Exploring Public Recordkeeping Behaviors in Wiki-Supported Public Consultation Activities in the New Zealand Public Sector

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Abstract

Government agencies rely on public records for public service provision, public consultation, tracking and monitoring public management performance, and maintaining consistency and continuity in government. In New Zealand, several government agencies have used new wiki-supported public consultation environments, leading to the creation of public records. So far however, there is no empirical knowledge available on how individual public servants have identified and managed these new electronic public records.

Applying a theoretical perspective of public servants’ policy discretion in identifying and managing public records, this paper presents empirical research findings of recordkeeping behaviors in two New Zealand-based case studies in which government agencies have used wikis in their public consultation activities. Both cases demonstrate the need for public servants to explore new appreciative settings for recordkeeping while dealing with new wiki-enabled public sector environments.

1. Introduction

Government agencies rely on public records for public service provision, public consultation activities, tracking and monitoring government performance, and maintaining consistency and continuity in government. Within New Zealand, government agencies must comply with the regulatory requirements of the Public Records Act (PRA) to create and maintain records and to retain them for as long as required, regardless of the format of the records. However, traditional methods and procedures for creating, controlling and maintaining records, such as print and file, may be less effective with regard to records created by emergent Web 2.0 technologies, such as wikis, which
governments are increasingly introducing in their external relationships with citizens.

Web 2.0 is an umbrella term that refers to a new generation of web-enabled applications built around user-generated or user-manipulated content [31]. Other examples of Web 2.0 applications are blogs, podcasts, and social networking websites. A wiki is a web-based collaborative writing tool that enables group authorship of information. Content on wikis tend to be iterative, whereby people undo and redo each other’s work, implying that the information on a wiki is the interlinked work of many [23].

In New Zealand, several government agencies have introduced a wiki in their public consultation activities, leading to the creation of public records. So far, however, in order to decide upon appropriate recordkeeping practices in these new public sector environments, many New Zealand government agencies do not have specific policy guidelines for managing wiki-enabled public records. Moreover, there is no empirical knowledge available on how individual employees of government agencies are identifying and managing these new electronic public records.

In this paper, we empirically explore two New Zealand-based case studies in which government agencies have used a wiki in their public consultation activities. In order to find out how public servants identified and managed public records in these processes, we first describe potential recordkeeping challenges emerging from dealing with new electronic, instead of physical, records under the existing legislative recordkeeping framework in New Zealand. Secondly, we look at the responsibilities of individual public servants for good electronic recordkeeping and point at the policy discretion they have in implementing the PRA and the recordkeeping policy of their organization. Thirdly, we provide an overview of wikis, including their potential and realized use within government. In sections 5, 6 and 7 we describe and
analyze empirical findings from case-study based explorative research on how public servants have identified and managed new wiki-enabled public records resulting from public consultation activities, also compared to existing regulatory frameworks for recordkeeping in New Zealand. Finally, we present our conclusions and make some recommendations for future wiki-supported public consultation activities.

2. Challenges of electronic recordkeeping

Records provide government agencies with the ability to ensure the continuing conduct of business, to comply with the regulatory environment, and to provide necessary accountability [17]. To support these fundamental recordkeeping purposes, records must meet certain recordkeeping principles, including that they are authentic, reliable, useable and that their integrity is protected for as long as required [17].

In accordance with existing legislation, these core recordkeeping principles apply equally to physical and electronic public records, but their application to electronic public records present a new series of potential challenges. These challenges include issues related to the possibilities of human and technical failures (e.g. accidental deletion, back up failures), the ease of altering electronic records without leaving a trace, the storage of electronic information without metadata, the accumulation of electronic information with limited appraisal and the focus on up-to-date electronic data at the expense of historical data [15, 33]. Further challenges exist with regard to long-term digital storage and technological obsolescence [24], as well as attempting to manage public records that only exist or are fully functional in an electronic environment, i.e. without a paper equivalent.

