

Speeches and statements  
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# **Recordkeeping as a Pillar of Public Memory, Accountability, and Administration: The Canadian Experience**

**Canada–Japan Symposium on e–Government  
Document Management**



Library and Archives  
Canada

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# **Recordkeeping as a Pillar of Public Memory, Accountability, and Administration: The Canadian Experience**

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## **Daniel J. Caron**

### **Deputy Head and Librarian and Archivist of Canada and Chair, Heads of Federal Agencies**

Daniel J. Caron joined the federal public service in 1982. In 2009, he was appointed Librarian and Archivist of Canada. One year later, he launched the modernization initiative to ensure that Library and Archives Canada could meet the multiple challenges of the digital environment. This initiative is a call for collaboration, epistemologically grounded institutional policies and policy driven decisions. In addition to his organizational experience, Mr. Caron is a seasoned author and speaker on public administration and issues related to information and memory both in Canada and abroad. Mr. Caron has also taught in several Canadian universities. He holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Economics from the Université Laval, and obtained a doctorate in Applied Human Sciences from the Université de Montréal.



**Canada-Japan Symposium on e-Government Document Management, National Libraries and Archives: Building New Frameworks to Preserve and Disseminate Intellectual Assets**

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished representatives of the Government of Japan, to whom we owe the organization of today's event, honoured guests.

Thank you to the members of this symposium for inviting me to share my thoughts on the Canadian experience in redefining the nature, substance and dimensions of public memory identified and preserved by Library and Archives Canada.

As you can imagine, your choice of theme for your symposium "e-Government Document Management" is a topic close to my heart.

Today, more than ever, we are living in a world that is becoming self-documenting.

Our lives are constantly recorded through surveillance and sousveillance, and we also continuously record ourselves at work, at play, in public and private conversation.

Our society has become fully aware of the importance of information.

Moreover, information resource processing and media literacy have become

fundamental assets to our society.

As well, it is generally recognized that a merger of technology, economics, information, organizations and people has intensified social transformation and brought about fundamental changes.



This has also resulted in substantive transformation within the administrative operations and culture of Public Administration.

For instance, in the midst of all this production and consumption of information within societies, two basic questions emerge:

First, what are the impacts of this transformation on the administrative operations and culture of public institutions responsible for identifying and making accessible a society's documentary heritage?

Second, how do these impacts affect the organizational business decisions

and activities to provide for the identification, capture, preparation, description, management and discovery of information resources as a deliberately constructed corpus of public memory preserved within a dedicated repository?

Drawing on the recent Canadian experiences, I wish to explore these questions through the emergence of recordkeeping as a pillar of a public administration that is accountable and responsible governance under the rule of law.

To situate this discourse, let me first present the Canadian institutional arrangements for the administration of the state.

The legislative, judicial and executive branches of government in Canada define the form and character of our democracy.

They represent the intent of our laws to enshrine everyone within fundamental rights, where everyone is subject to the law, and where the supremacy of the constitution is safeguarded by judicial review.

As Canada is a constitutional monarchy, the symbolic head of the executive is the Governor General.

In practice, the Prime Minister and his or her Cabinet comprise the active political executive, which is supported by central agencies, departments and

the administrative role of the Public Service of Canada.

Ministers, Deputy Ministers and the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada each have particular authority for public sector management.

Ministers and Deputy Ministers have authority to manage the people, resources and activities of their departments toward the objectives set out in legislative mandates and government policy.

The Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada functions as the management board of the Government of Canada and has the authority to ensure that the government, as a whole, is managed in a coherent and effective manner.

Library and Archives Canada functions as the repository of the authentic location of state memory and is responsible for making Canada's documentary heritage the most representative as possible, well-preserved and accessible to the greatest possible number of Canadians, both now and in the future.

It does this by reporting to Parliament through the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

To fulfill its mandate, Library and Archives Canada has recently been empowered by the development of a *Directive on Recordkeeping* for the Government of Canada.



In particular, the Government of Canada's *Policy on Information Management* defines recordkeeping as a framework of accountability and stewardship in which records are created, captured and managed as a vital business asset and knowledge resource to support effective decision making and achieve results for Canadians.

Essentially, recordkeeping is about establishing ways and means for organizations to effectively capitalize on corporate information as a key public business asset.

Under the *Library and Archives of Canada Act*, in effect since 2004, Parliament has assigned the Librarian and Archivist of Canada the responsibility of providing advice and guidance to departments and agencies on the management of records and the authority to control the disposition of records within government institutions.

In summary, the development of the *Directive on Recordkeeping* for the Government of Canada has emerged over the course of 40 years, as successive governments organized themselves to carry out the prescribed duties to identify, manage and preserve Canada's *causa materialis*.

