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What's in it for me? Taking a benefits realisation approach to developing a government digital archive in New Zealand

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Synopsis

Archives New Zealand is in the midst of a programme to implement digital archiving, including the capability to support digital transfers, store and provide access to digital archives, and undertake digital preservation. A key concern is how to ensure that the objectives for which government has funded this initiative are realised, which in turn requires all the various stakeholders to be positively engaged in the change this involves.

To maximise the commitment of stakeholders an analysis of their interests was undertaken, from which a Benefits Realisation Plan was developed. The delivery of benefits to stakeholder groups has thus become central to the planning and engagement of the programme, and to ultimately demonstrating its success.

1. Background - the New Zealand archival context

Archives New Zealand, the national archive of New Zealand, is responsible for overseeing recordkeeping in some 2500 public agencies, and currently holds approximately:

- 96 kilometres of paper archives
- 2.4 million photographic negatives and prints
- 552,000 maps, blueprints and plans
- 21,500 reels of film
- 1,545 works of art
- 1,000 video tapes
- some 40 terabytes of digital records.

These archives are currently held in physical repositories located in 4 geographically dispersed locations, and one temporary digital data store.

Stemming from our mandate under the Public Records Arct 2005, Archives New Zealand also maintains an extensive set of recordkeeping standards, provides advice and support to agencies, and runs an audit programme to report on agency adherence to recordkeeping obligations.

In 2009 Archives New Zealand presented the Digital Continuity Action Plan, highlighting the need for awareness and action about digital continuity to be increased across the public sector. Executive government approved this Plan in July 2009, and further emphasised their support for action in May 2010 by approving the Business Case for government digital archiving capability to be implemented.

The wider government context in which this work is taking place will sound familiar to many. The New Zealand government is facing severe fiscal constraints, and responding not only with significant budget reductions but also with widespread agency amalgamations, staffing reductions and down sizing. Restructuring is commonplace. Government is looking for maximum return on investment - there is now active sharing of "back office" services (such as IT, legal advice, human resources and the like) across groups of departments, the adoption of a more centralised planning and approval approach (for IT and property initiatives in particular), and a number of cross-agency projects aimed at putting the citizen at the centre of shared service offerings online and offline. "Reuse", whether it is data, applications, infrastructure or skills, is a commonly used term. Simultaneously there is the expectation of meeting customer needs through the ability to easily access information and conduct business online.

Archives New Zealand itself was amalgamated into the Department of Internal Affairs in February 2011, along with the National Library of New Zealand and some other smaller agencies (we are part of a department that now has 7 different EDRMS systems !). We have also moved from in-house IT development and support to having this provided by our parent department. A fundamental aspect of the Business Case for developing digital archiving capability was to leverage the digital repository application and servers already in use by the National Library in order to maximise the value of the government's investment.

2. Overview of the Government Digital Archive Programme

The Government Digital Archive Programme will ensure Archives New Zealand has the capability and capacity in the short to medium term to manage digital (alongside non-digital) records. This includes:

- the creation of a robust and secure digital repository
- support for agencies preparing transfers of digital material
- accepting and processing these transfers
- recognising and managing risks to digital holdings through preservation actions
- making digital objects available online to those allowed to see them.

The outcome will be that government digital information identified as having long term value will be held securely so it can't be lost, changed or inappropriately accessed; it will remain easily discoverable and readable, and the processes and systems to support this need to be cost effective and service client needs.

The Business Case envisaged a three year programme of work to initially implement the changes required, with ongoing development on a continuous improvement basis thereafter. We are now approximately half way through the initial programme of work.

3. Taking a benefits led approach

From the outset Archives recognised that this was not merely a project to deliver an IT system, but a programme of change throughout the organisation and also for New Zealand government agencies (which happened to include some IT components). It is clear that simply putting in a new computer system or making a few process changes would in themselves not deliver a successful and enduring outcome of ensuring the ongoing availability of important digital records through successful digital preservation actions.

As a consequence it was decided to manage the work required by adopting the Managing Successful Programmes approach[1], with its strong focus on realising expected benefits rather than merely delivering project tasks and changes. A key element in this approach is an emphasis on benefits realisation.

