

2. FUNCTIONS AND CONTEXT OF THE RECORDKEEPING SYSTEM

As the name suggests, a recordkeeping system is a tool for maintaining the recordkeeping function of an organization. In the case of Noark, this means the recordkeeping function of public administration; thus, the specifications must be adapted to the rules and requirements that apply to that sector. This chapter deals with some of the elements of the public-sector recordkeeping function that determine the design of the recordkeeping system.

The recordkeeping function of public administration is closely associated with the executive function. The registry keeps the documentation of and for the executive function, and there is a continuous document flow between the registry and the executive officers. The recordkeeping system must function within the framework of this interaction, so it is necessary to view it in such a context and consider its relationship with electronic case handling systems. The interface between the specifications of Noark and SGK is a central element in this description.

2.1 How it relates to the recordkeeping function of public administration

The recordkeeping function of public administration consists in keeping track of documents that relate to cases (case documents), placing those documents in their proper context (cases), distributing documents to the executive function, following up the executive function, storing documents that have been processed, responding to internal and external inquiries about the processing status and contents of documents, searching for and retrieving documents upon request, lending out documents or distributing copies, etc. Furthermore, the stored material should after a number of years be transferred to an archival repository as documentation of the activities which caused it to be produced.

The recordkeeping system should be a working tool for all parts of the recordkeeping function. It is used on the one hand to register and store documents and other information, on the other hand to search for and retrieve such information and distribute it. The system must of course be designed so that it covers the tasks that make up the recordkeeping function, as well as possible. At the same time, attention must be paid to the basic framework imposed by laws and regulations, including the definition of what types of documents the records should include. Furthermore, the system must provide for satisfactory quality control in the recordkeeping function.

2.1.1 Laws, regulations and administrative provisions

The recordkeeping function of public administration has for a long time been regulated through a separate set of provisions and regulations. For the state administration, these regulations have been fairly extensive, while local and regional administration have been subject to a less extensive set of regulations. This inequality is about to be levelled out by

the Archives Act ("arkivloven"¹) and its regulation ("arkivforskriften"), which stipulate common rules for the entire public sector, except rules concerning transfer to archival repository. The Archives Regulation circulated for comments during the summer of 1998, and there is reason to believe that the new act and its regulation will enter into force approximately at the time when Noark-4 is ready for publishing.

The Archives Act and the Archives Regulation will essentially perpetuate, in an updated and modernized form, the current provisions for the state administration. The purpose of the regulation is to ensure the documentation of the commitments and decisions of the administration -- partly for administrative and legal purposes, partly for the knowledge and research of posterity. Essential provisions deal with issues such as the duty to keep records, the organization of the records, what kind of material should be in the records, what should be kept for posterity and how it should be kept. There are also rather detailed provisions regarding recordkeeping procedures, related to document handling, recordkeeping, lending, remote storage and transfer to archival repository.

However, it is not only the archival regulations and the Archives Act that affect the recordkeeping functions. Several other laws and regulations must also be taken into account. This applies in particular to the *Freedom of Information Act* ("offentlighetsloven"), which has consequences for recordkeeping, presentation of public registry and screening of information. The *Public Administration Act* ("forvaltningsloven") provides general rules for the executive function, as well as more specialized provisions regarding professional secrecy and special access for parties involved ("partsoffentlighet"). The *Personal Data Registers Act* ("personregisterloven") and its regulation ("personregisterforskriften") regulate the handling of personal information systematized as personal data registers. It is particularly worth paying attention to § 2-19 of the regulation, which regulates licensing and exemption from licensing for electronic records. The *safety instruction* ("sikkerhetsinstruksen") and *security and protection instruction* ("beskyttelsesinstruksen") provide for the protection of information for reasons of state security or other reasons. Attention must also be paid to the written and unwritten rules known as «*god forvaltnings-skikk*» [good administrative practice]. These include things like equality of treatment (precedent), the basis of decisions, allowing enough time for communication with public administrative bodies, etc.

It is not the task of Noark to implement the regulations in the recordkeeping function of public administration. However, the standard should support recordkeeping functions which are within the framework of the regulations, and it should avoid incorporating non-permissible functionality.

