

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has offered a new road for effective management of records and dissemination of information. With this, records and information contents are properly kept, quickly retrieved and managed for effective decision-making. The primary aim of this study was to examine the role of information and communication technology in records and information management for effective governance. It further examined the importance, challenges, and opportunities opened to records and information managers in the current information age for good governance. Major findings revealed that the information/computer revolution has greatly increased pressures on information professionals for the preservation of source documents for social, economic, and political purposes. Therefore, governmental agencies should endeavour to strive and meet their obligation of providing free flow of information for good governance, and adequate training should be given to records managers to be able to perform their duties effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: *Records Management; Information; Governance; Information and Communication Technology (ICT)*

INTRODUCTION

The global search for effective and efficient means of management of records and information content for prosperity is gaining relevance among information service provider, with the advent of modern devices that could be used for storing and preserving information contents. As a consequence, much of the recent literature in this field has been devoted to discussing and exploring the shape of future information services. One area receiving significant attention is the development of access to information through records management. According to Tiamiyu (1993) in order to effectively perform their statutory functions, government organisations will experience an increasing need to keep up with the level of societal information sophistication by effectively harnessing their own information resources. Undoubtedly, there are overwhelming changes sweeping across the field of records and information management systems. These changes are necessitated by ever growing pressure in the information documentation systems, and also because, the society itself is changing into one in which knowledge work becomes ever more important, and partly because of the tremendous information and communication technologies which are transforming our socio-economic life.

The trends in the field of information management have been greatly influenced by the introduction of new technologies used in managing records and these have in turn changed the way and manner organizations keep and manage their records. It is a known fact that organization performance is improved through the free flow of information within the system and it makes the organization more accountable, transparent, reduces inefficiency and corruption, and enhances the rule of law. World Bank (2001) as cited in Shehu (2008) stated, "The free flow of information presupposes that institutions create and manage authentic records". Nevertheless, the International Records Management Trust, London and the International Council on Archives, Paris also affirmed in their publications that recorded information is the cornerstone of any entity's ability to fulfil its responsibility for good management. They further state that, without reliable, verifiable and authentic records, decisions and official actions and transactions cannot be traced; rules would not be known and cannot be enforced; and transparency does not exist. Neither integrity nor abuse can be demonstrated and nobody can be held responsible for whatever actions they take.

In addition to this, National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (2004) corroborated that, in the course of doing business, records are created through a variety of government activities such as vehicle registration, professional licensing, procurement contract transactions, general correspondence, and other external and internal business processes within state and local government offices. It further states, the records of governmental agencies capture information used to protect the rights and interests of governments, businesses and citizens and to preserve history and culture by documenting information about noteworthy people, issues, places, and events. However, according to State Archives Department, Minnesota Historical Society (2004) states that an official record includes all information, regardless of format, created or used in the course of a government business function or transaction. Governance on the other hand is the state of administering authority on a place or people in order to effectively carryout their daily routines.

Wikipedia (2010) defines Governance as the activity of governing. It relates to decisions that define expectations, grant power, or verify performance. It consists either of a separate process or of a specific part of management or leadership processes. More so, Engendering Economic Governance describes Governance as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. It is the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences.

RECORDS, INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The use of information in an organization can be a vital tool for decision- making and effective management of resources. In the light of this, Rim-Arma International (2007) states that information is one of the most vital, strategic assets any organization possesses. Recent regulatory requirements, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, make managing information both a business priority

and a legal obligation that demand the attention of executives and corporate boards. The use of modern technologies in the processes of records and information management has brought a tremendous influence on the ways information professionals preserve and manage their records and information generated. In this digital age, records and information management are enhanced by the use of ICTs. The role of records and information management in governmental organisations cannot be overemphasised. Records management helps in the proper decision making and improved productivity, in terms of output.

In view of this, Tihamiyu (1993) affirmed that most private sector organisations might consider information as a supportive input into their production processes; the typical government organisation must see information and information handling activities as the core and essence of their operations. Improving information management practices is a key focus for many organisations, across both the public and private sectors. This is being driven by a range of factors, including a need to improve the efficiency of business processes, the demands of compliance regulations and the desire to deliver new services (Robertson, 2005). In the same vein, Engendering Economic Governance states that, "Good" decisions can only be made if both decision makers and their constituencies have access and are able to make appropriate use of "good" information. In this regard, the relationship between records, information and governance cannot be overemphasised.

CHALLENGES TO RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Records and information managers face some limitations in the process of accomplishing their duties which are to ensure proper arrangement and easy retrieval of documents. However, coupled with the technological advancement, use of information and communication technology (ICT) has brought about a long array of opportunities; nevertheless, the advent of its usage has also brought a lot of challenges to the users. The National Electronic Commerce Coordinating Council (2004) is of the opinion that, the electronic office poses unique challenges to recordkeeping. Most essential qualities of records are that they are authentic and that their contents are fixed over time, which means that people can have confidence that a record is what it says it is. Whereas electronic records, unfortunately, do not intrinsically inspire this confidence in the same way that paper records do. They further argued that since electronic documents can be created, altered, accessed, duplicated, and shared, can jeopardize their value as records. Ironically, the most appealing aspects of creating electronic documents are what weaken our confidence in them.

