Office of the
State Archivist

Information classification tools

IMPLEMENTATION TOOL

Introduction

This fact sheet outlines classification tools for information and records management. The purpose of classification is to create a logical, uniform approach and common language for managing information and records.

Information classification supports:

- search and retrieval of information
- security and protection of confidential, personal and sensitive information
- business analytics and reporting
- efficiencies in identifying information of low business value, or time expired records that may be appropriately destroyed
- implementation of e-discovery strategies and auto-classification
- compliance with organisational policy
- documentation of administrative history.

Multiple classification schemes can be applied to the same information. For example:

- security classification categorises information according to its level of restriction or sensitivity
- business classification supports management of records according to its business context within the organisation
- data classification enables the organisation to share information (for example, Tim Berner-Lee's Linked Open Data 5-star classification).

Information classification schemes can be simple or complex, hierarchal or associative, capturing semantic or contextual relationships.

This fact sheet concentrates on business classification.

Business classification scheme (BCS)

Business Classification Scheme, Records Classification Scheme and File Plan are terms often used interchangeably. In practice, a business classification scheme is usually combined with a file plan to achieve standardised file naming and arrangement.

Tasmanian Government

A business classification scheme is a representation of the business activity performed by an organisation. It is a product of the analysis of business activities (functional analysis). It is presented as a hierarchical model consisting of several levels:

- Top level – the business function
- Second level – activities constituting the function
- Third level – groups of transactions that take place within each activity.

A business classification scheme typically falls into one of the following four categories:

Functional

This is based on an analysis of the unique business functions and activities of an organisation, independent of the organisation's administrative structure. Since core organisational functions change less often than organisational structures, this approach is often implemented in records management systems. It is easier to manage records disposal actions because a single transaction is captured on one file. For example, records documenting banking transactions are kept together, and records and communications with creditors and debtors are kept together. One has seven-year retention and the other two years.

Subject

Subject or theme-based classification groups information so the user can access all the activities under a single subject term. For example, property or location. It is often used in paper-based recordkeeping systems. Using this approach can make implementing records disposal actions more difficult. This is because many business transactions are captured on one file ('big bucket files').

Organisational

Based on organisational administrative structures, this approach is commonly used for network security access models. It is easy for users to understand. It is subject to frequent change, so does not capture business context or continuity of information well. This can result in information duplication and business inefficiencies.

Hybrid

This approach may incorporate the functional-based (Function-Activity) model at the top levels of the hierarchy. It allows a mix of topic, transaction and subject-based elements at the third level to suit business and user needs. A hybrid approach can accommodate case files and project files.

Functional thesaurus

A thesaurus groups terms according to similarity of meaning. It helps users find the most suitable term. A functional thesaurus is a controlled list of organisational terms linked by relationships. It builds on and extends an organisation's business classification scheme.

A functional thesaurus captures language and terms that describe unique or core business functions and activities. A functional thesaurus also defines terms not used for classifying and titling records. Adding 'non-preferred terms' guides users to the 'preferred' terms that should be used.

A functional thesaurus provides more navigational paths for users than a business classification scheme. It is complex to develop, implement and maintain.

Keyword thesaurus

A thesaurus of general terms based on the keyword classification method is *Keyword AAA*. This was developed by NSW State Archives and Records. *Keyword AAA* is designed for use in classifying, titling and indexing many types of records. It covers only those administrative functions

and activities common to most organisations. *Keyword AAA* was often used in classification tool development. For example, the *Disposal Schedule for common administrative functions (DA2157)* is based on *Keyword AAA*.

Keyword for Councils is the local government equivalent of *Keyword AAA*. This was also developed by NSW State Archives and Records. It aims to cover functions performed by local government authorities, and administrative functions. This means that Councils generally do not need to add their own specific functional terms. However, geographical, municipal and/or jurisdictional differences may apply. Councils may wish to add or amend terms to suit the Tasmanian environment. For example, the *Disposal Schedule for records of local government councils (DA2200)* is based on *Keyword for Councils*.

Merged thesaurus

A single alphabetical list of terminology for both general administrative and core functional terms, used to classify records. For example, merging an internally developed thesaurus of functional terms with a product like *Keyword AAA* may cover all information assets managed by the organisation.

Metadata schema

The term ‘schema’ may be used interchangeably with ‘standards’.

A metadata schema is not necessarily hierarchical. It can capture other relationships, for example, semantic or contextual relationships. Metadata capture can be automated, and the same metadata can support many uses.

A criticism of business classification schemes is that they are not easily understood by users. Metadata schemas often support more user-centric choices, or specific knowledge domains.

Implementation methods include:

Content tagging

Tagging allows users to collectively classify and find information by adding metadata. Free tagging is where terms are derived from users classifying information using words and phrases that are meaningful to them. This builds a set of key words or hash tags that can be ranked by popularity.

Structured lists

Users choose from a simple structured list instead of making up their own key words, which may be easier and more effective. Many business systems provide this functionality.

Rules-based

This involves using software to analyse metadata and content based on customised rules, to match the conditions of those rules. For example, word frequency, text location within a document or subject line in an email, etc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fact sheet is based on the following, now withdrawn, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office publication:

- *Advice 6: information classification tools*.

CONTACT US

Office of the State Archivist | https://osa.tas.gov.au | enquiries@osa.tas.gov.au | 03 6165 5581

Information classification tools is part of the *Tasmanian Government Information Management Framework.* It supports the *Information and records management standard.* This is a living document and we will make minor changes as needed. If you notice anything that needs updating, please let us know.

Document Development History

Version	Date	Comments
1.1	12/01/2026	New template, URLs updated, formatting changes, minor edits
1	28/09/2020	Initial release