The 'here today, gone tomorrow' philosophy related to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) sits uneasily with long-term legal and social obligations of government to preserve its information [16]. This decline in organizational memory may have significant negative impacts on accountability processes within government organizations [24]. In New Zealand, the 2005 Public Records Act (PRA) determines the legal recordkeeping obligations of government. The PRA sets the framework for creating and managing information in the New Zealand government, with a focus on promoting government accountability through reliable recordkeeping [6].

The Act sets three core duties for New Zealand government agencies. Firstly, the Act requires all agencies to create and capture full and accurate records of their activities and that agencies maintain these records in a recordkeeping system so they remain accessible overtime. Secondly, it requires that no person disposes of, or authorizes the disposal of records, without prior approval from the Chief Archivist. Finally, the Act requires organizations to transfer records of archival value to Archives New Zealand, the official guardian of New Zealand’s public archives, at twenty-five years.

In addition, the PRA provides Archives New Zealand with the ability to set mandatory recordkeeping standards for which government agencies are held accountable. Currently there are three such mandatory standards, two of which apply to electronic recordkeeping: the Create and Maintain Recordkeeping Standard [3] and the Electronic Recordkeeping Metadata Standard [5]. These standards specify the minimum requirements for the making of complete, authentic, reliable, useable and accurate records by public agencies; they also establish a framework and a set of recordkeeping metadata elements applicable to any operational electronic environment [3, 5]. In addition, in January 2007, Archives New Zealand released a discretionary standard, the so-called Digitization Standard [4], for agencies to use when they convert non-electronic records to electronic formats for recordkeeping purposes and for the retention of non-electronic records in electronic form only.

The definition of a public record under the PRA indicates that public records can exist in any format: “record means information, whether in its original form or otherwise, including (without limitation) a document, a signature, a seal, text, images, sound, speech, or data compiled, recorded, or stored” [32]. This means that organizations must create and manage the content and metadata of electronic public records, including those created by using emerging ICTs such as wikis, according to existing legislative requirements [8]. When using wikis, Archives New Zealand further advises New Zealand government agencies to manage public records either by capturing the records into existing corporate recordkeeping systems, electronic or paper-based, or by integrating recordkeeping functionality into the web-based tool [2].

3. Responsibilities of public servants for good electronic recordkeeping

The PRA demonstrates that good recordkeeping, whether in physical or electronic format, is considered to be of important democratic value to the people of New Zealand. To protect this collective interest, under the PRA, Archives New Zealand set the mandatory recordkeeping standards for which government agencies are held accountable. In many cases, New
Zealand government agencies have developed specific policies within their own organizations to meet these legal requirements.

This situation, however, implies that public servants in these organizations have become arbiters of the public interest of good recordkeeping. In applying existing legislation on behalf of their organization, public servants have the policy discretion to manage public records according to their personal interpretation of relevant legislative and agency-specific policy responsibilities [1]: they make critical decisions on the identification and management of public records in their day-to-day activities [27]. Furthermore, as recordkeeping goals and requirements usually have been formulated in general terms, individual employees need to make value judgments in deciding upon ‘correct’ recordkeeping behavior [35]. Research findings on the policy discretion of “street-level” or frontline public servants confirm this important assessment space for government employees, showing that, in many cases, public service and administrative needs are too complicated to be reduced to precise instructions [21]. In the New Zealand context, Archives New Zealand [7] provides the following general advice on the recordkeeping responsibilities of public servants, which then need to be further interpreted by individual government employees in their various public activities:

- Make records
- File and keep records
- Handle records with care
- Prevent illegal disposal of records
- Prevent unauthorized access to records
- Know your organization’s recordkeeping policies
- Undertake all recordkeeping activities to the standards set under the Public Records Act

As the legal definition of a ‘public record’ in the New Zealand context requires, the policy discretion of public servants in recordkeeping practices is not restricted to traditional paper-based records. Individual government employees are responsible for identifying electronic items as public records, including those created by emerging ICT, such as wikis. Therefore they decide how, when and where electronic public records are identified, collected, saved and maintained.