Canada's *causa materialis* can best be defined as the foundational civic goods of our nation—the original documents that record our decisions and actions

and the information to be found in our books and other documentary media and artifacts.

They are required within society to articulate, express and share common goals.

They provide individuals and groups with the capacities of social literacy necessary to enable their democratic participation within their communities.

They allow citizens to act on their entitlements, rights and freedoms, and to ensure the accountability of public administration and responsible governance under the rule of law (*ho no shihai*).

In short, *causa materialis* are the documents that permit Canadians to function collectively as a democracy.

They promote an inclusive social consensus and progress through the



distribution and sharing of information resources and the preservation of an accessible public memory.

Looking back over the last 40 years, Three government commissions created the foundation on which modern management regimes are now based in Canada.

Perhaps the most important, the *Royal Commission on Government Organization*, chaired by J. Grant Glassco in the 1960s, provided a catalyst for change in the domain of information resource management.

Aside from the many recommendations to address the volume and management of documentary production through legislation, policy and regulation, what Glassco focused on in terms of record-keeping was an explicit focus on the value of records within the decision-making context of public administration, and in particular, on the strong link forged between the creation and preservation of public records and the capacity for Canadians to have accountable national government.

Fundamentally, Glassco recognized the relationship between the reorganization of the public business and the infrastructure necessary to provide for its accountability, and in this sense, the recommendations regarding “records management” represented a watershed on the notions of transparency and

accountability connected to the accessibility of public information.

For example, they contain the first formal statement made by the Government of Canada directly linking the management of public information to transparency.

To quote the report, “Public records have a unique importance for governments.

In earlier centuries they were used mainly to document the obligations of citizens to their governments.

With the rise of democratic governments, however, it became even more important to record the obligations of a government to its people.

Records must be created, maintained and preserved in such a way that a contemporary democratic government can be held fully accountable to the public for its activities.”

More importantly, the recommendations of Glassco formally established the parameters and components of a business model to be followed across government in the management of its records, documents and information for the next 40 years.

Henceforth, the business of information management was recognized as an internal service provided within departments across government by a

professionalized class of civil servants with developed expertise and competencies in this service “field” and supported by legislation and policy.

In hindsight, the Commission’s report was very forward-looking in its findings, as the very business model it articulated would provide the foundation for Canada’s new *Directive on Recordkeeping*.

Thereafter, the 1979 Royal Commission on *Financial Management and Accountability*, chaired by Allen Thomas Lambert, raised the issue of accountability, under the auspices of financial management.

The Commission had two fundamental goals:

- to ensure that financial management and control was practised at all levels of the public service; and
- to establish the effective administrative accountability of deputy ministers to government, and where appropriate, to Parliament.

This Commission was created in large part as a response to concerns about the government’s accountability for the expenditure of public funds.

It distanced itself from the Glassco Commission’s focus on letting the managers manage, and emphasized

instead the importance of making the managers manage.

It also identified that information was fundamental to proper accountability.

In the words of the report, “accountability relies on a system of connecting links—a two-way circuit involving a flow of information that is relevant and timely, not only for managers but for those who must scrutinize the decisions and deeds of managers.”

It recognized that the current information systems designed to meet the accounting requirements of Parliament and of various other government agencies needed to be improved to meet the suitable requirements for the type of management information considered essential to the planning, decision making, budgeting, controlling, and evaluating performance of these government departments.

Likewise, the 1979 *Special Committee on the Review of Personnel Management and the Merit Principle*, the D’Avignon Committee, provided for significant changes in the way human resources were managed in the public service.

The Committee recommended legislative changes to put staffing in the hands of the Treasury Board and departmental management.

Indeed, it recommended that government adopt a philosophy of management defined as a clear declaration of a credo based on the beliefs, values and attitudes of corporate management.

This philosophy would then become the bedrock on which the practices of management and management systems are based in Canada, thereby creating the modern culture of the public service.

To summarize: the D'Avignon, Lambert and Glassco commissions, in effect, articulated the human, fiscal and information resources management principles on which modern management regimes are now based in Canada.

Turning to the more recent past, by early 2000, Canada's federal public administration was increasingly focused on accountability, values and ethics, and transparency due to political events.

Within this context, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada reported that archival and published heritage under the control of the federal government was exposed to serious risk of loss due to deficiencies in various protection regimes, weaknesses in management procedures, and the combined effect of a decrease in protection expenditures and continued growth in heritage.

In other words, the Government of Canada recognized that there existed the potential for a crisis situation to emerge.

In 2003, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada audited several departments including Public Works and Government Services Canada, the former National Library of Canada and the former National Archives of Canada.

