

Towards a Wicked Problems Research Agenda for Archival and Recordkeeping Scholarship

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Abstract:

Wicked problems, first described by design theorist Horst Rittel in the late 1960s and early 1970s, are societal problems that are complex, vitally important, ill-defined, and depend on contested political judgment for resolution. This platform presentation will outline a framework for ways that archival and recordkeeping scholarship can engage more thoughtfully with wicked problems. I will briefly describe the nature of wicked problems and the broad contours of its literature. From there, I will outline some of the intersections of records and recordkeeping practices with wicked problems to highlight ways of using wicked problems as a framework for recordkeeping and archival thinking and scholarship.

Additionally, as a way of contextualizing wicked problems within archival and recordkeeping scholarship, this presentation will highlight several ongoing projects in the field. One example is the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) research project examining how recordkeeping practices, frameworks, standards, and thinking can significantly contribute to addressing society's grand challenges—another term for wicked problems. This presentation is intended to briefly describe research that aims to increase and extend conversations in archival practice, description, scholarship and thinking around complex, important societal problems.

About the Author:

Eliot Wilczek is the Corporate Records and Archives Manager at The MITRE Corporation. He's previously worked as an archivist and records manager at Tufts University, Brandeis University, and Bowdoin College. He has a PhD in library and information science from Simmons College.