2.1.2 Record contents: record documents, case documents

According to the definition of the Archives Act, records are to be construed as documents which are produced as part of an activity ("dokument som vert til som lekk i ei verksemd"). This is a very wide definition which is in line with established custom in Norway and internationally. An organization's record documents are the documents that are received or produced as part of the activities of the organization. For posterity, they are the traces of the activities that took place, traces which document events in the form of decision, deals, information documents and other actions that have resulted in written information.

¹ Lov 4. desember 1992 Om arkiv.

An important consequence of this definition is that the concept of *record document* is not associated with any particular category of documents or to specific traditions in terms of case handling and records management. If a document has been produced or received as part of the organization's activity, then that document is a record document. Once entered into the records, a document stays there. The records should reflect the activities that are carried out. Thus, it is not permissible to remove certain documents, store them separately and claim that they do not belong in the records. In other words, the records are the central store of documents for the organization, including the executive function.

On grounds of space, retrieval possibilities, etc. -- i.e., the cost-efficiency of the recordkeeping function -- it is nevertheless necessary to limit the contents of the records to what is worth keeping from a documentational point of view. In Norway, this is regulated through rules of *records weeding*, and these rules will presumably be perpetuated through the regulations of the Archives Act. *Records weeding* filters out material which is not the subject of case handling, or material without documentation value for the organization, sometimes alluded to as "not of archival value". Examples of such material are duplicated (e.g., printed) material received from others, material downloaded from the Internet or external databases, draft documents and extra copies without documentation value, word processor files with draft copies of documents, etc. These normally constitute quite a large proportion of the material used or produced by executive officers. Records weeding is essentially carried out before the documents are entered into the records.

The records, then, consist of all material considered as record documents according to the Archives Act, except what is filtered out through records weeding. In addition to normal correspondence, notes, etc., the records also include an archival copy of own reports, circulars, etc., even if these per definition are duplicated and distributed. Also included are draft documents, etc., when valuable information important for the understanding of the case has been scribbled on them; in practice, this means the drafts which the organization finds it useful to preserve.

The Freedom of Information Act uses the concept of *case document* (or, more precisely, "case documents of public administration"). The case documents of public administration are, according to the Freedom of Information Act, either issued by an administrative body, or received by or presented to such a body. The concept of case document essentially corresponds to the concept of record documents for documents that are directly associated with the executive function. However, the concept of record document may have a wider meaning, since it includes registers, databases, etc., which would probably not be considered case documents.

The concept of case document is used in connection with records to designate those record documents that are directly associated with the executive function, and which are part of the *case records*. For all practical purposes, this must be regarded as equivalent to the same concept as used in the Freedom of Information Act. These concepts are expected to be used in the same way in the regulations to the Archives Act, reference being made to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

Recordkeeping systems should be used to register and handle all documents that are part of the records, i.e., record documents and case documents as described above. Noark-4 has been designed to maintain these functions, and the boundaries between Noark and the SGK document storage are based on these principles, cfr. 2.2.2 below. In the rest of this report,

the concept of *document* is used in the sense of record document/case document unless otherwise specified.

2.1.3 Quality control in the recordkeeping function: involved parties and roles

Quality control in the recordkeeping function may be considered on two levels. On the one hand, the recordkeeping function itself is one of the foremost quality control functions of the organization. The following tasks are essential elements of quality control:

- The registry marks and registers all external inquiries and makes sure they are dealt with (stamping, filing plan code, entry into records, arrears control).
- The registry follows up all deadlines for external inquiries (maturity control) and the self-imposed deadlines of the organization (activation date, etc.).
- The registry documents both the pretext of the case handling (external inquiries), the decision-making process (internal documents and comments, drafts, etc.) and the results of the process (outgoing mail, decisions, deals, etc.).
- The registry provides for the systematics and coherence of the records, so that they can serve as a source and system of information for management and the executive function, and provide for legal and administrative documentation as well as knowledge and understanding for posterity (research, etc.).

On the other hand, it is necessary to consider the internal quality control of the recordkeeping function, i.e., those mechanisms that are to make sure the recordkeeping function as such maintains the necessary level of quality. Important elements in this respect are the organization of the recordkeeping function, not least the distribution of rights and responsibilities. Normally, a number of parties are involved in the handling of case documents, and these perform various roles -- registrars, managers, executive officers, board secretaries, etc. In order to achieve a satisfactory level of quality in the recordkeeping function, it is necessary to identify and define these roles, associate parties with the individual roles and assign to them tasks and responsibilities, rights and restrictions of those rights. In this context, attention should be paid to the possibility that the roles may change with time, especially when electronic systems are implemented. An important element is granting the individual party the rights necessary to fulfil his or her role(s).