These audits became drivers for the creation of a recordkeeping regime for the Government of Canada.

Moreover, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada provided the impetus for institutional change.

In particular, new legislation was adopted in 2004 to fuse the former National Archives of Canada and the former National Library of Canada into a single institution, the Library and Archives of Canada, and this paved the way for a renewal of the ways and means of information resource management within the Government of Canada.

Indeed, following the 2003 Report of the Auditor General of Canada and the government-wide focus on accountability, values and ethics, and transparency, Library and Archives Canada moved to elevate the collective recordkeeping challenges of the Government of Canada to the executive level.

Given the fallout of the 2003 Report of the Auditor General of Canada and the emerging challenges created by the use of new information and communication technologies in general, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Secretary

of the Treasury Board responded and supported the Librarian and Archivist of Canada in the creation of a series of Deputy Minister Roundtables on Information Management and Recordkeeping in the fall of 2006.

Deputy Ministers and Heads of Agencies agreed that an Assistant Deputy Minister Task Force on Recordkeeping could provide insight and guidance, as well as recommendations on recordkeeping issues.

Library and Archives Canada agreed to lead this taskforce that would be guided by the following principles:

- Proper recordkeeping facilitates sound business management within the Government of Canada;
- Records are a key business asset and must be effectively managed;
- A comprehensive understanding of recordkeeping is an invaluable part of creating a culture of accountability and transparency;
- All Public Service employees benefit when they engage in proper recordkeeping throughout their daily work in the Government of Canada; and
- Proper recordkeeping is an essential enabler for the multitude of programs and services within the Government of Canada to

meet regulatory and performance requirements.

This Assistant Deputy Minister Task Force on Recordkeeping also undertook a series of projects assessing the time, cost and effort of implementing sound recordkeeping within the Government of Canada.

Finally, the Task Force concluded that standardized, yet customizable recordkeeping policy instruments, tools and best practices were required, and recommended increasing the accountability of Deputy Ministers and Program Managers through the creation of a *Directive on Recordkeeping*.

In June 2009, Library and Archives Canada in collaboration with the Treasury Board Secretariat launched the *Directive on Recordkeeping* across the federal government and provided departments with tools and information through classroom training, information sessions and presentations.

Turning to the present, Library and Archives Canada has engaged government departments at senior and operational levels on effective recordkeeping, including the Clerk of the Privy Council, Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers, and through more than 25 different assessment and pilot projects, to put in place a regulatory framework on recordkeeping.

With the *Directive on Recordkeeping* in place, Library and Archives Canada is now assisting with the implementation of that policy framework.

In particular, Library and Archives Canada is now leading an initiative across federal institutions to establish renewed disposition coverage for all Government of Canada institutions by 2014.

Development of a whole-of-government approach to disposition will involve three elements:

- a rollout of a generic methodology for disposition of government information resources;
- a revision of the framework for evaluating the archival or historical information resources; and
- the development of disposition tools for common government operational activities.

To put this all in perspective, one of the core-essential components of a new recordkeeping regime for public administration is the determination and identification of information resources having business value, resulting in the systematic elimination of all other information through authorized and documented disposal processes.

The *Directive on Recordkeeping* enables government departments to differentiate

between the vast amounts of information they create on a daily basis and focus resources on managing only those information resources that have business value and that are required to meet the department's business needs, performance requirements and legislated mandate.

The directive defines information resources as any documentary material produced in published and unpublished form regardless of communications source, information format, production mode or recording medium.

They may include textual records, electronic records, new communication media, publications, films, sound recordings, photographs, documentary art, graphics, maps and artifacts.

The directive also defines information resources of business value as published and unpublished materials, regardless of medium or form, which are created or acquired because they enable and document decision making in support of programs, services and ongoing operations, and support departmental reporting, performance and accountability requirements.

In this complicated and multidimensional context, a technologically and format-neutral regime of recordkeeping—applicable, regardless of the technologies employed to support it—establishes core-essential administrative and business coherence within government.

Importantly, the identification and management of information resources of business value is foundational to the implementation of an effective and efficient recordkeeping regime in Government of Canada departments.

It addresses many of the challenges posed by the abundance of information created and acquired in government work environments.

Information resources of business value provide reliable evidence in the form of records of business decisions, activities and transactions, for Ministers, Program Managers and Canadian citizens.

This leads to improved accessibility, supports efficient information retrieval, enhances the efficiency of program and service delivery, avoids duplication of work, prevents issues of limited storage space, clarifies disposition activities and enables a modernized and streamlined recordkeeping culture within the Government of Canada.

