

An Examination of Records Management Practices for Improved Service Delivery in Laikipia County Government, Kenya

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Abstract: *An effective records management program is a major element of the governance of any organization. However, despite this crucial role played by records management, there is a consensus amongst researchers that many organizations, including county governments, pay little attention to the management of records. In Kenya county government departments are under legislative obligations to adopt a systematic and organized approach to the management of records. For example, the National Archives and Records Service of Kenya Act (Act No. 43 of 1996) requires government departments to develop, implement and maintain proper records management systems. The purpose of this study therefore was to examine records management practices in Laikipia County Government. A descriptive research design was used in this study. The target population comprised of all the 101 employees of Laikipia County Government directly involved in the management of records. The sample size was determined through the census technique since the target population was small. A total of 101 respondents were selected for the questionnaire and five for interviews. Quantitative data and qualitative data were collected using questionnaire and interview schedule. Reliability and validity of the data instruments was ensured by conducting a pre-test to 10% of the target population of each department in Nyandarua County Government, making a total of 10 record officers. To analyze the data collected, descriptive analysis and content analysis methods were used and an appropriate computer software package (Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22) was employed to assist in analysis. The major findings of this study were that: record management practices in Laikipia County Government were inefficient; the county government lacked RM policies; a centralized records management system was ineffective for Laikipia County government and the County Government faced major challenges in managing its records. The study recommends for formulation of Records Management policies, decentralization of Record Management systems, budgeting and training of Record Management practitioners in Laikipia County Government.*

Keywords: Records, records management, service delivery, Laikipia County Government

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Records management is a fundamental activity of any given organization. Records are vital to every aspect of governance process and institutions of all kinds should highly embrace records management. According to ISO 15489, as cited by Healy (2001), "records management is a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposal of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records." What actually keeps the public service going in any modern system of government is having recorded information, which is used for planning, decision making and controlling. For any effective planning, decision-making and controlling to take place, there must have been timely access to records (Amina, 2011).

According to Kulcu (2009), records are created and maintained to meet the goals and objectives of an organization. Records are the memories of an organization and are used in decision making and the basis of legal defensibility. Without records, governments would find it difficult to address social issues such as poverty, crime, social grants, AIDs, land information, and even the provision of basic services such as water and electricity (Makhura, 2005). Provision of information to people in

every corner of the world would positively affect socio-economic and political development.

Fust and Graf (2002), as cited in Ngoepe (2008), suggest that records management is an essential part of government operations in all developing countries. Records management is a discipline that has become very popular in government institutions, non-governmental institutions, private institutions, industries and the society at large. Managing records is the foundation that any government body requires in order to provide effective services and fulfill its purpose of existence. This purpose includes enhancing accountability towards its citizens and protection of citizens' rights.

Today, governments are increasingly recognizing the fact that information is an important component of good governance. Governments are expected therefore, to manage records properly so as to use it to make prompt decisions, enhance accountability and transparency, and to meet their own information requirements (Nengomasha, 2009). Consequently records enable governments to improve service delivery, efficiently use available resources and respond to opinions of its citizens.

According to Ngulube and Taylor (2006), accurate and readily accessible judicial records minimize the delays in results and corruption cases. Government agencies create, use and disseminate a larger volume of records and

information than any other organization. These records are important to citizens as they enhance democracy and also hold a government accountable (Tafor, 2003). Governments should continuously and permanently manage their records since it needs to be accountable to its citizens for the decisions made in its governance (Currall and Moss, 2008). Governments and organizations are required to automate the records system to comply with the advancements in technology which is a necessity today.

According to a study by Kemoni and Ngulube (2008), despite the efforts of the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Centre to provide advice to government departments, records management has not been adequately implemented. The Kenya National Archive has faced numerous challenges in advising government departments on records management issues. The challenges include lack of adequate human and financial resources, lack of support from senior government officers, and inadequacies in existing legislations on the management of records. The Kenya National Archives and Documentation centre has not been able to assist in development of records management programs within the government (Mnjama, 2003).

2. Significance of the Study

The findings of this research would aid Laikipia County Government, other county governments and organizations to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in managing their records for improved service delivery. The findings intend to complement other existing studies and contribute to the body of knowledge in the records management field. The findings also hope to form a firm foundation for other researchers in the area of records management.