Furthermore, according to Tihamiyu (1993) government organisations have been slower than their private sector counterparts in adopting modern information resources management technologies and systems for harnessing their administrative and socio-economic data. The reason is that they generally operate in a context, which, being different from that of their private sector counterparts, influence their internal culture and dynamics, and pose special problems for information management. He further stated that the government organisation is often

hyper-protective of its data and information, with the result that effort is directed to promote secrecy, censorship and propaganda, rather than improve the accessibility (that is, the storage, retrieval and dissemination) of data and information resources, even to its own employees (Tiamiyu, 1993).

Tale and Alefaio (2005) are of the opinion that, lack of accessible training programmes for archivists and record managers, and the need for concerted and targeted awareness programmes at all administrative levels of any organization, and the public in general. These to them create a challenge to the progress and development of good recordkeeping. Other challenges faced by records and information managers include: lack of resources, space constraints, ad hoc approaches to Records and Archives Management, high staff turnover, etc. These are compounded by the rapidly changing information environment as a result of ICT application. Nevertheless, Robertson (2005) however views the challenges facing records and information managers as follows:

- Large number of disparate information management systems.
- Little integration or coordination between information systems.
- Range of legacy systems requiring upgrading or replacement.
- No clear strategic direction for the overall technology environment.
- Limited and patchy adoption of existing information systems by staff.
- Poor quality of information, including lack of consistency, duplication, and out-of-date information.
- Limited resources for deploying, managing or improving information systems.
- Lack of clarity around broader organisational strategies and directions.
- Difficulties in changing working practices and processes of staff.
- Internal politics impacting on the ability to coordinate activities enterprise-wide

OPPORTUNITIES TO RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Investments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are providing new opportunities in developing countries, and these opportunities can be made to achieve, the greatest social and economic benefits at the lowest costs especially for effective governance. With the global information infrastructure available to all via the internet, Government records can effectively be managed and accessed without any difficulties. The ICT has brought about this revolution, which has suddenly catapulted the world into a new society known as the Knowledge Society or Information Society, and the entire world into a global village. Because of this, record keeping, information management in governance can never be the same. Juxtaposing the above influence of information technologies in the management of records, it is believed that, the information/computer revolution has greatly increased pressures on information professionals for the preservation of source documents for social, economic and political purposes. This was facilitated by the widespread use of electronic media. Detailed work about individuals, institutions, and phenomena

in large numbers had been impeded by the slowness and tedium of manual tabulations. But with the use of ICTs, government activities can be easily undertaken as a matter of daily routine which was not envisioned during the early years of the 20th century. Data and information are been used for measuring effectiveness, trend analysis, resource allocation, personnel decisions, strategic planning etc (Burford 2003) as cited in Anyakoha (2005). Using ICTs, records and information managers are now able to set up computer based information management systems. According to Lakos (1999) as cited in Anyakoha (2005). The major function of the Management Information System (MIS) is to provide records and information managers with data, information, analysis and assist in the decision making process. Furthermore, Siddiqui (1997) Henderson (1992) as cited in Anyakoha (2005) agrees and summarises the benefits of ICTs thus:

- Speedy and easy access to information Remote access
- Round the clock access
- Access unlimited information from different sources
- More up to date information
- Facilitating the reformatting and combination of data from various sources
- Unlimited manipulation to serve various purposes.

In addition to the above benefits, Tale and Alefaio (2005) affirm that ICT also presents opportunities for recordkeeping in developing countries. Enhanced retrieval systems and online search facilities to name a couple. Opportunities for compact storage through electronic and digital storage devices are becoming more enticing to those responsible for records as they offer an alternative to bulky paper records that need a considerable amount of space for storage. Expectedly, all the opportunities brought about by the information/computer revolution have assisted information and record managers to carry out their duties more efficiently and effectively.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, for relevant information policies to be established and enterprise document management systems to be developed, policy makers and developers must see the highly interconnected nature of information, documents and records (Barry, 1996). In view of this, since it was observed that the challenges facing records and information management are enormous among this was highlighted earlier. According to International Records Management Trust (n.d), information and communications technology alone does not offer a complete solution to information management problems. If computerisation is to provide the basis for informed decision making, greater transparency and effective service delivery, the information generated or held must be reliable and trustworthy over time. Well managed records, paper and electronic, document the policies, transactions and activities of governments and provide a trusted source of information to support accountability. They are the foundation for good governance and for meeting development goals.

Finally, governmental agencies should endeavour to strive and meet their obligation of providing free flow of information for good governance, and adequate training should be given to records managers to be able to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. Nevertheless, for effective and efficient information handling in Governance, records and information management will depend largely on the consolidation of Information and Communication Technology. It is agreed with West (2005), that as more and more people takes advantage of these features, e-government is supplanting traditional means of access based on personal visits, phone calls, and mail delivery. Finally, we can say that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the essential tool for economic development and material well-being in our present age; it conditions power, knowledge and creativity. And its use also makes possible the full realization of its developmental values, an inter-related system of flexible organizations and information-oriented institutions.

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