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[1] "Managing Successful Programmes" comprises a set of best practice principles and processes for use when managing a programme of work, as developed and mandated by the UK Cabinet Office.
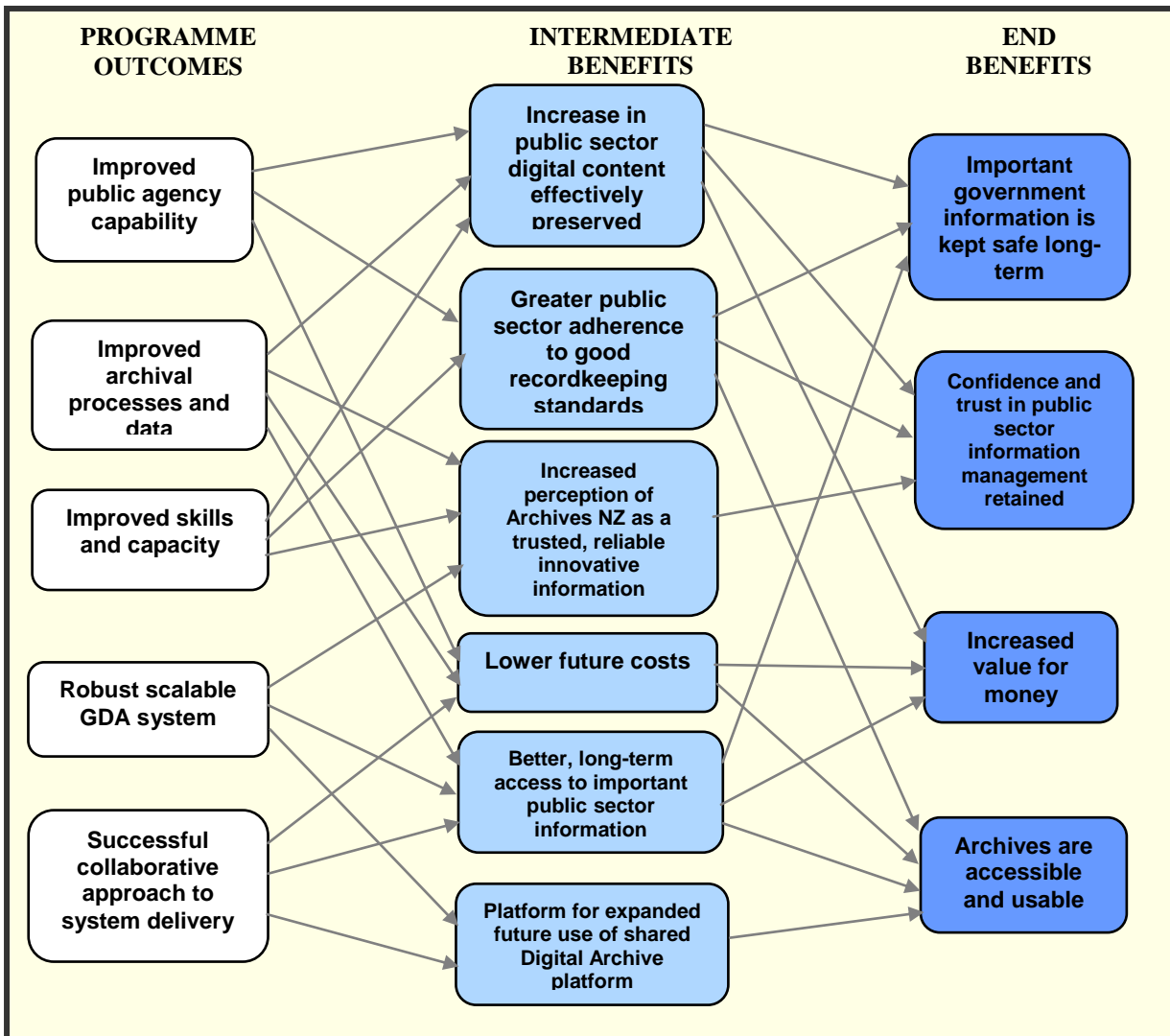
The Business Case[2] had already identified a general set of expected benefits:

CITIZENS	PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES	ARCHIVES NZ
• Increased ease of access	• Reduced loss of important information	• Ability to meet statutory obligations
• Confidence in government maintained	• Reduced cost of providing [digital] access	• Reduced costs [through sharing some costs with National Library]
• Greater potential for harmonised access (with other providers)	• Reduced cost of long term paper storage	• Leverage of National Library knowledge and experience
• Increased ability for [information] reuse	• Agencies' confidence to plan digital transfers increased	• Reduced long term expansion of paper storage facilities
	• Reduced duplication of government investment	

Through a series of iterative workshops, we worked first with a range of internal managers and then with forums of external stakeholders to test and then refine these. This included identifying how they related to each other, which helped us identify some benefits which were more immediate and others which would build on these to deliver longer term value.