3. Literature Review

Records Management Practices

It has been widely accepted that information is now regarded as an asset equivalent to capital, man power, and physical assets such as land and buildings. It is one of the most vital strategic assets any organization can possess. Therefore, it is important for organizations to give recorded information high priority (Yusuf, 2008).

All sorts of organizations create records in their daily activities. Government institutions in the course of doing business also create a variety of records. Within organization records are either created internally or externally. According to Thomassen (2002), in every business the creation of records is a vital part. Records are created as evidence of business processes in institutions. The creation of records requires legal requirements. The importance of records keeping includes three domains which include the business domains cultural domain and the accountability domain. Organization using records really on them in providing evidence for decisions made without records supervision of employees in public organizations cannot be possible. Organizations would have difficulties assessing the transactions executed and the manner in which the actions were performed by relevant individuals (Wamukoya, 2000).

Wamukoya (2000) further indicates that records have primary and secondary functions. The primary functions of records are the functions their creators had while creating them. The primary value is beneficial to the creator of the record or to the office from which they originated. Records with primary functions are used for accounting purposes administrative reasons, legal and financial purposes and for the control of activities in organizations. Records management helps organizations in identifying the extent to which they adhere to laws governing them, support the decision making process, enhance accountability and minimize risks (Yusuf & Chell, 2005). Records with the secondary function are those whose creators create them without having their value in mind. The secondary function is acquired by the records after the primary function has diminished. In the management of records the records go through different stages in their cycle. Records are created, stored, used and maintained until they are no longer required by their creators. Records are also permanently preserved due to their enduring value (Ngoepe, 2003).

Record Management Policies

According to Gwinnett (2002), record management policies are important for any institution to identify record retention and disposal periods. Proper records management programs require policies that control the management of records in organizations. The policies should be well documented according to the state laws of institutions concerned. The record policies in place should monitor records right from creation of ultimate disposal (Macleod, Hare and Johare 2004). Records management practitioners should be trained on documented policies. It should also be ensured that staff members implement the policies on their daily activities.

According to Kemoni (2007), lack of records management policies would lead to difficulties in establishing efficient and effective records management systems in organizations. Kemoni (2007) further indicates that lack of records management policies would obstruct the role of public service providers. According to Franks (2013), organizations rely upon comprehensive records and information management policy that draws best practices for the management of records. The record and information management policy guide the management of records resulting from all business activities in an organization. Regulatory compliances are required to safeguard vital records in organizations from unnecessary risks and help control costs.

Organizations without record management policies would have difficulties in deciding as to what documents should be kept and which ones should be discarded. Keeping records which are valueless only serves to waste space time and resources. Records management policies hence help clear the clutter and boost efficiency in organizations. Employees require guidelines to manage records and information in their computers and in their files. Policies enhance efficiency in organizations by giving clear guidelines on the management of records at their different phases.

According to Smith (2008), many organizations operate with informal records management policies and in most cases are not written down. Written policies are advantageous to

organizations since they enable all employees to familiarize with the policies and thus eliminating uncertainty. The study further notes that written policies provide authoritativeness in the management of records and ensures effectiveness in business operations.

According to Mampe and Kalusopa (2012), for a records management program to be successful, there should be procedures, policies, and standards in place to govern management of records. The policies and procedures serve as guidelines for the management of records in organizations. Record management policies should serve all records in organizations, regardless of their formats. The record management guidelines must be consistent to both electronic and paper based records.

Record Management System

Records, which play a critical role in institutions, must be managed properly. Efficient systems and procedures for the creation, organization and disposition of records have to be created. Storage and management of large volumes of records can be expensive particularly in the public sector. In a paper based environment, volumes of information keep accumulating in offices hence causing challenges, in terms of storage space and retrieval. Records management systems are used to share and manage information in organizations (Fineberg, 2011).

Organizations use records management systems as a tool to manage records. Both manual and automated records management systems are used to support record management processes right from creation to disposal. The systems establish storage locations and the creation of records in Organizations. Records management systems are established by organizations to guide on the creation and capture, maintenance and storage of records. According to IRMT (2000), the symptoms to poor records management systems are:

- Unauthorized access to records
- Difficulties in retrieval of records
- Loss of control over the creation, use and maintenance of records and
- The ease of manipulating electronic records.