The recordkeeping function within public administration may be organized in many different ways. In large organizations, the tasks are normally specialized, and the individual party has only one or a few role(s). In small organizations, individuals will often have a wider spectrum of tasks assigned to them, and will thus perform several roles. The organization of the recordkeeping function itself may, for instance, consist of one single (or part of a) post, and one and the same individual may act as head of archives, executive officer and a board secretary. However, irrespective of size and organizational structure, it is important to have the roles defined, and to have decided what rights and responsibilities are associated with them.

Noark-4 is meant as a tool for maintaining quality control at both levels. The Noark systems should support the recordkeeping function in such a way that it fulfils its role as a quality control tool for the organization. In addition, Noark should have the necessary functionality to define roles and the corresponding rights, associate these with individual parties and check that these parties keep within the defined limits.

2.1.4 The position of Noark within the recordkeeping function

From the beginning, Noark has been rooted in the recordkeeping of public administration. Essential information is registered about all case documents and their processing, and this information is used in most parts of the recordkeeping function. It has gradually been deemed appropriate to extend the amount of information that is registered. This applies partly to information on cases and their associated documents, but in particular to various types of background information, such as an organization's filing plan, administrative structure, the names and addresses of clients, etc. Thus, the Noark systems now contain far more information than a traditional registry or diary system.

Noark-4 represents a big step forward in this development. The system provides for the registration of considerably more information than previously, both in terms of background information and information related to the individual cases or documents. The most significant enhancement, however, relates to the functionality of electronic recordkeeping. When case documents are stored electronically, even information such as notes, control information, etc., associated with those documents must be stored electronically. The result is a completely electronic recordkeeping system.

A completely electronic recordkeeping system according to the specifications of Noark-4 will achieve a dominant position in the recordkeeping function of an organization. It will contain most of the information that is used in connection with the recordkeeping function. It will be a management and information system for the records, and will also contain the records themselves. This will entail major changes both in the execution of the recordkeeping function and in the interaction with the executive function (see below).

Individual organizations may of course choose to give the Noark system a less dominant position than this (see 1.4 above regarding requirements at various levels). In its minimum version, Noark-4 may be used as a modernized version of Noark-3 and Koark. It is possible to limit oneself to registering records information and, if desired, decision-making information, and to keep the case documents including comments, control information, etc., on paper. Most organizations are expected to choose something between these two extremes in preparation for a gradual development towards electronic records.

2.2 How it relates to the executive function - SGK

2.2.1 Recordkeeping and the executive function

The recordkeeping and executive functions of public administration are closely related. The registry distributes documents to the executive function, follows up the processing with maturity and arrears control, receives and stores documents that have been processed, and makes information and documentation available to managers and executive officers. The interaction between the recordkeeping and executive functions are, in other words, extensive and of major importance to the efficiency of the organization.

Traditionally, this interaction has taken place by way of documents circulating in hardcopy form (on paper) and inquiries being made between the various institutions. For instance,

when an executive officer wants a document from the records, he or she inquires at the registry. The registry uses its information system to find the document, which is retrieved from the records and handed to the executive officer. This procedure is also to a large extent followed by organizations with Noark-based recordkeeping systems. The Noark systems themselves make it perfectly possible for the executive officer to search for cases and documents himself. However, since the recordkeeping system is not normally an integrated part of the tool that the executive officer uses, many find it too cumbersome (or don't have the knowledge) to use the recordkeeping system for searching themselves.

There is, undoubtedly, considerable potential for rationalization in incorporating as much as possible of the interaction between recordkeeping and the executive function into an electronic system, either by integrating the recordkeeping system in a complete case handling system or by integrating two or more systems with each other. If the desired potential is to be realized, the solution must include the following:

- It must be possible for all involved parties to reach the information they need and have access to, irrespective of where it resides in the system(s). Searching and retrieving must be possible within the user environment that each party normally uses, and with a user interface which does not vary significantly between the different parts of the system(s).
- It must be provided for electronic information and document flow between the different parts of the system(s) and between different parties, and for automatic updating.
- The recordkeeping must be electronic, so that the parties can retrieve documents on their computer screens.
- The roles and rights of the parties must be administered and managed by the system(s) in such a way that the individual parties only get access to the functions and information he or she is entitled to.

