

Culture and Community: IG in the Global Arena

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In an increasingly volatile and often-troubled world where headlines of economic and political strife can predominate, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage work serves as a reminder that positive aspects of the human experience continue to thrive. These aspects, sustained through UNESCO's inter-continental efforts to retain cultural heritage and effected through proper information governance (IG), are fostered for the enrichment of present and future generations.

Cultural Stewardship and IG

To understand IG's relationship to cultural stewardship, it is helpful to examine the current state of practice for records and information management (RIM) professionals. The long-standing (and still relevant) RIM manager position has blossomed into a panoply of job titles, such as chief records officer and director of information governance.

Concomitantly, the foundation of knowledge supporting the practice and theory of RIM has expanded with the maturation of the profession, the sense of urgency generated by public awareness of data breach activities, and the burgeoning of complex technologies. To work most effectively in today's RIM community and demonstrate optimal professional preparedness, a broad set of capabilities – including cultural sensitivity – is advisable.

Identifying IG Skills

Recognizing that a professional transformation was underway, in 2013 ARMA International created and began administering the Information

Governance Professional (IGP) certification program, which confers an industry-leading credential, the IGP. (See details at www.arma.org/igp.)

When earned by an individual, the IGP designation signifies the attainment of a defined range of expertise and readiness for tackling organization-wide information asset management responsibilities.

As part of developing the IGP certification, ARMA International used the Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) process for analyzing the types of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that are applicable to the practice of IG in the 21st century. These are codified and enumerated in

the IG DACUM chart, which is available at www.arma.org/docs/igp/dacumchart1012.pdf.

Cultivating Cultural Sensitivity

As detailed on the first page of the DACUM chart, IG professionals should be expected to embrace a modern, cross-cultural work environment; cultural practices and sensitivities and the recognition of regional differences are highlighted as areas requiring knowledge and skills. Being attuned to cultural practices and sensitivities and cultivating an understanding of regional differences can facilitate negotiations with internal and external information stakeholders.



Regional differences can arise from any number of sources, including religious beliefs, communication styles, and language barriers; so, recognition of these differences can be the key to attaining a measure of success, especially in challenging settings where delicate or sensitive negotiations are mandated.

The link between IG and cultural stewardship is strong. *Culture*, in a broad and basic sense, is the specific context within which an organization's information assets are grounded. IG provides the framework that protects those embedded assets.

Cultural Memory and Stewardship

Cultural memory is a predominant element of cultural stewardship. It is critical to the health and viability of many different communities and types of organizations or groups. A Fortune 500 company undergoing a corporate merger and describing its founding and establishment (in a court-ordered document, for instance) relies upon the availability of knowledge pertaining to its history and development as a public business.

In everyday settings, genealogical investigations can deepen a family group's understanding of a private legacy or lineage by utilizing illustrative family tree diagrams. On a larger scale, each society, tribe, or nation has its own vital history or collective "story," whether it is catalogued through oral or written tradition.

Each of these scenarios, despite the differences in a group's affiliation, size, or setting, reflects the importance of cultural memory. The absence of a comprehensive cultural memory, regardless of its cause(s), can produce uncertainty and lack of transparency.

Telling the 'Story'

As an example, archaeologists continue to ponder the mystery of the circumstances surrounding the loss of the Maya civilization of Central

Read More About It

As of January 2015, there were 1,007 World Heritage sites in various locations around the world. The Europe/North America region accounts for the bulk of them, at 48%, while Asia/Pacific claims 23%. The Latin America/Caribbean, Africa, and Arab states regions have 13%, 9%, and 8%, respectively.

A list of World Heritage sites, as well as publications, newsletters, maps, brochures, and numerous manuals in PDF format, are available at: <http://whc.unesco.org>. Useful guidance materials, available free of charge, may also be found on the website, including: *Managing Disaster Risks for World Heritage*; *Preparing World Heritage Nominations*; *Managing Natural World Heritage*; and *Managing Cultural World Heritage*.

Across the globe, a variety of organizations and groups are involved in the World Heritage effort. More than 60 partners, representing government, private, for-profit, and not-for-profit organizations help mobilize fiscal support and other resources.

Advisory bodies are the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property. By signing up for a membership on the UNESCO website or making a donation, private individuals may endorse the cause, too. Membership is currently more than 100,000.

Many colleges and universities are also involved. In the United States, the University of Minnesota's College of Design created the Center for World Heritage Studies. It offers educational opportunities in research, policy innovation, conservation, and preservation.

Outside the United States, several schools provide diverse training on World Heritage-related issues, including Deakin University (Australia); Mweka College of African Wildlife Management (Tanzania); Tsukuba University (Japan); and University College Dublin (Ireland).

America. Although temple ruins, religious artifacts, and art items have been excavated, many questions about the factors precipitating that ancient society's extinction are unanswered, even after much investigation by social scientists and the passing of many centuries. In this case, cultural memory is inadequate and the resulting "story" remains largely untold.

