Abstract
This article proposes ethical and social responsibilities for archival institutions to supplement the ethical codes for records management that focus on individual ethical behavior. The methodology is based on case studies, from the author’s long career as professional archivist in administrative and historical archives. The original contributions of this study are ethical and social responsibility proposals from the perspective of archival institutions, not the staff, which could help these institutions extend their ethical code and formulate new strategies to benefit the community.

Keywords
Social responsibility; Ethical codes; Archival institutions; Ethics in archives.

1. Introduction

In Spain, archival institutions are responsible for managing and conserving records produced by people and legal entities in the course of their activity. Such institutions may depend directly on the producing body (if the company or public authority body has an archive with staff and services) or they may be established by law and receive documentation by transfer (they may be other public archives within a national archive system, or they may be private entities with a contract to protect records, safeguarding the confidential nature of what they receive). From the perspective of the institution, rather than its archivists, ethical and social responsibilities have their own particular features that are determined by the importance and exclusivity of the records in its custody. This aspect has not been considered from the perspective of archival institutions, which have not drafted their own ethical codes.
Collections of records are exclusive because the producing entity (the body or individual who engages in an activity) creates them without generating copies (which is not the case with library records) and the loss of the records would leave a gap in the documentary heritage. Collections are important—for businesses they serve as evidence of activities, as proof of rights, or simply bear testimony so that the business can continue with its activity efficiently (for example, keeping clinical records whose loss would cause serious detriment to patients). Collections are also important for society in terms of accountability (Roper, 2003) and in short, ensure transparent management and activity in institutions (Berggren, Bernshteyn, 2007), and good governance in democracies (Dikopoulou, Mihiotis, 2003).

Archival institutions have not drafted their own ethical codes

Ethics for archival staff are regulated through the codes of various professional collectives and associations. This approach helps to establish archivists’ neutrality and impartiality, while their profession is in the midst of disputes over policies on memory (Gilliland, 2011). These professional ethical codes emphasize staff conduct and values;
- how to promote access, understand historical records, preserve primary sources;
- commitment to protecting records;
- social responsibility towards employers;
- defense of cultural heritage;
- professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, and processing collections of records to select and maintain;
- etc.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA, 2012) and the International Council on Archives (ICA, 1996) are two organizations with codes of ethics. There are indications, from a business perspective, that codes of conduct are insufficient and need to be supplemented with ethical initiatives. Therefore, a model for collaboration based on individual ethical behavior, supported by senior management, is needed (Svensson; Wood, 2008). The social role and responsibility of business is no longer limited to supplying goods and services, it now extends to social behaviors and values, and impacts public life (Agatillo, 2008).

Archivists’ ethical codes do not resolve or influence areas that lie outside the competence of professional archivists and are, therefore, not their responsibility. Archivists must perform their duties responsibly to protect the integrity of the records in their care, but they are not responsible for financing or making the necessary budget allocations for this task. Archivists should follow good practices when appraising and selecting records, but they are not responsible for introducing a record appraisal and selection policy (budgeting for record appraisal committee expenses, appointing professionals to these committees, establishing meeting calendars, prioritizing appraisal needs from the perspective of the company’s business activities, etc.). Archivists must promote access to records, but they are not responsible for establishing the restrictions legally available to a state or for the restrictions decided by a company’s business policy. Archivists are responsible for achieving professional excellence by updating their knowledge, but they are not responsible for their company’s or institution’s decision to allocate funds towards updating knowledge in their employees (all employees, not just archivists) to achieve more effective information management and knowledge generation. In this context, archival institutions and record-producing entities need to address essential issues of ethical and social responsibility to supplement professional ethical codes in order to ensure a global commitment to ethics. Obviously archival institutions are governed by real people, and these people must apply an ethical code of archivists. It is important to note that in some cases those responsible for archival institutions are not archivists, or may not have exclusive archival responsibilities. In this article we refer to persons who have responsibilities for archival technical duties and the duties of governing or managing institutions that guard the records. Spanning activities include records management in a broader responsibility than that of the archival technician job, being responsible for issues such as personnel management, enterprise policy, economic management, dissemination, etc.

Codes of conduct are insufficient and need to be supplemented with ethical initiatives

2. Contexts where ethical breaches may occur

Next is a closer examination of settings where ethical problems might arise, including a description of cases where ethics within an organization may be vulnerable. We consider the situation from the organization’s point of view, rather than from the archives perspective; in archives, ethical codes are known and have been published by, for example, the aforementioned Society of American Archivists or the International Council on Archives. In the following cases, archivists are subject to practices and guidelines that organizations and managers introduce in order to defend their business policy, corporate image, or business line, without considering whether they are in breach of ethical considerations or social responsibility towards the community. Abe la (2008) has indicated that business ethics is challenging also because business are controversial. Other studies have examined the role ethical codes of conduct play in the representation of archivists and their work. These studies examined codes of ethics for concepts of professionalism, and considered the relationships between archivists, records creators, records users, employers, and the general public (Dingwall, 2004; Turner, 2011).