Facilitating new electronic information relationships between public servants and the public, the introduction of wikis in public consultation activities may lead to ambiguities of choice for public servants in deciding on ‘correct’ administrative behavior in these new environments [22]. As public servants experience new conditions for the identification and management of public records in wiki-enabled public sector environments compared to familiar paper-based public service environments for instance, they will need a new appreciative setting for making decisions on their electronic recordkeeping behaviors. That is, public servants require a new readiness of the mind to see, value, and respond to electronic recordkeeping situations in familiar ways [38].

4. The Use of Wikis in Public Consultation

The Internet, as networked information environment, provides the actual capability for members of society to observe, report, question and debate [9]. They can do this by commenting on blogs, through collective web-based media such as Slashdot, and by cooperative authoring wiki-based web sites.

A wiki (from WikiWiki; meaning ‘fast’ in Hawaiian) is a set of linked web pages, created through the incremental development by a group of collaborating users [19]. Technically, a wiki is a collection of interlinked HTML web pages and has cross links between internal pages where each page can be edited while keeping details of such changes.

Almost anything that can be written using a word processor, can be written collaboratively in a wiki; Klobas [18] provides some examples of uses of wikis:

- Reference works
- Websites for communities of practice, hobbyists and other interest groups
- Technical documentation and standards
- Directories and lists
- Resource sharing
- News reports
- Conferences and events
- Collaboration on projects and in committees
- Surveys
- Website development
- Personal wikis

In essence, along with other forms of Web 2.0 technologies, wikis, such as Wikipedia, open source software, and citizen journalism, can enable citizens to become active co-producers of information. Tapscott and Williams point at four innovative principles on which wiki-enabled collaborations are based: openness, peering, sharing, and acting globally [37]. As a result, new wiki-enabled policy consultation tools offer an alternative vehicle through which citizens can become involved in the development of policy initiatives [11].

Several governments around the world, including New Zealand, support fostering more consultative and collaborative online public engagement. Within the New Zealand public sector, the New Zealand Digital
Strategy 2.0 policy document [25] proposes that wikis, along with other forms of social media, will provide a useful forum allowing members of the public to less formally contribute to government:

“E-government will increasingly allow people to feed their views, ideas, and information back to government, through formal consultation, or, less formally, through wikis, blogs or online forums. The collective wisdom of the public is valuable – after all, the people who are affected by government policy are in the best position to suggest how to make it better.”

However, to government it is not simply a matter of turning a wiki on; both technical and cultural barriers can reduce the likely success of any wiki. For instance, in research investigating the use of Web 2.0 applications by information managers in New Zealand, Chawner [12] identified two categories of technical barriers:

- institutional barriers, such as firewalls or filtering software that limited access; and
- technological barriers, such as lack of access to broadband.

In addition, Guy [14] suggests that although some wikis offer What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) capabilities, most require content creators to learn, at the very least, the rudiments of a particular wiki language. This makes wikis some way off being accessible to the ‘not so technical’.

One of the most significant cultural barriers is getting people to use a wiki. Guy [14] suggested that it is the notion of ownership that remains so deeply embedded in society that is the reason why many users still find it difficult to change content on another person’s website. Nielsen [29], a web usability professional, proposes the 1 percent rule, which suggests that 90 percent of users will read or observe but not contribute to content, 9 percent of users will contribute from time to time, and only 1 percent of users will participate on a regular basis and will account for most contributions.

A further perceived barrier to effective use of wikis is potential vandalism, whereby inappropriate or malicious posts are made. This can compromise the content and reinforces the need for active management. Similarly, particularly in the sphere of government, there may be concerns over privacy of personal details, copyright issues, impartiality of content, and information quality [14]. To help address this issue, having developed expertise in the field of e-participation through a dedicated policy program, the New Zealand State Services Commission [36] recommend that New Zealand Government web sites containing any kind of discussion forums are moderated daily by a human resource:

“An open forum, particularly non-moderated, is essentially opening an agency to allow free format content on its site. This can result in revealing identity and/or contravening privacy laws that the agency has bound itself to. It can also expose the agency to views and opinions that are not necessarily those of the agency. It can expose the agency to grievances by users who view the material on a forum and find it offensive.”