Preserving the 'Story'

Cultural memory serves a crucial function, allowing for the continuity or "passing down" of traditions, practic-

es, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge. It creates linkages between persons. It can also represent a bond between and/or within groups, communities, nations, or other socio-political factions, constituting a common heritage or a body of shared experiences.

Thus, IG, through the effective management of information assets, is one way to safeguard cultural memory and foster cultural stewardship.

IG and the World Heritage Centre

Headquartered in Paris, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre is

The application documentation can be challenging if recordkeeping has not been optimal over the years

testament to the importance of cultural memory on a broad and public scale. Its educational mission and role as global advocate legitimizes IG's efforts to support cultural stewardship.

The recognition and preservation of both constructed and natural sites of cultural importance are essential to the guardianship of global heritage; these responsibilities should be taken seriously by the world's citizenry, as caretakers of an increasingly vulnerable and resource-constrained planet. A cardinal feature of World Heritage designation is a commitment to conservation; that is, once designated, the site must be protected and sustained for the benefit of subsequent generations.

The legal underpinnings of the UNESCO World Heritage effort are found in the 1972 treaty "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage." Countries ratifying this agreement endorse the World Heritage mission and can nominate sites for inclusion on the World Heritage list.

Over the decades, the number of signatory countries, called *states parties*, has risen to 191. As new countries are enjoined to the treaty, the scope of the World Heritage List continues to expand and embraces an ever-widening swath of global territories.

Recordkeeping Is Key to Nomination

Preparing a nomination for a site's inclusion on the World Heritage list is a considerable undertaking. The nomination must be executed at the country level, and the country must have ratified the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" treat-

ty. It often takes more than two years to complete the application proposal prior to its actual submission.

Nominations must convey how a property demonstrates what UNESCO terms "outstanding universal value." As well, UNESCO must be made aware of how that value will be preserved over time. Criteria for consideration (which are subject to ongoing revision and may be viewed online) include many types of universally recognized, culture-related elements.

Artistic, architectural, biological, ecological, and geophysical realms may be addressed in the decision-making process entailed in each application's review. UNESCO's World Heritage Committee meets annually to vet new applications and determine which are favorable, rejected, or remanded for the appending of additional information and subsequent re-examination.

Accessing Documentation

The principle that IG involves the management of records and information spanning a variety of types, media, and formats is underscored when considering the records often associated with the attainment of World Heritage designation.

The application for a man-made cultural site (e.g., the historic St. George's village in Bermuda) or a naturally occurring landscape (e.g., the Grand Canyon National Park in the United States) can require access to a wide array of record items. Accordingly, very specific records may be referenced in the process. If an application pertains to a living landscape, scientific inventories of flora and fauna or geographic/topographic

surveys may be sought, as well.

Depending upon the setting, it may be necessary to obtain copies or images of any number and type of historic and/or current record items: ships' logs, religious relics, structural blueprints, archival photographs, census reports, and city planning maps. The possibilities are nearly endless, making the importance of comprehensive recordkeeping and IG apparent.

Using Technology for Efficiency

In addition, there may be times when an application warrants gathering records from geographically dispersed locations. This can occur when a site is or has been located within the boundaries of a colonial settlement or a state under the jurisdiction of another nation. Some records might be locally available, while others could be housed thousands of miles away.

Previously, such a situation could have presented an operational or financial hurdle. However, with today's digital technologies, communications capabilities, and advanced photographic/videographic/imaging techniques, this dilemma might now be resolved such that less travel time and fewer budget dollars are required.

A recent news story about how the Smithsonian Institution's 3-D scanning program allows users to download scanning data of some of its holdings – for example, a sixth-century Buddha statue – and use the data for modeling or to print the object using a 3-D printer illustrates how technological innovation can be deployed to allow more cost-efficient access to an information repository's holdings. (Read more at <http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/3-d-printed-bust-president-obama-view-presidents-day-national-portrait-gallery>.)

IG Ensures Cultural Significance

A World Heritage application – which is incomplete without appropriate records – provides evidence of a property's enduring cultural signifi-

cance, often telling a story that has unfolded over generations or epochs. The application documentation can be challenging if recordkeeping has not been optimal over the years.

Sometimes, the effects of various man-made or natural events have thwarted recordkeeping efforts of bygone eras, and desired items may have been permanently lost to the ravages of time. Or, mismanaged files, damaged artifacts, and problematic record formats (due to poor conver-

sion and/or migration planning) could precipitate sub-par recordkeeping results, highlighting gaps in IG policy or implementation. Ultimately, regardless of the root cause, lack of proper evidential documentation can have an impact on an application's chances for success.

IG Preserves Cultural Treasures

While it may be true that the past is immutable and the future is unknown, the present remains rife

with resources. And today, organizations such as UNESCO provide the opportunities to identify, conserve, and preserve the resources associated with the planet's cultural treasures. With appropriate IG, such efforts can be aided and the future sustainability of humankind's multi-faceted, cultural panorama can be supported. **END**

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