

Theory to practice: Short phrase, long process!

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As a recipient of public funding, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is bound to preserve its research records as prescribed by the National Archives. Therefore, besides it being good scientific practice, the management of scientific data is linked to the CSIR's records management initiative. Records management is a more comprehensive activity than data management but it includes, for example, the obvious activities such as the assignment of appropriate metadata and safe storage which ensure that data sets remain usable and accessible for prolonged periods of time. More importantly though it provides the legal mandate for proper curation while it also includes selection criteria for making the decision whether certain data sets should in fact be preserved as records at all!

The CSIR is not unique in trying to get beyond the theory of effective data management. From a number of surveys conducted, both inside and outside the CSIR, it is blatantly clear that South African researchers are, in general, still living in blissful ignorance when it comes to the threats facing their research data. This paper will highlight the findings from three small but independent studies conducted to establish researcher practices within the Bio-scientific domain.

The paper will also explain the process followed in our Biosciences unit to ensure that the research workflow smoothly dovetails with our data curation workflow. The paper will report on the process followed - from the design of the necessary procedures to the conclusion of the workflow. It will also report on how a sincere intention to create minimal disruption paid off – to the point where it will soon be possible to report that our Bioscience research data could be regarded as a well maintained record of all their research activities.

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