The use of wikis in public consultation activities poses several issues in the area of information and records management. Aspects of records management, such as retention and disposal, classification, and appraisal, all present challenges when dealing with emerging ICTs, such as wikis. Some issues require the creative application of traditional records management techniques; others may require the development of new approaches [13].

5. Research design

The requirement of a new appreciative setting for appropriately managing public records created in wiki-enabled public sector environments leads to important research questions on how public servants actually identify, collect, and manage public records created by wikis; and how their recordkeeping behaviors meet existing legislation and organizational policy requirements. So far, however, there is little empirical knowledge available about the electronic recordkeeping behaviors of front line employees within government agencies [20, 10]. Moreover, empirical knowledge on how public servants identify and manage public records created in wiki-enabled public sector environments is lacking. This paper aims to bridge this empirical knowledge gap by describing and analyzing the decisions and resulting behaviors of individuals who identified and managed public records in two recent wiki-supported public consultation activities in New Zealand: the use of a wiki in drafting new Police legislation, and in public consultation on the review of the New Zealand Digital Strategy.

Focusing on the particularity and complexity of multiple cases in order to understand their development under similar legal circumstances [30], we used case study research methodology to bring a depth of understanding to our work that would enhance reliability, enrich our subsequent analysis, and enhance the external validity and transferability to New Zealand policy and practice of the research findings [30,34].
We chose to conduct case studies in which a wiki had been used for public consultation purposes to compare relevant similarities and differences in individuals' recordkeeping decisions and behaviors operating within the same recordkeeping legislative framework. Further case study selection criteria included recent experience of using a wiki in a completed public consultation activity and the location of the public consultation activity in a New Zealand state sector agency. These selection criteria have been met by two case studies, which are presented in this paper.

We used multiple sources of evidence in our case study research [39]. We conducted an academic literature review to gain broader understanding about the potential impact on recordkeeping of using wikis in public sector activities, we explored relevant New Zealand-based public records legislation, and we reviewed the organizational policies of the public agencies involved in each case study. We also undertook a review of available online documentation for each of the two case studies to inform us further about the strategic and operational context of the wiki-based public consultation initiatives. Furthermore, we conducted semi-structured interviews with key individuals involved at the strategic, operational and policy levels in each of the two cases in order to explore individuals' decisions and resulting recordkeeping behaviors. These key individuals included project managers, legal and policy advisors, project team members, and records managers.

In designing our interview structure, we acknowledge that the research participants are inclined to provide input based on their full experience of the initiative and with the benefit of hindsight. Within this research we have not attempted to evaluate whether or not wikis are the most appropriate technologies to use; whether or not wikis are the most suitable tool for the public consultation processes under study; or evaluate the technical design of the wikis. In addition, we appreciate that the use of case study methodology limits our ability to generalize the research findings beyond these two cases.

In the following sections, we present an historical overview of the recordkeeping decisions and resulting behaviors in the case of introducing and using a wiki for public consultation on new Police legislation in New Zealand and in the case of introducing and using a wiki for public consultation on the review of the New Zealand Digital Strategy.

6. Case study descriptions

6.1 Police Act Review wiki

In March 2006, the New Zealand central government initiated a comprehensive review of the 1958 Police Act. A small group, comprising a project manager and five project team members was formed to lead the consultation and policy development process. The Minister of Police and the Commissioner of Police gave the review team a broad-ranging mandate to challenge ideas previously taken for granted and to encourage public debate.

The team needed to generate significant public interest in the review of the Act, including 'hard to hear and hard to reach' target audiences like youth, Maori and Pacific Island people, and expatriate New Zealanders, and they needed to do this with a limited communications budget. Consequently, the team pursued both traditional and non-traditional consultation channels.


In March 2006, the review team held a brainstorming session to explore how they could effectively communicate to all New Zealanders (including those overseas) within the limited communication budget. An important outcome of this brainstorming session was the investigation of opportunities provided by social networking sites. The team evaluated MySpace and YouTube but found them unsuitable, as they were unstructured and overly informal, so they consulted the New Zealand State Services Commission (SSC)’s e-participation program team who suggested wiki software.

