

Guidelines for the Creation of the Electronic Protocol Register in an Electronic Records Management System

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last twenty years, the organization of the administrative divisions of the Italian state has been deeply modified to improve the provision of services to citizens and companies. The process of computerization of the Italian public administration, called e-government, changed the ways and tools for the management of records. Paper records have been increasingly replaced by electronic ones, and tools for records management are electronic systems. Citizens and firms can write from their computer to the government and receive answers directly at their homes. In addition, the protocol register, one of the vital records of the government, which certifies the acquisition and production of records, has become a database connected with the records management system. The protocol register plays the important role of certification and identification of records in a digital environment. It is a reliable tool, which controls all the records and preserves the institutional memory, public or private. The aim of this chapter is to identify the elements that compose the electronic protocol register in an Electronic Records Management System (ERMS) that must be kept unaltered over time.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Italian government performs administrative activities for the realization of public interest aims and goals. It is organized by Central Government (State) and by local authorities (Regions, Provinces, and Municipalities). Its action is carried out according to the principles and criteria established by civil law, using a structured administrative procedure as a working model. The administrative procedure is a predetermined sequence of actions, identified by laws, inter-related and all directed to the production of a single final act, which can be addressed to a citizen, a company, or another public body. All steps leading to the final act consist of and generate a variety of records.

During the last twenty years in Italy, legislative interventions have tried to improve the transparency in the relationship between citizens and public institutions. Administrative action has tried to give more efficient services to citizens and to implement the principles of freedom of information and right to privacy. The attention to techniques and methods of Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR) has increased. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is increasingly considered a determining factor for records management systems, to make public administration more efficient, and to simplify communication with citizens. This process is called e-government. The computerization of public administration led to the introduction of digital records, the digital signature (a particular type of advanced electronic signature), and electronic ways for the transmission of records. Citizens' companies and firms can communicate with the government through information technology. They can address their requests directly from their PC and receive replies directly to their computer. The records exchange is simplified and faster. However, the process of change must be properly regulated to ensure the integrity and the existence of records over time (Duranti, 2005, pp. 20-22).

Records management includes many issues. Important issues concern record type, registration and signature of protocol, organization of records according to a classification scheme, and transmission, retrieval, and preservation of records created or received by public bodies. The classification scheme, which is a plan to identify and arrange records and archives in categories according to logically structured conventions, methods, and procedural rules, is a major concern for a fully functional system. Therefore, the Electronic Records Management System (ERMS) must meet several characteristics. ERMS, as a record-keeping system, must include the contextual aspect of records and their interrelationships, prevent records from being modified, prevent records from being deleted, except as part of the controlled disposal schedule, include rigorous retention controls, and provide a classification scheme, which determines the records arrangement structure. This is

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