According to IRMT (2000), the public sector record keeping systems in most countries are weak to a point where they do not meet the goals and objectives of the public agencies. The study further indicates that the loss of control of records has consequences to citizens from humble backgrounds that do not have the strength to fight for their rights. Records practitioners and information users realize challenges in information retrieval but lack knowhow on solving the banning issues. Very few public institutions appreciate the importance of maintaining records management systems.

4. Methodology

A mixed method design was used where a quantitative approach was employed, with an aspect of qualitative in data collection and analysis. For the purpose of this study, a descriptive design was used. The descriptive design was used to describe events in relation to records management in Laikipia County government. The technique used for this

study beneath descriptive methodology was the case study approach. The target population for this study comprised of all the 101 employees of Laikipia County Government who were directly involved with management of records. The census technique was employed in this study, data being collected from every member of the target population. This technique was employed because the population of interest was small. Census was used so as to minimize chances of eliminating important cases from the study. This study used questionnaires and face to face interviews as methods of data collection. All the 101 respondents were given questionnaires to fill. In addition, five departmental heads were interviewed. Data was also analyzed using the content analysis method which involved grouping of notes taken during interviews, through use of key words and themes. An appropriate computer software package namely the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, Version 22) was employed to assist in analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

a) Records management practices

Majority of the respondents 55.26% (42) expressed that the physical location of the registry had a negative impact on provision of information in the County Government. However, 40.79% (31) of the respondents believed that the location of the RM unit within the Central registry had a positive impact on provision of information. The minority 3.95% (3) of the respondents were not certain if the location of records had a positive or negative impact in the provision of information. Interview respondents confirmed that majority of the records were located in the central registry while others were located in the departments. Interviews revealed that it was difficult to easily access records due to the distance between their offices and the central registry. Others argued that the central registry lacked enough space and equipments to enable proper records management. The findings of this study revealed that having different registries to serve distinct units would suit Laikipia County Government. The results of this study are in agreement with a study conducted by Ngoepe (2008), which recommends consideration of adoption of decentralized registries.

b) Availability of records management policies

The respondents indicated that Laikipia County Government did not have records management policies regulating the management of records. Only 18.42% (14) indicated that Laikipia County Government had records management policies. All interview respondents expressed that the county government did not have record management policies. Majority 60% (3) of the interview respondents indicated that they had to create their own policies when need be in the cause of managing their records. The other 40% (2) indicated that they have been working under instructions from their seniors since there were no written record management policies. These results indicate that there was inconsistency in the management of records in Laikipia County Government. Record management practitioners having to create policies to suit various situations would be termed chaotic and improper in the management of records.

c) Records management system

Interview respondents were asked whether the county government had a running records management system. Majority of the respondents 80 % (4) indicated that Laikipia County Government had a centralized records management system in place while 20% (1) indicated that the county government did not have a running record management system. Some respondents argued that the program in place was not running effectively due to lack of resources, records management receiving less attention and inadequate staffing. From this study it was revealed that the centralized records management system in place was inappropriate and inefficient for the management of records. The findings of this study correlates with Amina (2011) which indicated that organizations require effective and efficient systems for the management of records.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The study made the following conclusions:

- 1) Laikipia County Government had not fully embraced the concept of records management. The management of records in the county had not been acknowledged as a key resource in achieving goals and objectives of the county government.
- 2) The county government did not have records management policies in place to govern the management of records. A records management policy should have been drafted and implemented to guide staff members in managing records effectively.
- 3) Implementation of proper records management systems in Laikipia County Government relies on the top management support. Attempts to implement proper records management systems would fail without the managerial support. The county government requires a records management system that would support both paper based and electronic records. The system should outline duties of all individuals involved in the management of records in Kenya.

6.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were arrived at to address issues identified affecting the management of records in Laikipia County Government.

- 1) Proper records management enhances service delivery in organizations. Laikipia County Government management should emphasize more on the management of records and include record management practices in their annual budgets.
- 2) A decentralized registry system should be established to avoid unnecessary delays in accessing files.
- 3) The county government should formulate records management policies to guide the officers in the management of records
- 4) Digitization of records in Laikipia County Government should be done to improve service delivery and improve efficiency in operations of the county governments.
- 5) The county government should work closely with the Kenya National Archives and documentation center in the disposal of records in the county.

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