Once government granted approval and drafting instructions for a new Policing Bill had been issued, the project team launched the Police Act Review wiki. The team released the wiki with limited content and a high-level structure, providing contributors with a ‘starting place’. The wiki received more than 5000 visitors with a New Zealand IP address. Interest in the wiki quickly became international after the BBC published a story on its main webpage. As a result, the majority of visits came as referrals from embedded links in online news
stories. Consequently, posts to the wiki were from both New Zealand and international visitors.

There was no registration process on the wiki, which allowed people to participate anonymously. The team defined a set of moderation rules that were available to all visitors, which described the behavior expected of participants. The project team moderated entries on the wiki based on these rules and removed any offending entries.

As well as moderation rules, the team provided wiki guidelines that included details on its purpose and that entries could form part of a submission to a parliamentary committee, which would be considered with other information gathered during the consultation period.

After the media reports the speed and quantity of the entries became overwhelming, and moderating the wiki was a full time job for at least four people. As a result, the review team posted a message on the wiki home page indicating that the wiki would only be available for editing during New Zealand office hours. The team found that most people accepted this change.

The review team anticipated a high degree of public interest in this project and required a robust process to demonstrate transparency of all policy decisions. However, at this time, there was limited experience within New Zealand using a wiki to manage public consultations so the team was unable to obtain advice from others who had managed a similar wiki-based initiative.

The team decided on a uniform records management approach through the three phases. This meant that every submission, including documents, letters and substantial wiki content was scanned, given a unique identifier and a subject code.

The wiki did not support automatic coding of entries, although all entries did have a unique identifier and were date stamped. To resolve this, the substantial wiki entries that feature in the final online wiki-act were printed and subject codes were applied to the entries. At this point, the entries were scanned and stored in the electronic repository with all the other submissions. Optical character recognition (OCR) software ran over the scanned items, providing an additional mechanism to query the electronic repository.

The subject codes that the team applied to items, allowed the team to build relationships between the submissions regardless of their original format. The electronic repository had a powerful search tool function, which meant that team members could access submissions through free text searches, using the unique identifier, or using the subject codes that were applied to each submission.

In addition, the wiki automatically captured all wiki-based exchanges, providing a transcript of all 30,000 wiki entries, including moderated and un-moderated comments.

The team closed the wiki for comments on 30 September 2007 and published it as an un-editable online resource on 1 October 2007 [28].

At the end of the process, the review team provided more than 35 boxes of documentation as well as a single disc to the Records Manager at New Zealand Police containing the total contents of the two-year process.

6.2 Digital Strategy 2.0 wiki

The New Zealand Government released the New Zealand Digital Strategy in 2005. This strategy document set out the government’s direction for a digital future for all New Zealanders using the power of ICTs. In 2007, the Minister responsible requested a comprehensive review of the 2005 strategy, involving wide consultation with key stakeholders. A small team was formed to manage this project, comprising of a communications advisor and four policy analysts.

During this consultation process, the project team decided to showcase emerging technologies for the digital consultation option in line with the topic under consideration. The team discussed using a blog to post ideas that members of the public could respond to, an online forum where members of the public could answer and discuss questions, or a wiki. Following evaluation of these options, the team decided to use a wiki, which allowed members of the public to edit the draft strategy and post comments online. The decision to use a wiki was also the option preferred by senior management. In preparation, the team learned from members of the New Zealand Police Act Review team about the consultation process they had used.

The Digital Strategy 2.0 submission process allowed the public to highlight issues and opportunities that may have been missed in the draft strategy document and to propose actions and policies to achieve New Zealand’s digital potential [26]. Submissions on the draft Digital Strategy 2.0 were invited over a six-week period from mid April 2008. In addition to the wiki, people could provide responses via a submission form or submit written responses by email, letter, or fax; the preferred format for submissions was electronic, via either the submission form or email.

When the project team publicly released the wiki, it included an editable copy of the draft strategy, a series of questions that people could respond to, and space for the public to post comments. The team made the wiki available through links on the New Zealand
government website, the Ministry of Economic Development website, and on the Digital Strategy website. The initial target audience of the wiki was people already familiar with the technology, as training resources were not available.

