

ARTICLE 1—WHY YOU SHOULD PAYING ATTENTION TO THE COMPETENCIES

Submitted by Deb Marshall

If you are reading this article, you already know that records and information management (RIM) is the oxygen of your organization. RIM is an overlooked and often understated necessity, and just like oxygen, very much taken for granted. RIM is critical to the successful life of the organization long term because without it, demise is eminent and can occur in a sudden heart attack or stroke (business interruption) with severe consequences (fines, jail, disasters, etc.). Having a gradual loss of oxygen, like an extended slow illness, eventually ends up with the business in a coma resulting in death (bankruptcy or going out of business). This may be the more common scenario. Businesses don't even realize they are oxygen deprived until it is too late.

Why is this worth writing about? Because you are your organization's triage nurse and it's necessary for you to be competent so that you can maintain your organization's RIM health. By paying attention to the competencies and engaging in growing and expanding your skill set, you can be your organization's greatest asset rather than its biggest liability. Your competencies also prepare you to have the ability to change patients when they don't follow that healthy lifestyle that you can offer, support and lead.

The Competency Document is the end product for the first phase of a three phase competency initiative ([1] competency document, [2] self-assessment, [3] specialty and international competencies) that ARMA International accepted on behalf of its membership. The membership asked repeatedly for a product that would clearly define the profession of RIM for themselves and each other, as well as for:

- Their employers,
- Organization human resources staff,
- Recruits into the RIM profession,
- Information users and contributors (RIM vendors) at large,
- Non-RIM professionals, and
- Educational institutions and educators

So as you can see, the competency document addresses several audiences, but the primary driver of phase 1 was you, the RIM practitioner.

Getting back to why you should pay attention to the competencies--They can be a key instrumental tool in advancing your career. Let's look at some of the benefits in more detail. The competencies:

1. Provide you with a clear direction for your career and how far you want to go. You can see what you need to move up the RIM ladder (levels) and how far you want to go.
2. Open the way for career opportunities and options. Career moves and advances mean higher salaries and we all want to make more money!
3. Allow for personal preferences, timelines and attributes—in other words, you may decide that you want to specialize in a particular domain at the highest level. You set your own schedule for growth.
4. Foster professional growth—in order to advance and be more competent you will need to ‘grow’ your knowledge and skills whether it be overall by level, or specifically within a domain.
5. Enhance your career satisfaction—there is comfort and security in knowing that you know your stuff. Gaining and realizing the respect of your peers because you are competent adds personal satisfaction to career satisfaction.
6. Enable you to be honest with yourself through self evaluation and self assessment.

Since the “Competencies” contribute to the recognition of RIM as a profession, you may also be recognized as a ‘professional.’

The Competencies were not created in a vacuum. The project kickoff was an information exchange forum where over forty practitioners of varying levels and industries came together with a facilitator to collect data, and express ideas and opinions on what knowledge and skills the generic records professional should have. In addition to the raw data from the forum, other competency resources were reviewed including but not limited to:

- Previously published competencies of ARMA
- Australian competencies
- Canadian competencies (ALARM)
- SLA competencies

All of this raw data was turned over to the ARMA Education Development Committee to make sense of and refine.

As a result, the competencies address the knowledge and skills RIM practitioners need at four levels and in six areas called domains. These levels and domains are explained in detail in the competency document introduction, but quickly, in summary:

- Level 1 is a beginner in the field of RIM. They may or may not be experienced and knowledgeable in other fields, but are definitely new to RIM.
- Level 2 has mid-level knowledge and skills in RIM. This person probably has some supervision and analysis experience as well.
- Level 3 has solid RIM knowledge, skills and experience in RIM. This person probably also has solid business management skills.

- Level 4 has high level RIM knowledge, skills and experience in RIM at the executive level.

Sometimes the records management knowledge and skills are the easy part of being a professional at any level. Because of that, the competencies list sets of assumptions at each level that address business operational skills. Some of the assumptions detail computation, writing, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

The competency document addresses the skill set each of the above levels need across the following areas called domains: Business Functions, RIM Functions, Risk Management, Communications and Marketing, Information Technology, and Leadership.

You will see that the Levels show a vertical look at the competencies in all domains, while the Domains show a horizontal look at the competencies across all levels.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Business Functions	↓			
RIM Practices	↓			
Risk Management	↓			
Communications & Marketing	↓			
Information Technology	↓			
Leadership	↓			

	Business Functions	RIM Practices	Risk Management	Communications & Marketing	Information Technology	Leadership
Level 1	→	→	→	→	→	→
Level 2						
Level 3						
Level 4						

The most important thing to remember about the Competencies is that if you don't engage; if you don't pay any attention to them, they can't influence or inspire you in your career development and choices—only you have the power and control your future. Achieve your professional goals by moving forward with the ARMA Competencies.



Here are some recommendations for getting on your personal career highway!

- Access and download the ARMA Competency Document from the ARMA website: www.arma.org There are several points of access on the main page.
- Make sure to read the document introduction—it doesn't take long and your experience will be more satisfying from the start.
- Review the document (You may want to print it for leisurely and repeated access as well as customizing your copy with highlights, notes, etc.)
- Once you have finished your review, think about where you *honestly* believe your competency levels are—make some notes. Realize that there is no right or wrong, it is what it is. You may feel that you are pretty much at a level 1 or 2 in one domain, and surprise; a level 4 in another! You may have a mixture of task statement experience across levels—as long as you are being honest, this self-evaluation is right. It's right because it's you. This evaluation will help prepare you for the ARMA Self-Assessment, which will be the topic of the next newsletter article.

So, pay attention to these terrific competencies: get busy, engage, evaluate where you are and where you want to go—

DO IT!