The result was the following Benefits Map:

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[2] Government Digital Archive Business Case v2.8, Archives New Zealand, 9 February 2012.

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

- Improved public agency capability
- Improved archival processes and data
- Improved skills and capacity
- Robust scalable GDA system
- Successful collaborative approach to system delivery

INTERMEDIATE BENEFITS

- Increase in public sector digital content effectively preserved
- Greater public sector adherence to good recordkeeping standards
- Increased perception of Archives NZ as a trusted, reliable innovative information
- Lower future costs
- Better, long-term access to important public sector information
- Platform for expanded future use of shared Digital Archive platform

END BENEFITS

- Important government information is kept safe long-term
- Confidence and trust in public sector information management retained
- Increased value for money
- Archives are accessible and usable

Government Digital Archive Benefits Map[3]

We did not want to start a new industry of collecting statistics for statistics' sake, so we took a very pragmatic approach – we culled out things that were too difficult or time consuming to measure; we re-used measures already collected for other purposes; and we used surrogate measures that were 'close enough' where that was appropriate.

It was also important to identify who owned each benefit. These owners are always business managers within Archives, not programme staff. While others may be responsible for measuring performance indicators, it is the owner who is responsible for the actual delivery of the benefit, and they will remain responsible long after the GDAP programme is over. Of course that meant they had to sign off the Benefits Realisation Plan and accept the responsibility.

We ended up with 27 measures, some of which applied to more than one of the 10 benefits.

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3 GDAP Benefits Realisation Plan v1.1, Archives New Zealand, 15 August 2011.

Here is an example of one of the key performance indicators for the benefit "Archives are accessible and usable":

Measure and target	Baseline value	Date targets will be met	Who is respon-sible for meeting KPI?	Who is responsible for reporting?	Frequency of reporting	Source of measure-ment data	Starting date for reporting	Date reporting will end
90% of open digital archives can be rendered in a viewable form online	25,000 items available online now	June 2014	Digital Continuity Manager	Collection Management System Product Owner; Digital Preservation System Product Owner	Annual	Reports from application systems	July 2013	On-going

4. Impact of benefits led approach on programme activities with public agencies

The result of adopting this strong focus on benefits is quite marked. For example, this focus has underscored the critical importance of a collaborative approach with government agencies. Agencies have to see there is something in it for them or they will struggle to engage, so clearly we cannot simply take the approach of telling them what we expect them to do.. Overseas experience has shown that lack of attention to what will really work for and be helpful to agencies is a key challenge to success, a view strongly confirmed for us when we invited peer review on our programme approach from representatives of two different overseas archives who had been through the implementation of digital archiving.

At the start of the GDAP programme we conducted an Investment Logic Mapping[4] exercise with a small group of senior people from across government records management, IT and the user community (for example the Ombudsman's Office), to determine a high level managerial view of where a digital archive might sit in the framework of shared cross government approaches. A clear (and not surprising) outcome of this was the expectation that an actual digital repository and transfers of digital material to Archives could not be divorced from the wider questions of how agencies store and describe digital records generally - in other words it has to be part of the wider recordkeeping standards and advice processes if it is to meet agencies' needs.

We are now working with our Agency Reference Group to plan how digital transfer processes will work. What tools do they think would be most useful? How can we best support them? These

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[4] Investment Logic Mapping (ILM) is a technique to ensure the 'story' about any proposed investment makes sense, and to test and confirm the rationale for the investment. ILM was developed by the State Government of Victoria, Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) in Australia in 2003.

discussions also provide an important opportunity to share the responsibility for getting this right with them - they also understand that Archives has statutory responsibilities and constraints that we have to work within. Taking this thinking into wider forums with all public sector records managers is then important, to socialise and test the thinking, and also to manage expectations.

One of the most important aspects of the approach we are taking is the use of "pilot" transfers. Five agencies have volunteered to be the first users of the new systems and processes, either because they are keen to transfer or because they are about to cease business operations (there are two Commissions of Enquiry in this category). These are real transfers, and we are going to use them to test and refine the whole end to end approach – the proceses, technology, guidance, training, support and so on. In this way we will be able to demonstrate competance to a range to stakeholders – that we can support them to complete transfers, and that public users are able to get online access to usable digital archives where access rights permit.