Approximately fifty people visited the wiki at least weekly and contributed comments, edited content, and answered questions online. In addition, there were approximately one hundred people who visited the site at least once over the six-week consultation period.

People could contribute anonymously to the wiki. However, to receive updates on the consultation process, they were required to provide a valid email address.

The team defined a Terms of Reference for use of the wiki, available to all wiki visitors. The Terms of Reference rules were that the team would moderate activity on the wiki and remove any obscene language, threats, or irrelevant comments. In addition, the Terms of Reference made visitors aware that any comments provided on the draft Digital Strategy 2.0 would be subject to the New Zealand Official Information Act. The team checked the wiki daily to respond to any questions and review the comments made. The level of interaction on the wiki meant it was possible for one person to manage, especially as no moderation issues arose.

The team received a very small number of submissions from international visitors (only two) and they managed these in the same way as submissions made on the wiki by New Zealanders. Other international visitors provided general comments that the team treated as supporting material.

After the six-week consultation period, the team closed the wiki for editing and they collated the comments and edits for policy analysis. The team found submissions made on the wiki quite difficult to manage; in some cases one person had provided a single sentence comment, while someone else had written an email or sent a letter that answered each of the questions asked. In addition, there were challenges where a member of the public edited a section, which someone else updated later: this required that the team captured both edits independent of each other. In response to these challenges, the team decided to group wiki comments made on the same subject, e.g. broadband access, and manage them as single submissions.

In most ICT-supported initiatives at the Ministry, the internal information technology group is involved and it is recommended that project teams consult with records management staff, who are part of the wider Organizational Development and Support branch. In this particular case, the internal information technology team was not involved due to the short timeframes in place and the project team engaged an external IT provider. The project team did not actively request assistance from the organization’s recordkeeping team or consult with Archives New Zealand during the project. However, records management staff became aware of the initiative, albeit quite late in the consultation process, and were able to provide recordkeeping advice to the project team at that point. This involvement was approximately one week before the project team made the wiki available online and was too late to incorporate electronic recordkeeping requirements into the wiki technology.

The records management staff had limited experience with wikis, but advised the team they needed to capture all comments and edits made on the wiki as public records.

The team had arranged for the retention of an electronic copy of the wiki, which was searchable by internal staff. However, the Ministry’s recordkeeping policy requires that all records are maintained physically, therefore, when the project team closed the wiki for comments, records management staff advised that the team print the wiki pages for each day that the wiki had been available, capturing all comments and edits. Once printed, the team filed the wiki pages in the paper-based files according to the Ministry’s recordkeeping policy, along with all other submissions made.

The wiki was removed from the Internet at the end of 2008 as it had met its specific purpose. The consultation finished and the Digital Strategy 2.0 project is complete.

7. Analysis of the two case studies

Comparison of recordkeeping decisions and behaviors in the two case studies highlights substantial differences in the identification process of electronic items as public records, and, subsequently, recordkeeping decisions and resulting behaviors.

For instance, whereas the Police Act review team identified all electronic items as public records prior to the start of the wiki-enabled public consultation process, the Digital Strategy 2.0 team only acknowledged the electronic items created in the wiki as public records when records management staff at the Ministry provided recordkeeping advice. Consequently, the Police Act review team had the advantage of exploring necessary requirements for wiki-enabled recordkeeping ahead of the implementation and management of the public consultation initiative. The Police Act review team decided to maintain all submissions electronically so that they would manage all submissions in a single electronic repository, while retaining paper copies of
all submissions. The Digital Strategy 2.0 team on the other hand, in accordance with organizational recordkeeping policy, printed and filed the wiki pages together with all other submissions in the organization’s paper-based recordkeeping system.

Furthermore, characteristics and conditions of the new wiki environment pressed public servants to make new value judgments about recordkeeping, which do not always sit comfortably with existing legislation. For instance, from a PRA point of view, the recordkeeping decision of the Police Act review team to have duplicate copies of all submissions received during the consultation process, including those made on the wiki, leads to ambiguity about which copies need to be managed as the original public records and, therefore, the authoritative source, and which as the duplicates. Another example of a new value judgment on effective recordkeeping is that the Police Act review team decided to make a read-only copy of the wiki publicly available on the Internet for future information and consideration by interested parties. The Digital Strategy 2.0 team, however, decided to remove the wiki from the Internet once the consultation process was complete.

