both institutions and individual RM professionals. Like the supplementary assistance, naa-CA-p, representatively the Check-up tool developed by NAA for agencies' self-assessment of RM matters, had been in

existence from the first page to the last page and only advanced in versions (i.e., from Check-up to Check-up 2.0 to Check-up Digital). In 2016, another performance tool occurred on the menu, i.e., the RM agency survey, which was devised to gather more information from agencies on RM matters. According to NAA, the RM agency survey was of a “whole-of-government” nature, focusing on NAA’s understanding of issues “common to agencies across the Australian Government” [5].

The changes to naa-CA-mc are clearly indicated by the new and removed items and we described them generally as ‘jumping between records and information’. By considering 1) whether or not “records” is in the name of item and 2) the order between records and information when they both occur (i.e., “records and information” or “information and records”), we identified the following changes in terms of (dis/re) appearance:

- 2007-10-11: records disappeared with Records authorities.
- 2008-04-13: information appeared (in the new “Information management framework” and “I(nformation) T(echnology) systems”);
- 2011-10-06:
  - information and records appeared (in the new “Strategic information and records management”);
  - records reappeared (in the new “Managing your agency records”);
- 2016-03-02: information appeared (in the new “Information governance”).

From these (dis/re) appearances, it is clear that changes happened and happened to both the object of management (i.e., from records to information and records) and management itself (i.e., from management to management and governance).

### 3.2 IM Contents and Changes

By the first retrievable IM page, we established the beginning of the IM space as at 2016-11-13. As the IM space is still current, we used the end of our data collection time as the end of the IM space for the purpose of our study, which is 2022-01-30. Like the RM space, the IM space went through one site change; unlike the RM space, however, this site change went through not only colors but also the way of displaying contents. In addition to a drop-down menu, there were three boxes under the central message that were used to highlight three menu items. Moreover, the central message was changed. As such, we deemed this change worth compartmentation and accordingly divided the IM space into two phases: the first, from 2016-11-13 to 2019-01-29 and the second, from 2019-10-31 to 2021-01-16. Table 2 below lists, for the first IM phase, the times of changing and the changes, following the column titles of Table 1.

For the first IM phase, five times of changing occurred after the first IM page. Similar to the RM space, naa-SA and naa-CA-p remained steady, with the former appearing in a more consolidated manner and the latter advanced into the version of Check-up PLUS. For naa-CA-mc, the ‘jumping between records and information’ ceased and two trends emerged: 1) records (in “Records authorities”) remained steady (i.e., from the first page to the last page), and 2) items relating to information were continuously being

**Table 2.** IM contents and changes of the first phase

{2016-11-13, the 1<sup>st</sup> page of the IM first phase:  
naa-CA: Digital Continuity 2020; Information governance; Check-up Digital  
Records authorities; Managing information  
naa-SA: Training and events; Support}

Time	The updated	New item	Removed item	The same
2017-01-01	• naa-SA (→ Support and professional development)	• None	• None	• naa-SA (Training and events) • All other 2016-11-13 items)
2017-1-21	• None	• None	• naa-SA (Training and events)	• All other 2017-01-01 items
2017-05-09	• None	• Information Management standard	• None	• All other 2017-01-21 items
2018-05-29	• → Check-up PLUS (2018)	• None	• •None	• All other 2017-05-09 items
2019-01-29	• None	• Building interoperability	• None	• All other 2018-05-29 items

added (e.g., Information Management standard), including sometimes items that did not have the term information in their names, e.g., Building interoperability. Building interoperability aimed at making “information, systems and processes to be interoperable” or “information and data between different systems” exchangeable [6]. During this time period, the object of management appeared to be completely information yet management and governance were both still present.

Table 3 lists the times of changing and the changes for the second phase following mostly the column titles of Table 1, but not all of them: the column Removed Item was eliminated as there was only one item that belonged to this category (i.e., Digital Continuity 2020, which is attached to the The Same column) and the column The Highlighted was added to reflect the changed way of content display, which the study considered reflections of policy emphases.