Since the ultimate purpose in preserving important digital records for the future is to enable them to be discovered, accessed and re-used, it is only when this happens that many of the benefits will be realised. We know that processes in this area will evolve, sometimes in ways we do not yet know, and that it will be very important to have ongoing conversatron with our user community about their needs and interests. This is not always easy – the needs of current users revolve largely around exisitng physical access models they have largely mastered; how will their interests compare to the needs of online users and future generations ? We have started to address this through some researcher forums, but also through analysing the ways in which online access expectations are changing in the world and how these need to apply in the Archives.[5] Though at present we are prioritisating the need to meet government agency needs, we know in future that achieving our key benefits will require a significant and ongoing conversation with consumers of the records we are preserving.

5. Challenges

Being strongly benefits focused has also lead to a strong emphasis on a collaborative work effort with our stakeholders and a broader set of thinking in Archives New Zealand about ways and means of achieving the end goal. For instance achieving an "increase in public sector digital content being effectively preserved" means thinking not only about ensuring agencies are capable of successfully tranferring, and that Archives has the capability to manage and preserve those records once tranferred, but also working with agencies on how digital records still in their custody may need preservation. We are actively working with our Agency Reference Group to identify the

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[5] There are strong links here to another programme of work in Archives New Zealand which had developed the Online Strategy for our future business.

whole suite of processes, training, support, guidelines, software tools and other items (the "toolkit") they will need to assist them.
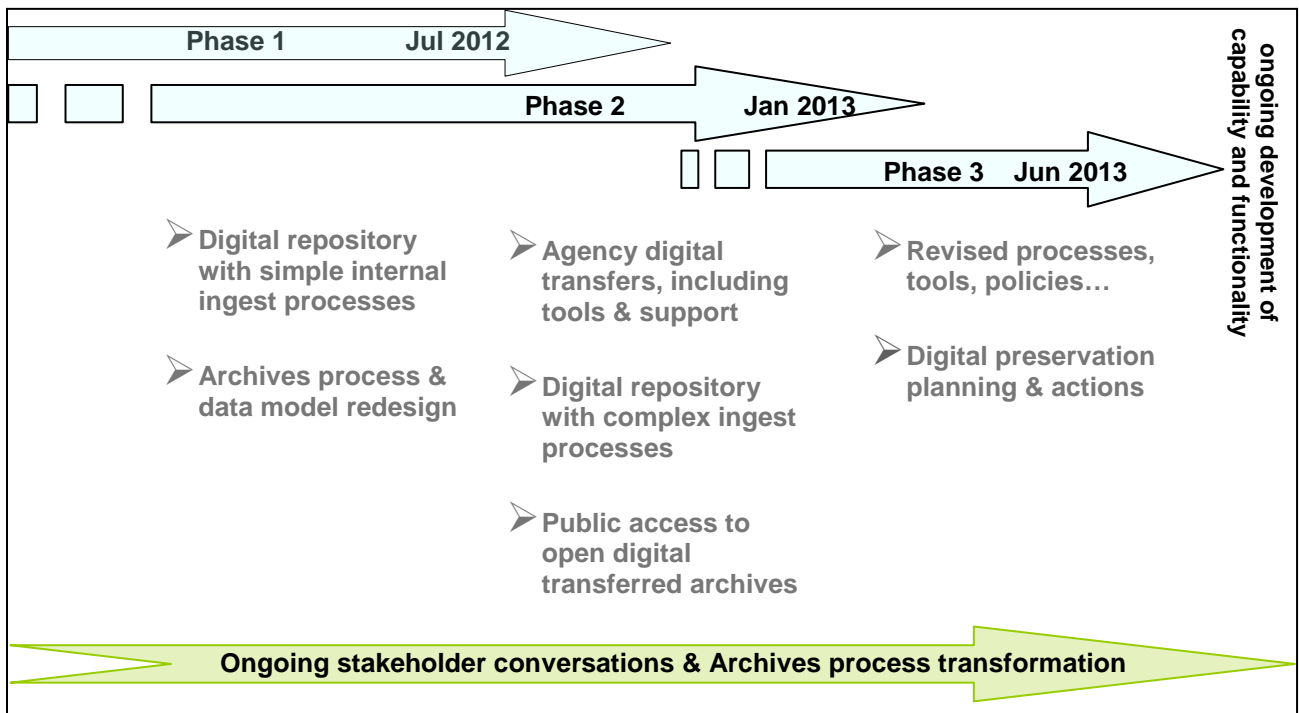
However the area of managing and preserving digital archives is one of uncertainty - a field in which no one has all the answers and worldwide we are all still learning. But archivists naturally seem to prefer certainty and perfection, and do not always find it easy to make decisions or provide advice without the comfort of certainty. Consequently it is necessary to continuously stress that we are not going to be experts for quite a long time; that not everything will be known and perfect before we do anything; that we will be learning and refining a lot in the next few years...and that's OK. We will deliver important benefits by making decisions and moving ahead, doing the best we can with what we know now.