Noark-4 is designed with a view to being incorporated into such an integrated solution, both with general case handling systems according to the specifications of SGK and with the more specialized dedicated task systems.

2.2.2 Recordkeeping and the executive function in general: Noark and SGK

"Elektronisk saksbehandling. Statens generelle kravspesifikasjon (SGK)" [Electronic case handling. General specification of requirements for the state administration] was published by Statskonsult (the Directorate of Public Management) in 1997. Its purpose is to help public bodies evaluate various solutions and prepare their own specifications of requirements for electronic case handling. The specifications of SGK are primarily aimed at what is known as *general or non-standardized case handling*, i.e., various kinds of processing not associated with strictly defined handling procedures within a specific field. SGK is therefore relevant to most public bodies planning to implement an electronic case handling system. The specifications are mainly functional requirements at a general level. Thus, unlike Noark-4, SGK does not specify the information contents of the systems (apart from giving a few examples of document attributes) or data structure. Rather, the functional requirements are to be regarded as check lists for planning and designing case handling systems.

SGK is preoccupied with document handling, including document storage and retrieval. Executive officers should be able to handle both documents which are part of the (case) records and those which are not. Examples of the latter category are documents being drafted, either by an executive officer alone or in cooperation with others, documents which the executive officer receives or produces as member of external governing bodies, scanned versions of published documents, information downloaded from external databases, the Internet, etc. The executive officer should have access to various sources of information from one and the same user environment, and he (or she) should have access to flexible tools for organizing, associating and processing his documents. As part of this, he should be able to create his own folders where he stores "his" documents. An executive officer's folder might for instance contain one or more case documents (from the records) as well as other kinds of documents and information relevant to his handling of the case. Thus, SGK defines a separate document storage in addition to the case records of Noark, and documents in this document storage are managed by the individual executive officers. The document storage is subject to common rules in terms of document categories, a common registration form and common rules for deleting documents.

In the interaction between systems or functions based on Noark and SGK, respectively, it is essential to distinguish between the electronic (case) records of the organization, which are managed by Noark, and the document storage of SGK. The records are the documentation base of the organization. They are subject to comprehensive laws and regulations and strict requirements with regard to quality control. Documents in the SGK document storage are associated with the individual executive officers (or groups of officers) and managed by them. The document storage has a certain structure and certain rules for quality control, but it is up to the executive officers to enforce them in accordance with common guidelines. What documents the executive officers may want to include in their parts of the document storage will of course be depend on their needs. In many ways, the document storage is meant to replace the unstructured «file folders» in use and to give the officers an internal tool for working efficiently with documents during the production stage.

If documents belonging to the SGK document storage are stored in the records, the records will be loaded with documents which do not belong there (such as duplicated material, duplicates of record documents, documents being drafted, etc.) and which do not fulfil the quality control requirements for the records. It may be time-consuming to single out these documents at a later stage, such as during transfer to archival repository.

On the other hand, if case documents are stored in the SGK document storage instead of in the records, parts of the organization's documentation base will be taken out of its context and stored elsewhere without quality control requirements being maintained. If this should happen to a great extent, there is a risk that the archival authority (the National Archivist) would apply the same strict requirements to the SGK document storage as to the records, which would be very inappropriate and lead to inefficiency for all involved parts. Also, conflicts would arise with the Freedom of Information Act and, presumably, the Archives Regulation, if case documents were to be stored in the SGK document storage without being registered in Noark.

Thus, the distinction between electronic records and the SGK document storage is fundamental in terms of laws and regulations and in terms of quality control. This imposes certain requirements in terms of the functionality of integrated systems, and in terms of the preparation and enforcement of procedures in the organizations that use the systems.

Technically, the distinction is mainly logical. Within one and the same system, both kinds of documents would be part of a common document storage. When an executive officer retrieves a document into his personal folder, this happens naturally through a reference to the record document, not by physical duplication. *From the Noark point of view, however, it is an absolute requirement that documents which are part of electronic records should be subject to the Noark functions for records management, including access control and quality control.*

Figure 2-1 presents a model for organizing document storage and retrieval in an interaction between Noark and SGK functions. The model is relevant whether the functions are integrated within the same system, or two or more systems are integrated with each other.