Next, we will review the research related to the people who are responsible for the management of archival institutions’ cases.
Case 1. Lack of freedom of expression and communication. When archivists, or other workers in an organization, are not allowed to express their opinions about how or what documents are managed. Technical meetings are not held to resolve any management problems that the organization may have and/or archivists receive orders from their superiors that prevent management of specific documents—in particular documents that may be newsworthy or of legal interest for the community. For example, a town council may prevent the archivist from diffusing the minutes of plenary meetings, or a public television program may not allow transparent financial management because they do not want to reveal pressure from economic or political groups.

Case 2. The organization promotes non-ethical behaviors. Public or private organizations may coerce archivists to alter the integrity of a file, telling them to add or remove documents to change the general purpose of the file, or to provide partial information so that the truth of a matter cannot be established. Generalized absence of control over the sheets in a file (by not applying the General international standard archival description [ISAD (G)] or Encoded archival description [EAD] in a database to record the volume of the document unit) means that, out of political interest, senior management in a firm or other pressure groups can coerce archivists to modify the integrity of files. Changes may be made by archivists themselves (which would be an offence) or with the aid of a representative from the pressure group.

Case 3. Deliberate neglect of document maintenance. In major organizations which have been active for many years (public authorities may keep documents dating from the 19th century or earlier, and firms may have been active for several decades), managers may decide they wish to destroy documents as a way of freeing up physical space in their buildings. As they consider the documents no longer have any legal interest or primary value, they do not set up an evaluation committee to decide whether the documents should be destroyed for lack of any primary or secondary value (interest for history and culture), but comply with their country’s legal requirements for document destruction. Some practices used to destroy these documents under the guise of legality may be related to storage on premises where it is known that water will get in when it rains heavily. When the documents are wet, the necessary steps are taken to destroy them. In other cases, cleaning staff or other maintenance employees, with no technical knowledge of the work, may be ordered to clean premises containing documents and, unaware of the seriousness and complexity of the undertaking, they may inadvertently destroy archive documents, considering them to be “just old papers”.

Case 4. Sale of data. The organization neglects to control information, making it easy for senior management or document management staff to sell data. A council may provide telecommunications companies with the records of new entries on the electoral role for their business line. Senior management in a historical archive will not allow the organization to have a policy of transparent document management if they use their knowledge of the documents to sell data and information to people seeking genealogical or other types of information. They may prevent the production of inventories and catalogs or hide those that already exist in order to sell the information they have privileged access to.

Case 5. Precarious work. Various strategies are used to avoid hiring archives’ staff under contractual arrangements or categories that are not in keeping with an archivist’s level of knowledge and professional qualifications, such as administrative contracts in firms, or contractual levels below graduate level in public authorities. Also, firms sometimes make employees work longer probationary periods on very low pay, or use volunteers for qualified technical work.

Case 6. Unfair competition. Entities that diffuse archival documentation, through reuse or open data policies, may obtain information from other document-producing entities without clearly stating that fact in order to gain unfair competitive advantage over other producer entities. They may use this information system for web promotion, positioning, or to sell data.

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Case 7. Apathy over the quality of technical work. Senior management does not have updated technical expertise, either because they are older staff who have not made, or find it hard to make, the effort to keep up-to-date with information and communication technologies, or because their personal interests and aptitudes do not lead them to update their knowledge. In order to conceal their lack of professionalism, these senior managers prevent their staff from progressing, or from proposing or updating technical archiving work, by limiting or cancelling new document management proposals, especially in view of the challenges of electronic management of documents produced by organizations. In this context, senior management may also limit investment in updating staff expertise, despite the company’s solvency, to avoid furthering expertise among possible competitors for senior management posts. They also neglect to introduce a quality system to avoid evaluation of their technical management and prevent people from identifying management deficiencies.

Case 8. Obstacles to staff promotion. The organization has no procedure for promoting staff to higher positions of responsibility after ongoing training or professional development. Public authorities often promote internally, but have no staff promotion system. Thus they avoid higher remuneration and prevent entry into senior management of people who are able to make observations and suggest technical approaches that would eliminate senior management’s monopoly over information and the way the work is done.