For the second phase of the IM space, five times of changing occurred after the first page but four of them are related to one subject, i.e., the Building trust in the public record policy. Of the naa-CA-mc category, this policy and its developing process were highlighted on the IM space home page, which became the other record occurrence of the two record(s) occurrences for this time period. Records authorities continued its persistence, appearing from the first page to the last page and occupying one of the highlighted areas. The trend of adding information-related item also continued, here

**Table 3.** IM contents and changes of the second phase

{2019-10-31, the 1<sup>st</sup> page of the second IM phase:

- naa-CA: Digital Continuity 2020; Information Management standards  
Information governance; Building interoperability; Check-up PLUS 2019; Records  
authorities; Information management legislation; Information management policies; Types of  
information and systems
- naa-SA: Agency Service Centre; GAIN Australia
- The Highlighted (from left to right): Introduction to the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy;  
Check-up PLUS 2019; Records authorities }

<b>Time</b>	<b>The updated</b>	<b>New item</b>	<b>The same</b>	<b>The highlighted</b>
2020-08-01	• None	• None	• All other 2019-10-31 items	• Same (Introduction to the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy) • Have your say on our next policy for government; • Same (Records authorities)
2020-09-20	• None	• None	• All other 2020-08-01 items	• Same • Our next policy for government (from 2021) • Same
2020-10-31	• → Check-up PLUS (2021) [7]	• None	• All other 2020-09-20 items	• Same • Building trust in the public record policy (from 2021) • Same
2021-01-16	• None	• Building trust in the public record	• All other 2020-10-31 items except Digital Continuity 2020	• Building trust in the public record • Same (Records authorities) • Check-up PLUS (2021) [8]
2021-04-01 (till 2022-01-04)	• None	• Information management and data capabilities	• All other 2021-01-16 items	• Same

with the Information management and data capabilities. For the naa-CA-p, Check-up PLUS is now at its 2021 version and the naa-SA remained exactly the same throughout.

### 3.3 From RM to IM

As the above tables sort out changes within the established time periods respectively, there are gaps between RM and the first IM phase as well as the first IM phase and the second IM phase. Between 2016-10-18 the last RM page and 2016-11-13 the first page of the IM first phase, items were both removed and added:

- Removed: Strategic information and records management; Managing your agency records; naa-SA (Publications and tools; Where to go for help; GAIN Australia; A-Z of information and records management);
- Added: Records authorities; Managing information; naa-SA (Support)

Between 2019-10-08 the last page of the first IM phase and 2019-10-31 the first page of the second IM phase, items were as well both removed and added:

- Removed: Managing information; naa-SA (Support and professional development)
- Added: Information management legislation; Information management policies; Types of information and systems; naa-SA (Agency Service Centre; GAIN Australia)

By combining these moved and added items, we identified 1) the time when Records authorities was added to the IM space (i.e., 2016-11-13) and 2) the time when the less formal expression Managing information was replaced by formal ones such as Information management legislation and Information management policies (i.e., 2019-10-31).

### 3.4 The Entire Process

For the entire process, we observed that:

- The object of management changed from records, information and records, to information.
- The managerial considerations changed accordingly from centering on records to more and more on information.
  1. Information governance emerged alongside information management (standards, legislation, and policies);
  2. The only survival records item is Records authorities, which was removed from menu during the initial emergence of information management within the RM time period and added back during the first phase of IM;
- Performance information had been collected throughout.



## 4 The Comparison

Following the above observations, we compared relevant specifics for furthering understanding.

### 4.1 Object of Management

As the object of management, either record(s) or information should have a formal definition. The situation, however, is not that simple. First, record(s) has a formal definition, yet information does not have any; second, record(s) has more than one formal definitions; and third, information is used to explain record(s). Both the Archives Act and the AS ISO 15489 RM standard formally define records, with the former stipulating a record as “a document, or an object, in any form (including any electronic form) that is, or has been, kept by reason of: (a) any information or matter that it contains or that can be obtained from it; or (b) its connection with any event, person, circumstance or thing” (s3) [1] and the latter characterizes record(s) as “information created, received and maintained as evidence and as an asset by an organization or person, in pursuit of legal obligations or in the transaction of business” [2]. Neither the wordings nor the meanings are compatible with each other entirely. For our analysis, we recognized that in comparison with information (which, again, does not have a definition in either the Archives Act or the RM standard), record(s) 1) has a more concrete and sometimes physical format and 2) record(s) contains/carries information.

NAA's approach towards the meanings of records and information was to put out a central message, conveying also the significance and affordance of their management. The central message of the RM space explained records by the following points:

- (RM-1) Records are an essential tool of good business and efficient administration. For government agencies, records document what is done and why. They provide information for planning and decision-making and evidence of government accountability;
- (RM-2) In the long term, some of the records your agency makes will be retained as national archives and so become part of Australia's documentary heritage;
- (RM-3) They are often subject to specific legal requirements [9].