To achieve successful digital tranfers efficiently with agencies, a further challenge is the need to engage in a three way conversation - between Archives, agency records staff and agency IT staff. This is a relatively new challenge, and the traditional lack of good communication between records and IT teams makes this conversation more difficult. Our programme benefits are generally expressed at a high level [eg. "lower future costs"] which is often too vague to motivate good engagement of IT staff. We may need to refine some benefits to be more immediate and relevant to these staff, for example looking at the potential for them to reduce their need for increasing mass storage and backup to hold old records. We are also lookig at positioning the digital archive as part of the accepted suite of whole of government approaches identified by the Government CIO on the "ICT Roadmap" for the public sector – this should help government IT strategists to see digital continuity and digital recordkeeping as a part of best practice in the government IT community.

It is fair to say that whilst the public sector organisations we are working with have been positive and supportive, the general record keeping environment is facing tough times. As part of austerity regimes records staff numbers have reduced across government, and they were not usually generously resourced to start with. This may well mean the timeframes for realising the benefits of GDAP become longer, as individual agencies need increased support from Archives staff to understand what digital continuity and transfer will mean for them. That still makes the process worthwhile, but does require some expectation management. It also puts greater pressure on the boundary between responsibilities (and cost) Archives will bear verses those the agency will cover.

6. *Where will this take us in future ?*

The delivery map for GDAP looks like this:

The key focus is on ensuring digital transfers can be supported, and then that digital risk management and preservation activities can occur, as well as delivering online public access wherever restrictions allow.

However we are also planning a range of follow on developments, building on this base, to provide further benefits realisation:

- Secure access to restricted records for agency records staff

    [so agencies can access restricted archives more efficiently, leading to lower future costs and better access]

- Secure online access to restricted records (for approved members of the public and other public servants, potentially managed directly by agencies)

    [lower future costs and better access]

- Collaborative workspace where agency staff can work on transfer planning, Access Authorities and (later) other documents such as Disposal Authorities, as well as conduct other transactions with Archives

    [more efficient processes leading to lower future costs and increased trust in Archives]

- Medium to long term transfer planning that sees transfers become routine and regular, rather than the major occasional operation they are at present

    [more efficiency leading to lower future costs, increase in content preserved]

- The management of digital and non digital material as an integrated set of material

    [more efficient processes leading to lower future costs]

- Recognition that for some (probably large) agencies it is likely that records kept in transaction systems especially may be held in an authorised arrangements outside of Archives' direct custody, possibly in the agency itself where the software and support to give meaningful access to that information resides. The concept would need to include the explicit recognition that such records, whilst still in agency custody, would nevertheless need to be made publically accessible, and would need to be subject to proper digital risk assessment and preservation management. Since these can be expensive activities requiring specialist (and quite new) technical knowledge, and one of the benefits for the government in a centralised digital preservation capability is maximum return on building up that investment, thinking on how some of that capability could be applied in situ within other agencies may be sensible.
  [increase in content preserved, better access]
- There may also be potential to use the digital archive to store records of medium term importance to agencies (eg because they are required to be kept for a period for statutory reasons) but that are not long term archives. There is a need for these records to remain readable and for agencies to access them if necessary without necessarily wanting to maintain specialist systems to support them, which may mean a government digital repository with digital preservation and access services could offer value in this area in the future, though it is not the current focus.
  [lower future costs, greater adherence to good recordkeeping standards, increase in content preserved].

None of these developments will occur without detailed conversation with agencies, and the life span of the Agency Reference Group is therefore likely to be long term.

7. Conclusion

The desire to think about benefit to the customer is hardly new, however it is all too easy in any major programme of work to focus down at the level of the specific tasks that we the Archives need to complete. Having agreed statements about the various benefits expected, measures for those benefits, and clear responsibilities in the business for their delivery has helped Archives New Zealand to continually place the work being done in the wider context of what we are trying to achieve with all our stakeholders.

With the fiscal and other pressures we and our stakeholders face, change is inevitable and this focus on benefits as the end objective helps us make choices about approaches, priorities and sequence of activities. In the end we believe it will give us the best outcomes for our stakeholders and for government.