

Kathryn Miller

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A Review of the Documentation Strategy Model

The theories behind documentation strategies have been discussed since the term was first clearly defined by Larry Hackman in 1984. At the time, he was working on a Society of American Archivists (SAA) Task Force to develop a strategy for nationwide assessments of archival conditions and priorities (Hackman 2009). Archivists have offered many approaches to executing documentation strategies, from an emphasis on collaboration to Helen Samuels' functional analysis focus (Samuels 1991). However varied the arguments might be, documentation strategies call on all archivists to be proactive. Archivists, record creators, community and government stakeholders, and other related groups gather around an event, institution, group, etc. to collect, arrange, preserve, and deliver records created in order to provide a more representative and inclusive history for future generations. In the case of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, The National Archives (TNA) spent years planning *The Record*, an online directory that would deliver all sides of the London 2012 story, "formal and informal, official and unofficial" (Williams 2012, 24). A review of the arguments and an example currently in practice perhaps raises more questions than answers when it comes to documentation strategies, but this is one archival theory that still has much growing to do.

Relationship between Functional Analysis and Documentation Strategy

Helen Samuels' 1991 article "Improving our Disposition: Documentation Strategy" is both an assertion of her stance on documentation strategies and a review of her book *Varsity Letters*, a functional study of colleges and universities that is intended to be a how-to guide for those creating, preserving, and managing records of higher education institutions (Samuels 1991,

128). Samuels makes the argument that in order for multiple institutions to come together and participate in a documentation strategy, each individual institution first needs to perform what she calls a “functional analysis” (127). Samuels explains the difference between a documentation strategy and a functional analysis:

Documentation strategies are intended to coordinate the collecting activities of many institutions. Institutional functional analysis is intended to be used by individual institutions to improve their own documentation. Documentation strategies and institutional functional analysis are, therefore, separate techniques, but are mutually supportive of one another. (127)

This is an interesting approach to the documentation strategy model, as Samuels is suggesting that each institution do some house cleaning before they fully collaborate with others. This house cleaning does not involve a traditional collections analysis or the usual arrangement practices, but rather calls on the institution to examine the functions and context of the records, and that context should influence new archival and records management policies (128). Context rather than record-creating location or record type provides the opportunity for more cross-departmental/institutional relationships to form (131). Samuels is limited by her scope, however, as she is only focusing on academic institutions in her argument. Similar institutions produce similar records in similar contexts. So, naturally, a documentation strategy between multiple academic institutions will be seamless because the functional analyses that were performed in the individual institutions will have produced similar collection and arrangement policies. While her scope is limited and she places great faith in a functional analysis being able to naturally lead to a documentation strategy, she does call for archivists to be more proactive, “Archivists and their colleagues must become active participants in the creation, analysis and selection of the documentary record” (137).

Documentation Strategy: Origins and Reflections

In his article, “The Origins of Documentation Strategies in Context: Recollections and Reflections,” Larry Hackman (2009) discusses the planning and analysis that went into developing a documentation strategy to assess priorities and provide recommendations for archives across the nation. He participated in this planning and analysis as a member of an SAA Task Force in the early 1980s. Unfortunately, Hackman does not discuss his nationwide documentation strategy beyond the planning stages, but does lament the lack of interest in archives to take on leadership roles. From a 2009 perspective, Hackman decides to look back on the model he created and how it can be improved today. Hackman asserts that his scope was too limited, that trying to work within the archival community to develop a strategy that would inevitably require further archival cooperation on a nationwide scale was producing poor results. No archive wanted to take on a leadership role, most likely because they were answering directly to the SAA, which was politically complicated (448). Not surprisingly, it turns out Helen Samuels (nee Slotkin) was on the SAA Task Force with Hackman, so they were both involved defining the documentation strategy model. Hackman has since read Samuels’ writings on the functional analysis model and while he agrees with the necessity of “broad analysis preceding selection,” (456) he also argues that her ideas are “limited” and “less demanding of broad participant and collaboration” (456). Hackman believes that the attitude of the archival profession needs to change, that archivists “need to support wider action, including sophisticated, tailored, continuing advocacy beyond the archival community” (438). The only way Hackman’s ideal of archivists going beyond their tight-knit communities can be realized is to disseminate publications on implementing documentation strategies through multi-institution collaboration and individual institution functional analyses to a wider audience. This wider audience should not only include record creators but also, “organizations that set standards and promote best practices” (457) for said record creators. A

realization of Hackman's ideal and Samuels' "functional analysis" approach was attempted by TNA for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games.

Documentation Strategy and Functional Analysis: An Olympic Undertaking

TNA decided to put theory to practice shortly after London, UK won the bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games (hereafter referred to as London 2012). Led by TNA, *The Record* was to be an online directory of records associated with London 2012. Cathy Williams (2012) discusses the planning of *The Record* in, "On the Record: Towards a Documentation Strategy." The objectives of *The Record* were not only to create a website bringing all relevant London 2012 records together but, more importantly, to implement best practices for archives and records management in all London 2012 record-creating groups (hereafter referred to as stakeholders). The planning and delivery structure of *The Record* was also influenced by Hackman's argument that archival centralized groups should actively seek widespread collaboration and promote archival education. TNA brought together all stakeholders, both government and private, and acted as the central group for the project, giving each organization the tools needed for implementing good record-creating and keeping practices and for cross-organizational communication. Like Hackman, Williams points out that early in the process, "there were plenty of ideas and useful discussion but enthusiastic promises often came to nothing" (31). TNA also had to implement Helen Samuels' functional analysis approach as new groups and organizations connected to London 2012 were cropping up (and closing down) every day. *The Record* committee had to "identify them, define their activities, select and appraise records they created, and transfer them as appropriate before their dissolution" (25-26). These quick functional analyses of new groups helped immensely, as there was a lack of communication and leadership in the stakeholder committee TNA had set up. Constant communication with new organizations allowed *The Record* to deliver "against its core objectives" (34), as records and stories not before

thought of were being collected and preserved. Because there was so much not thought of in the planning stages, TNA and the stakeholder committee had to be able to adjust their documentation strategies and organization at a moment's notice. The fact that the whole project was "regularly refined in response to changing conditions" (37) shows that *The Record* took the theories of Hackman, Samuels, and other archivists to heart in real time as they planned, organized, communicated, and delivered records associated with London 2012. Williams does admit that this article was published in April 2012 to merely to share the process of planning and organizing *The Record*; the project's true success could not be measured until at least a year after London 2012. As of now, *The Record* (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/olympics/>) is an aesthetically pleasing website with a thorough list of links to groups and records associated with London 2012. It is refreshing to see that *The Record* has not abandoned their mission of fostering ongoing collaboration, as the website requests that any groups who have London 2012 records contact TNA for further information.

Conclusion

In practice, documentation strategies have as many drawbacks as they do unforeseen benefits. Within a limited scope like London 2012 or an academic institution, functional analyses and ongoing widespread collaboration, communication, and archival education, can produce a representative "legacy," as Williams (2012) calls it (24). The most important idea to take away from all three articles is that behind every strategy to document a sector of society or a specific event is the need for implementing best practices in record keeping, management, and preservation. As archivists, it is our duty not only to seek out groups and events to document, but also to make sure that government, private, and community organizations have all the resources necessary to ensure a legacy is created and maintained through the records they create.

Bibliography

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