The central message of the first phase of the IM space (IMI) made the following points:

- (IMI-1) Information and records are important government assets. They support planning and service delivery.
- (IMI-2) Good information and records will help reduce risks for your agency;
- (IMI-3) Managing and storing information and records in the right place means they will be protected and easily found;
- (IMI-4) All information created, sent and received as part of your work for the Australian Government is a record;
- (IMI-5) In the long term, some of the records your agency creates will be retained as national archives and become part of Australia's documentary history.

The central message of the second phase of the IM space (IMII) made the following points:

- (IMII-1) Managing and storing information, data and records in the right place and the right way means they will be protected and easily found; and
- (IMII-2) At the National Archives of Australia, we provide advice and support to help everyone working in government to achieve this goal.

From RM to IMI to IMII, the clarity of these messages progressively declined. The RM central message made clear what records could offer (RM-1 and RM-2) and how records were controlled (RM-3), yet the IM messages clouded the “offer” part increasingly and retired the “control” part entirely. The IMI message caused confusions by adding information to records without explaining why (IMI-1, IMI-2 and IMI-3) and the IMII message caused further confusions by adding data in between information and records without explaining why (IMII-1). The IMI message was clearer than the IMII one because it defined the relationship between records and information (i.e., IMI-4) and it maintained records’ affordance as part of the nation’s documentary history (RM-2 and IMI-5) – a noble destination of records. These efforts disappeared in the IMII message; instead, an emphasis on NAA’s role appeared (IMII-2), which was unprecedented in this NAA RM-IM history.

These messages seem to reflect also the changed thoughts behind the NAA’s approaches. We recognized the following: 1) highlighting legal requirement vs not mentioning it, 2) rationalizing systematically vs concisely, 3) limiting to the present vs including also the future, and 4) focusing on agencies vs individual employees.

## 4.2 Managerial Considerations

**The Pure RM.** The item names in the above tables indicated that managerial considerations for records and information are mostly intermingled. For example, Information management framework and Information governance appeared during the RM period (i.e., 2007-08-30–2016–10-17) and the item Records authorities had been in existence throughout the entire IM period (i.e., 2016-11-13–2022-01-04). As such, it seemed that only the beginning of the RM period (i.e., 2007-08-30–2008-04-13) is fully and clearly RM focused: the considerations for creating, capturing, describing, keeping, destroying, transferring, and preserving were all about records [10]. Information, as stipulated by the legal definition of records, remained to be “contained” in records (Archives Act 1983, 2022). The adding of information to the RM space destroyed this clarity as its advent was not accompanied by any explanations – not even a definition of information that could help with some level of comprehension. The adding was literally to place information next to records, i.e., “information and records” or “records and information” (which is overall rare) [11]. It is clear that there was a battle between information and records in terms of occurrence, which is logically relevant to substance as substance requires occurrence to display it.

**Records over Information, or not?** On the pages of Information management framework [12] and IT systems [13], records – not records and information, just records – dominated. Information management framework during this time period (i.e., 2007/10/27 – 2011/09/03) was clearly about records, so was IT systems during its existence (i.e., 2007/10/28 – 2011/09/03). Therefore, the term information here appeared as a cover only, under which were indeed managerial considerations for records. Moreover, the pure RM items of the RM beginning time were carried on for this time period.

The next round is Strategic information and records management (2011/10/14–2016/07/30) replacing Information management framework and IT systems. The occurrence of “information and records” largely increased and the term records was moved to the label, making one more “information and records”. Managerial considerations towards information and records could not be distinguished as nowhere differences could be discerned when they were together. For example, when requiring that “your agency should have an information and records management strategy”, it explained “strategy” as “systematic approach” but offered nothing on how information and records should function respectively or together against the systematic approach [14]. Another example is the part What are information and records management policies and procedures?, a place where one expect to find useful information regarding the differences between RM and IM. Yet, the first sentence beneath it stated only as “Policies and procedures should be approved by the head of agency or other senior management” [14], apparently not answering the “what”. On the other hand, records evidently received much more attention than information: 1) Managing your agency records (2011/10/08 – 2016/04/17) co-existed with Strategic information and records management, 2) records occurred frequently alone (e.g., “Linking business to records” and “Set out the principles for managing records”) yet information did only once (i.e., Information architecture), 3) under Information architecture, the content was about both information and records (e.g., “An information architecture outlines how information and records are used, described and organized across the whole of your agency”) [14], and 4) the section Standards and legislation was entirely about records (e.g., “Records and legislation” and “Records in Evidence”) [15].