Case 9. Preventing introduction of a transparent system. A transparent management system is optional in some cases, (especially in private companies) and in others obligatory.
(especialmente en públicos autorizados). Archivos y transparencia están íntimamente vinculados, porque acceder a los documentos es una manera de demostrar que las acciones de una organización son acreditables para el público. Sin embargo, algunas organizaciones privadas pueden comprometerse a prácticas que limiten la transparencia, tales como no organizar sus archivos, no describir unidades de documentos que dificultan su localización, o no nombrar a personal responsable para responder a solicitudes externas de información. Las autoridades públicas pueden no aplicar la legislación actual y actuar como entidades privadas, evitando sospechas de que se están infrriendo normas de accesibilidad a documentos que no estén vinculadas a actividades específicas para el archivo de archivos.

**Case 10.** Dificultades reconciliando el trabajo y la vida personal. Actualmente, las regulaciones laborales en los países de Europa Occidental proporcionan un ambiente laboral en que las dos sexos pueden disfrutar del mismo equilibrio entre los propios hogares, la vida personal y la profesión, work-life balance, durante las horas laborales y fuera de ellas. Sin embargo, la organización puede evitar las interrupciones laborales si asigna cargas laborales que mantengan los empleados obligados a trabajar durante horas invariables y fuera de ellas. En general, la explotación laboral no puede ser una realidad, a menos que ambos sexos disfruten de igualdad de oportunidades laborales.

**3. Ética en las instituciones archivísticas.**

Los elementos éticos que propone no son exclusivamente competencia de archivistas, pero deben ser promovidos y adoptados por los altos directivos de la empresa. Propone los siguientes puntos para consideración:

**Punto 1.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover la libertad de expresión y las ideas en todos los aspectos de los recursos humanos.

**Punto 2.** Instituciones archivísticas no deben afectar la integridad de los documentos. Aseguran la integridad y la independencia de los empleados. Deben proteger la integridad y el interés propio de los empleados cuando manejen información personal, preservando su independencia contra cualquier interferencia o interés propio que pueda afectar la independencia profesional y la imparcialidad; los gerentes no deben solicitar, promover, o exigir comportamientos inmorales.

**Punto 3.** Instituciones archivísticas deben emplear la información apropiada como lo requiera la legislación legal.

**Punto 4.** Instituciones archivísticas deben asegurar la integridad y la autenticidad de la información en la documentación de la que se crean y manejan, aplicando políticas que establecen medidas oportunas para proteger el patrimonio/documento.

**Punto 5.** Instituciones archivísticas deben garantizar la aplicación de la legislación de protección de datos por medio del diseño de medidas de seguridad apropiadas a la sensibilidad de la información personal, especialmente en entornos digitales.

**Punto 6.** Instituciones archivísticas deben remunerar el trabajo de profesionales de manera apropiada, evitando formatos contratuales que no estén en concordancia con las calificaciones necesarias para el puesto.

**Punto 7.** Instituciones archivísticas deben evitar que los empleados reciban beneficios externos por la utilización de la información que manejan o que estén en custodia de la organización.

**Punto 8.** Instituciones archivísticas deben evitar comportamientos que fomenten el comportamiento anticompetitivo. La organización debe establecer su misión y sus políticas en el uso de la información y el uso de la información y debe comunicar estas políticas a todo el sector.

**Punto 9.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover la calidad en el manejo de la información técnica que gestionan, dedicando recursos para la adquisición de software o hardware y para la aplicación de estándares nacionales o internacionales para la descripción y manejo de la información.

**Punto 10.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover la aplicación de sistemas de manejo de la calidad del proceso productivo y promover la participación de los empleados para incorporar diversas fuentes de recursos en la toma de decisiones y la asignación de recursos económicos y/o materiales.

**Punto 11.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover la introducción de un nuevo sistema para mejorar la productividad y la calidad en el manejo de la información.

**Punto 12.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover el entrenamiento y la investigación para mejorar la eficiencia del manejo de la información.

**Punto 13.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover la introducción de sistemas de información que garanticen la transparencia en los servicios y líneas de negocio de la institución.

**Punto 14.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover la conciliación del trabajo y el empleo de sus empleados.

**Punto 15.** Instituciones archivísticas deben eliminar las barreras al acceso y al procesamiento de la información de los empleados en el que trabajan, dentro y fuera del entorno laboral.

**Punto 16.** Instituciones archivísticas deben hacer asesoramiento en relaciones con otros agentes, empresas y ciudadanos, y no deben aceptar o ofrecer regalos o comisiones que puedan condicionar decisiones o constituir sobornos, especialmente si proporcionan acceso transparente a la información o si se difunden dicha información para su uso o reutilización.