The two case studies also demonstrate similarities in their recordkeeping decisions. For instance, consistent with core duties under the PRA, both project teams captured full records from the wikis and maintained these within their organizational recordkeeping systems so they remain accessible overtime. It is interesting to observe, however, that, although decisions of the two teams had similar records management outcomes, the recordkeeping behaviors to arrive at these similar outcomes were quite different. For instance, the Police Act Review team printed each edit and comment made on the wiki during the consultation period; they also scanned each printed copy to create an electronic copy. Where New Zealand Police staff moderated any edits and comments, they also captured these. The team provided both paper and electronic copies of the records to records management staff responsible for incorporating them into the recordkeeping system, in the appropriate format. In the case of the Digital Strategy 2.0 wiki, once provided with advice from records management staff at the Ministry, the project team printed all records retrospectively, capturing all edits and comments on every page of the wiki for each day that it was available during the consultation period. The project team then filed these printed records in the organization’s paper-based recordkeeping system. There might be a slight discrepancy in capturing original public records for the Digital Strategy 2.0 wiki, when edits were made during the course of the day and re-edited later that same day; this would mean that the original edit would not be captured in the daily print out of the wiki page.

Characteristics and conditions of the new wiki environment also caused similar obstacles for applying and interpreting the existing legislation in the two cases. In both case studies, for instance, while full records were made of the wiki-enabled public consultation activities, the teams and with them their organizations, could not demonstrate that captured records are accurate and provide reliable evidence of the business activity. As wikis support easy modification of content, it was possible to easily change, intentionally or unintentionally, a public record. Moreover, as neither of these two wikis required registration of participants, the wiki did not automatically capture details on who edited the records, resulting in potential incomplete recordkeeping metadata, e.g. on the author.

Further analysis of the two case studies highlights the lack of knowledge by project team members of their organization’s recordkeeping policy and their corresponding personal responsibilities, particularly in the Digital Strategy 2.0 wiki case. However, all individuals involved did behave in accordance with legally acknowledged effective recordkeeping behaviors: they created records, filed and kept records while handing them with care and did not delete any records.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Looking at the two case studies from an individual’s policy discretion perspective it becomes clear that, although operating under the same recordkeeping legislation, recordkeeping decisions and resulting behaviors in similar wiki-supported public sector activities can vary substantially. Both cases also demonstrate the need for public servants to make new value judgments and explore new appreciative settings for recordkeeping behaviors while dealing with new wiki-enabled public sector environments. In the New Zealand context, the unique characteristics and conditions of a wiki-enabled public consultation environment can cause problems for public servants to meet existing legislative requirements.

Analysis of the two cases also provides three recommendations for public agencies that are using or considering using a wiki to support public consultation activities. Importantly, these recommendations address both procedural and technical aspects of managing records created using wikis.

Firstly, it appears to be of importance that records management staff members are involved in any such initiatives as early as possible. Through early involvement, record management staff can support
public servants in making value judgments for effective recordkeeping in new electronic public consultation environments. For instance, they can review the informational value of the content, explore the level of care required to manage the information appropriately, and plan the necessary recordkeeping framework to ensure compliance with existing legislative requirements.

Secondly, it appears to be important that organizations understand the technical functionality of the wiki fully. Wherever possible, organizations should incorporate recordkeeping functionality into wiki technology, therefore ensuring that the wiki is able to function as a recordkeeping system in its own right. This would mean that in the case of the Police Act Review wiki, if appropriate recordkeeping functionality had been embedded in the wiki, including application of recordkeeping metadata, the team would not have been required to print, manually apply the relevant codes, and then scan the electronic items.

Thirdly, it is important that public servants involved in these wiki-enabled initiatives have a detailed understanding of their organization’s recordkeeping framework and its implications for using a wiki in public sector activities, as there appears to be no ‘one size fits all’ solution to managing records created using Web 2.0 technology.

9. References