This records-dominating (in spite of the information presence) situation started to tilt when information governance appeared as a submenu item under Strategic information and records management at 2013/04/11. On the Information governance page, information (e.g., “information assets” and “digital information” in addition to “information governance”) dominated. Only a handful records occurred when accountability was being referred to and only one independent occurrence, i.e., records manager [16]. At 2015/11/13<sup>1</sup>, Information governance moved up to the RM main menu, explaining Information governance as “an approach to managing information assets across an entire organization to support its business outcomes” [17], same as the one on the 2013/04/11 page. It must be pointed out that one of the two objects of governance, i.e., information asset (the other being digital information) was not defined or explained. Its difference

<sup>1</sup> Note that in Table 1, the date for Information governance’s occurrence on the menu is 2016/03/02. The discrepancy is caused by the different tracing URLs. For Table 1, the URL for records management was used and here, the URL for Information governance was used. The rest is all on the Wayback Machine.

with records, therefore, remained unknown (as well). Moreover, records were still being placed next to information, raising the question as to the differences between “information asset” and “information and records”. Also, the question about the differences between management and governance emerged. From the above explanation for information governance (i.e., governance is “an approach to managing ...”), management seemed to be synonymous to governance. If so, then why were there existences of both information management and information governance?

Despite of all these confusions, we recognized the trend/intention of intensifying the presence of information and information asset over records.

**Information over Records, or not?** The dividing of the IM space into two phases was due to the way of content display, not the substance of the contents. Both the phases conspicuously focused on information and the second one formalized (or fortified) the intention of the first one in terms of menu item names. Apart from the persistent Information governance, the major information items of the first phase were Information Management Standards and Managing information. The Information Management Standards page excluded any occurrence of records [18]; however, the ideas for both the IM benefits and principles were identical to those for records except the replacement of the term records with the term “business information”. For example, both records and business information were stated essential for government accountability [19] and both records and business information were required to be created, described, transferred, etc. [20].

The Building interoperability page followed the suit of the Information Management Standards, i.e., to exclude records altogether. The difference between these two is that the former introduced data into the information focus as building interoperability “means you can exchange information and data between different systems” [21]. Accordingly, Data governance and management appeared, characterized as “an essential component of information governance” [22]. If this characterization tells minimally the relationship between data and information (part of), it does not, however, help with the conceptual understanding of these terms: what are the differences between them? By extension, why are they better than records to be the object of management?

The IM second phase removed the still records-dominating item Managing information and added four more information related items to its menu, i.e., Information management legislation, Information management policies, Types of information and systems, and Information management and data capabilities, which gave rise to the above information-intensified observation. However, these new items did not follow the suit of Information Management Standard and Building interoperability in terms of excluding any occurrence of records in their contents. Under Information management legislation were acts relating to records, i.e., the Archives Act 1983 and the Archives Regulations [23], and the opening sentence for the Types of information and systems stated that “Business systems create and manage digital information and capture information about records” [24]. The Information management policies page featured the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy, which “enables the integration of information governance principles and practices into the work of agencies” [25], exhibiting a tie with Information governance. As we observed above, Information governance did not exclude records but used (while in small quantity) the expression of “information and records”. The Information governance in the IM second phase kept still records, but used not only “records and

information” but also “records management” [26], which was frequently seen in the pure RM phase but rare subsequently. The Information management and data capabilities “outline[s] the skills and knowledge that employees and their organizations need to create and manage information assets (records, information and data) effectively to meet business and accountability requirements” [27]. As such, it included certainly records. Moreover, the skill and knowledge requirements were devised based on all other information items such as Information legislation and Information governance [28], it therefore would be difficult for it not to include any content relating to records. By putting all these together, we recognized that the intensity of information taking over records was noticeably softened by the contents underneath the item names.