The model considers

- the needs of the individual parties (indicated by the roles of registrar, manager and executive officer) to have access to their documents and sources of information from one and the same user environment,
- the logical distinction between the case records and the SGK document storage, and the managing of the two parts by separate document-management systems,
- the need to transfer documents between the two documents storages, by way of actual document flow (in both directions) or by way of referencing (only from SGK to Noark).

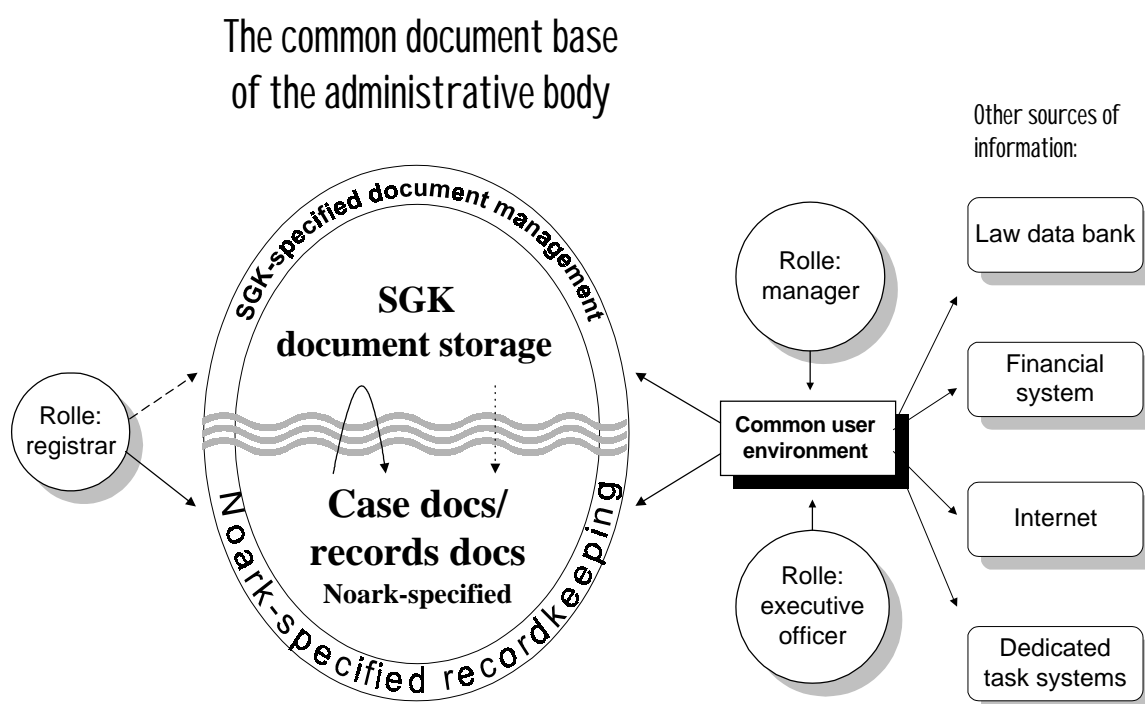


Figure 2-1: Model for document storage and retrieval in the interaction between Noark and SGK

Noark's interaction with the document handling of SGK-based case handling systems is particularly relevant during production of case documents which are to be stored as electronic records. The production of documents itself is an executive function outside the scope of Noark and within the scope of SGK, but the storage of documents as well as the associated registration and quality control are recordkeeping functions specified in Noark. This interaction imposes requirements in terms of the functionality of the systems as well as the firmness and clarity of procedures and responsibilities. This is described in more detail in chapter 6.

2.2.3 Recordkeeping and dedicated task systems

The need for integration between recordkeeping and case handling systems will also be present in those cases where the case handling system is a dedicated task system. Even here it is possible to choose between including the Noark functions in a complete system or integrating two or more systems with each other. The model in figure 2-1 applies even to dedicated task systems.

However, it will probably not be rational to build Noark functionality into every dedicated task system within public administration. There are a number of very different such systems, and it would take an unnecessary amount of development work to integrate Noark with all these. A more appropriate strategy is to integrate the dedicated task systems with the Noark interface, which would be common for "all" recordkeeping systems within public administration. Noark-4 forms the basis of such a solution by offering an open interface as specified in part II, chapter 17.