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Management of records —
Code of practice

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Foreword

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Presentational conventions

The provisions of this standard are presented in roman (i.e. upright) type. Its recommendations are expressed in sentences in which the principal auxiliary verb is "should".

Commentary, explanation and general informative material is presented in smaller italic type, and does not constitute a normative element.

The word "should" is used to express recommendations of this standard. The word "may" is used in the text to express permissibility, e.g. as an alternative to the primary recommendation of the clause. The word "can" is used to express possibility, e.g. a consequence of an action or an event.

Notes and commentaries are provided throughout the text of this standard. Notes give references and additional information that are important but do not form part of the recommendations. Commentaries give background information.

Where words have alternative spellings, the preferred spelling of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary is used (e.g. "organization" rather than "organisation").

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Introduction

Organizations produce, receive and accumulate, in the delivery of their operations and activities, data, documents and information (or a combination of these and other related terms), together with e-mails, text messages and other electronic communications; they show who did what, when. This British Standard refers to these collectively as records and sets out recommended good practice for an organization to follow in their management.

Organizations need to identify, create and capture specific records and record types in order to meet legal, regulatory and business requirements. Organizations need to know what records they have and to be able to readily retrieve them. When retrieved, organizations need good quality records and trusted, authoritative sources; and to be able to extract value from the contents of those records, where appropriate. An organization needs to retain its records as long as required to meet its legal and regulatory obligations and business needs; to identify and preserve records of continuing value; and to regularly, systemically and securely destroy other records, particularly records consisting of, or including, personal information or data which an organization might no longer have a business reason to retain. At the same time, destruction, modification or movement of records or sets of records need to be able to be halted when directed, for example by the courts or regulators.

Changing technology, systems, platforms and software challenge the very idea of what a record is. A record created through completion and submission of an electronic form might be broken down and stored as data elements, within one, more or many databases. It might not exist in a substantive form. The data elements and how they fit together need to be documented and fixed together so that an organization is able to reconstruct the record, to retrieve and process it, retain it to meet legal and regulatory obligations and business needs and possibly retain it permanently, if it has continuing value, or securely destroy it.

Effective management of records is key to good corporate governance, protecting an organization's rights, preserving the accumulated knowledge and experience of current and former workers as well as supporting an organization in meeting its legal and regulatory obligations, and day-to-day business needs and objectives. The principles and recommended practice in this British Standard are intended to help an organization to deliver effective management of records as well as to leverage the information value of its records and to drive business improvement and innovation. Organizations are encouraged to view their records as key strategic and operational assets and top management to see it as their business to establish and maintain direct oversight of the management of the organization's records.

This British Standard supports and enables effective management of an organization's records through helping to integrate management into the wider processes of the organization and through knitting together the range of applicable standards. It supports related areas such as delivering effective information security and implementation of BS EN ISO/IEC 27002 and, in turn, the implementation of BS EN ISO/IEC 27002 and other related standards support the implementation of this standard. There are references in this document to standards which provide useful further information: these include BS 10008-1 and BS 10010. Other useful standards are listed in the Bibliography.

1   Scope

This British Standard sets out recommended good practice for an organization to follow in the management of its records.

In the course of operations and activities, people and IT systems in an organization produce and accumulate what might be called data, documents, information, documented information or records, or a combination of all these, and other, related terms. For the purposes of this British Standard, all such organizational outputs produced and accumulated in the course of operations and activities are records – regardless of the terms that are used for them, their medium or format, the type of technology or system on which they are created and captured, when they are created, why they are captured and maintained, or their value to people or to an organization.

People and organizations might set out with an intention to produce and accumulate some records (for example, a minute of a meeting or financial accounts) but also produce drafts, working notes and similar material as part of conducting operations and activities. Some of what an organization produces and accumulates it might only label as records at the point that they are added to an IT system, such as an electronic document and records management system, or other form of content management system. Some organizations might separate out what is produced and accumulated in some media and formats – for example, e-mail, texts and other electronic communications – and manage them separately. For the purposes of this British Standard, all these outputs – at whatever point they first appear – are records.

NOTE   *The description of records used in this British Standard might be seen by some to be a broader use of the term than that defined in BS ISO 15489-1, potentially extending its usage to include aspects from other fields; for example, information management, information asset management or information governance.*

An individual record is a snapshot of an act at a position fixed in time, how things were at some moment in the past. It is a persistent representation of an occurrence, it provides a trace or evidence of an action or decision – in short, a record shows who did what, when.

This British Standard applies to digital, electronic and physical records irrespective of the media or formats used to create, capture, process or store them or the type of information they contain. It includes the management of records on IT systems (for example, databases, electronic document and records management systems, content management systems, CCTV and voice recording systems, business and information systems, websites and social media platforms) as well as physical records.

This British Standard is intended to be applicable to all organizations regardless of the type, size and nature of its activities. The degree of detail and complexity in tools, processes and records that an organization develops and maintains to meet the recommendations varies, depending on the organization's operating environment, size and complexity.

This British Standard is intended for use by those responsible for managing an organization's records. Workers in related areas who have been asked to take the lead operational role in the management of records but who might not be familiar with principles and good practice for the management of records might find it a useful foundation. This standard can also provide those tasked with supporting specific areas of the management of records (for example, those developing IT systems being used to capture, process and store records) with an understanding of the wider framework.