**The Policy That Travelled Through RM and IM.** As indicated by the above three tables, the Digital Continuity 2020 Policy had been an important policy for a long time, running from 2016-03-02 (in Table 1) to 2021-10-27 (in Table 3), across both the RM and IM periods. It had occupied one of the three boxes of highlight during the second IM phase till its replacement by the Building trust in the public record policy. We examined the following four versions of the policy with the hope to shed light on the records-information-records puzzle: the 2016-03-02 one (DC2020-2016, first time on the RM main), the 20170122 one (DC2020-2017, first time on the menu of the IM first phase), the 2019-10-31 one (DC2020-2019, first time on the menu of the IM second phase), and the 2021-10-21 (DC2020-2021, last time of our data collection period). Also, due to the statement in DC2020-2016 that “The Digital Continuity 2020 policy builds on the Digital Transition Policy” [29], we examined this Digital Transition Policy as well.

The Digital transition policy was first approved in 2011 and remained valid at the time when DC2020 2016 version arrived. The purpose of this policy is “to move Australian Government agencies to digital information and records management for efficiency purposes” [30]. As indicated by this purpose statement, this policy concerned itself with records and “information and records”, conforming seamlessly to the “records over information” situation that was evident during the Strategic information management and Managing your agency records time period. The DC2020 2016 version, however, seemed to have created a 50%-50% situation, where information dominated yet records appeared to be the endgame or destination of information. The term information was used for all important places, e.g., “enables the integration of information governance principles and practices into the work of agencies” (purpose), “Agencies will manage their information as an asset” (outcome), and “Information is valued” (principle)). Under the Authority section, the policy stated that by the Archives Act, records “cover all information in digital and non-digital formats that is created, used or received as part of government business” [31], which corresponded to one of the points made by the central message of the first phase of IM (i.e., IMI-4). Which is over which? Challenging to say. We, however, asked this question: why was information needed – in fact, all over the place – when there was a legal concept for record(s)? As the other three versions (i.e., DC2020 2017, DC2020 2019, and DC2020 2021) carried on the content of the DC2020 2016, our “over” judgment remained uncertain, and our question remained unanswered.

The successor of DC2020, i.e., the Building trust in the public record policy 2021, continued the records-information swinging situation. In this policy, information asset – not records, not information – dominated. However, this term “refer to records, information and data collectively”, its Terminology section explained [32]. This new term, therefore, made no contribution to the existent situation in terms of clarifying confusions such as those concerning the differences between records and information. Were managerial considerations applicable to information asset equally applicable to records and information? If so, why are records and information still needed? If not, how can them be collectively managed? Moreover, the full title of the policy, i.e., Building trust in the public record: managing information and data for government and community, seemed to suggest that record covered information and data – an idea that was promulgated in DC2020.

### 4.3 Performance

The Check-up series are online self-assessment tools designed by NAA for agencies, specifically, questionnaires for self-administration. Early assessments, i.e., those by Check-up and Check-up 2.0, are only accessible to agencies. Later on, NAA started to produce summary reports and published them online, which include 2016 Check-up Digital Analysis of 2015 Survey Data and the 2018, 2019, and 2020 Check-up PLUS assessment. As the design of the questions was based on NAA intentions, these reports could not be strictly considered as performance reports. Moreover, as they are self-administered questionnaires, accuracy cannot be guaranteed across the board. Nevertheless, their content would still shed light on the management situation. Our examination of these reports focused on the most problematic areas, or as the 2016 report stated, “areas that require ongoing attention” [33]; or as the PLUS reports stated, areas that were at the “lowest maturity level” [34]. We observed that from the 2015 report to all the PLUS reports, areas relating to retention and disposition (where the item Records authorities is the soul) and later on information governance (one that our study identified as mostly confusing) had persistently remained as the most problematic areas.

## 5 Conclusions

Our study was triggered by the IM replacing RM phenomenon and we aimed at why. We found out that RM in practice had not changed into IM because the differences between IM and RM had never been clear, from the start to end. In other words, the particularities of managerial considerations towards information could not be discerned. High level justifications or explanations regarding the replacement did not seem to exist either. As such, we could not distill answers for the why question. What we have discovered seemed to be a perfect case of *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*: behind the dazzling changes (i.e., the large number of managerial considerations), the matter (managerial challenges and outcomes) remained the same.

We still hope future studies – by us or anyone interested – can do better in coming up with empirical explanations for the replacement. Given the conceptual confusions here,

however, we expect a much more systematic approach: we would need insights from the RM and IM practitioners, from those who led the dazzling changes, from those who implemented (or refused to implement) those changes, and the public who will be much more impacted by government decisions in the artificial intelligence world. A daunting task, but one that needs to be done.

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