**Punto 17.** Instituciones archivísticas deben introducir medidas oportunas para garantizar el acceso real físico y virtual a la información en los registros que manejan, en el marco legal.

**Punto 18.** Instituciones archivísticas deben garantizar el tratamiento justo para todos, empleados, usuarios y clientes, independientemente de su género, raza, religión, etc.

**Punto 19.** Instituciones archivísticas deben promover el respeto por todas las personas que trabajan tomando en cuenta sus consideraciones en términos de valoración y apreciación de sus derechos, cualidades, habilidades y conocimientos.
4. Archival institutions’ social responsibility

The concept and practice of corporate social responsibility has been evolving since the late 19th and early 20th centuries when business owners like Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford, and George Cadbury began to apply health programs for their employees or create housing provisions for workers as an exercise of social responsibility in their business environment. Social responsibility in business continues today; the World Business Council for Sustainable Development proposal, states:

“Corporate social responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at large” (Bassen; Jastram; Meyer, 2005).

Currently, social responsibility can be contemplated from a variety of viewpoints, such as the economic responsibility to generate profit, the legal responsibility to comply with legal regulations, the ethical responsibility to comply with social expectations not contemplated by law, or as a discretionary, voluntary responsibility to engage in additional behaviors or activities desired by the community, such as philanthropic, cultural, or social initiatives (Galbreath, 2009). We only take into account archival institutions’ social responsibility, not the responsibility of a records producer in their line of business. We therefore disregard proposals linked to profit or compliance with the law (which is assumed) and the abovementioned ethical aspects in order to focus on proposals concerning discretionary social responsibility, about what an archival institution can do to benefit its community. In general, archival institutions should adopt corporate social responsibility to promote actions designed to encourage a positive impact on the environment, users, employees, society, stakeholders, and the economy. In short, businesses can give back to society through corporate social responsibility.

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Social responsibility actions

Point 1. Protecting the environment by promoting the rational use of energies, the efficient choice of infrastructures and the use of less aggressive materials (fire prevention gases, chemicals for restoring records, etc.).

Point 2. Providing theoretical and practical training in archival knowledge.

Point 3. Strengthening culture in society through cultural activities like exhibitions, publications, visits, etc.

Point 4. Reusing information, permitting the use of documentary information that can generate benefits for society.

Point 5. The right to know, diffusing records that society has the right to know about to improve decision making in politics, economics, or other aspects of personal life.

Point 6. Capturing and protecting business archives in the community to save its documentary heritage.

Point 7. Diffusing records online, through the appropriate databases and search engines, to facilitate access for society.

Point 8. Research, conducting and diffusing research and analysis to satisfy the needs for knowledge detected in society to achieve its objectives as community.

Point 9. Establishing a system for dealing with complaints and claims over breach of the institution’s obligations or the community’s rights.

Point 20. Archival institutions should apply a quality system to ensure their services are appropriate to their functions and competencies.

5. Conclusion

The ethical aspects of records management are not limited to archivists’ professional approach; instead, there is a broad spectrum of points related to the institution for which senior management, rather than technical archival staff, is responsible. The ethical points the institution must assume supplement the ethics of records management.

Top level management of archival institutions and document-producing agencies has a duty to ensure the ethical responsibility of the actions carried out in its corporation. The abandonment of this responsibility can cause practices to be carried out to the detriment of the user community (lack of access to documents due to professional shortcomings of the employees -who perhaps have not been selected with the appropriate professional profile, for different reasons- abandonment in implementing new technologies for document management, avoidance of quality systems, etc.) and to the detriment of the organization itself (negligence in implementing policies of innovation, denigrating treatment and low remuneration to its workers, reversing in the practice of charging illegally for providing information services, absence of recycling programs, etc.) that can cause a bad public image.

The practices of the cases listed are not usually made public. It is not done by the top management nor employees, for different reasons linked to their benefit, and because they are...
not pressured by citizens or public opinion, who are often unaware of these behaviors. In public administrations the archive inspection figure could solve many of these behaviors, but unfortunately has fallen into disuse, perhaps mistakenly associated with policing. The inspection is a useful tool to detect deficiencies and anomalies and, above all, to propose solutions that should be verifiable in another future inspection.

Archival institutions can also exercise social responsibility to benefit the community where they work. Various actions linked to the records management of archives can give back to the community while also generating knowledge and encouraging transparency to promote a democratic society.

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Note

1. Although this article is based on actual cases in Spain and Latin America, they cannot be specifically cited because they are not found in judicial decisions.

6. Bibliography