Inevitably, any discussion about an ideal national library and archives will include some comments about the impact of the emerging digital landscape.

In a digital world largely unconfined by dimensions of time and space or referenced by controls within physical boundaries, we are rapidly developing a completely networked society through the exploitation of new information and communications technologies.

Through technology we are thus:

- commodifying information resources for delivery to consumers on a previously unparalleled and unimagined scale;
- enabling the participation of consumers in the creation and production of information resource content; and
- establishing new forms of mediation and documentary production in relation to information, literacy and knowledge.



Consequently, in collaboration with the Treasury Board Secretariat, Library and Archives Canada is leading the first phase of the Digital Office Initiative.

The goal of this pilot project is to create an environment where born-digital documents will remain digital from creation to access.

Findings and results from the various phases of the pilot project will help determine how best to equip Government of Canada institutions with technology



solutions that will enable them to keep the right information, over the right period of time, in the right way, and in an ergonomic enabling physical environment, thereby significantly reducing paper use and dependencies across the government.

Based on the success of the current pilot projects, adjustments will be made and further rollouts will be planned and executed.

The first phase of the pilot project will support laying the foundation for pilot institutions to satisfy the needs of the Digital Office of the future while meeting the requirements of the *Directive on Recordkeeping*.

Phase one of the Digital Office Initiative is therefore focused on activities and deliverables associated with the recordkeeping component of Digital Office implementation—in particular, defining the business context for recordkeeping so that creation, acquisition, capture and management of information resources of business value can be facilitated by appropriate enabling technologies and enterprise solutions.

Several government agencies will work with the Government Records Branch of Library and Archives Canada during Phase one.

The project team will become early adopters and contributors toward the development of recordkeeping maturity

and capacity and will develop strategies to address the organizational, process, business rules and technology requirements associated with the directive.

Library and Archives Canada is also working with another pilot department to develop a guide on issues relating to the digitization and destruction of paper records.

A draft general guideline was presented to a number of departments for review and comments.

Overall, the newly developed policy instruments developed by Library and Archives Canada will emphasize the capture, preservation and timely disposition of digital information resources.

Of significant development, beginning in 2017, Library and Archives Canada will no longer receive or will receive very little in the way of paper government records. Documents will be ingested in an electronic format and Library and Archives Canada will become a Trusted Digital Repository.

As could be expected also, the rise of the digital landscape affects in a very large way the core institutional practices at the heart of any national library and archives.

As a result, as the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, I am now leading my organization through a process of modernization.



Indeed, modernization at Library and Archives Canada is a focal point for re-visiting our institutional relevance and effectiveness in society in the digital age of the 21st century and beyond.

The immediacy and fluidity of creation, use and reuse of our *causa materialis* have fundamentally changed the traditionally established and accepted relationship between information providers and information users.

As social transformations and technological advances allow for self-publishing, mash-up and reuse of digital information, consumers of information are now also the producers of information in the digital environment.

The degrees of separation between citizens and information resources have diminished dramatically.

Acquisition, preservation, and access to information resources, which were once mediated by memory institutions in the analogue world, have become more direct, unfiltered and immediate in the digital domain.

This change provides opportunities for both memory institutions, such as Library and Archives Canada, and our clients, the citizens of Canada, to reassess and readjust monopolistic and obsolete business models and methodologies that were designed for and more applicable to the print era, and to participate in activities such as

cataloguing and metadata allocation, once the sole purview of information professionals.

Also, central to Library and Archives Canada's modernized model for digital information resource development is the recognition that we must be a policy-driven institution, acting within the larger federal government organization.

Our decisions must be evidence-based and founded on sound research and analysis, and our institution must make decisions that are viable and sustainable and reflect the views of Canadian society as expressed by the consensus among Ministers.

For public memory institutions and documentary heritage capture, the enduring value of government's information resources has become a value subset of government's intellectual capital as expressed and captured in its business records.

In this regard, Canadian federal institutions are integrating recordkeeping into their core business activities, interventions and decision points immediately before or during the creation of documents for business and public memory purposes both within the administrative context of new public management and inside the digital infosphere.

These interventions are leveraging the deliberative constructions of information resources development within departments into a construed corpus of public memory preserved through dedicated memory repositories.

In conclusion, in light of this transformation, and looking toward the future, I think the following questions would need to be addressed in a meaningful way by any institution that would lay claim to being the ideal national library and archives:

First, what are the principle challenges for public memory institutions in the digital age?

Second, will the current business and economic models for public memory institutions in the digital age require further collaboration and new business model development?

Finally, can public memory institutions work toward reorienting their traditional role and functions in a manner appropriate to the digital era and to the realities of a global economy?

Thank you